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Guided Play Based Pedagogical Practices At The Kindergarten Level: Evidence Of Research At The Sissala East District Of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study constitutes an investigation into the place of guided play as a pedagogical practice by early childhood teachers at the kindergarten level at the Sissala East district of the Upper West region of Ghana. Using descriptive design coupled with explanatory sequential mixed method approach, a sample of 100 teachers at the kindergarten level at the study area were sampled using the purposive and convenience sampling techniques for the purposes of the study. A researcher-developed questionnaire and interview guide (semi-structured) served as the instruments for data collection. Using descriptive and inferential statistics both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed. Results emanating from the study points to the following: there was evidence of the use of guided play as a pedagogical practice at the study area, participants of the study also used varied teaching and learning activities whiles using guided play approach. Background information of teachers with the exception of age positively influenced their use of guided play pedagogy. Challenges faced by kindergarten teachers included but not limited to; difficulty in controlling learners and lack of teaching and learning materials. The conclusion of the study was that kindergarten teachers had adequate knowledge on guided play pedagogy and used it in teaching and learning; with the exception of age, other background information of kindergarten teachers positively influenced their use of guided play pedagogy; and also, kindergarten teachers were confronted with challenges in their use of guided play pedagogy. Among some recommendations provided by the study included provision of in-service training to kindergarten teachers on how to use guided play pedagogy. Also, workshops as well as in-service training on how background information of teachers could influence their use of guided play pedagogy should be organised by the supervision team in the education directorate of the Sissala East district for kindergarten teachers. Again, in appointing head teachers for basic schools, as part of the orientation service given to them, they should be equipped on the need to encourage their kindergarten teachers to use more of the guided play pedagogy, and play based pedagogical practices should be made part of early childhood teacher training curriculum.

Keywords: Kindergarten education, Play-based pedagogy, Teachers, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

The progress of early childhood education throughout the world has being continual and gradual shaped by so many variables and factors. Scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Froebel, and Rousseau among others have professed theories and strategies pertaining to how it should be practiced. Such ideas as suggested by most of the aforementioned scholars have shaped and continue to provide direction in classroom pedagogical practices at the early

childhood level. Characteristic of all educational levels arise multiple and differing approaches on how teaching and learning should be structured and realized. And this definitely is not an exception when it comes to early childhood education. In fact, there have been a number of philosophical postulations relative to how teaching and learning should be executed at the early childhood level, and one of such prescriptions which have gained much attention and attraction is guided play pedagogy. Though fanciful, what constitutes such a concept, how it is practiced, and even if effectively practiced has always being an issue of investigation within the spectrum of early childhood education, and more profound in an environment such as Ghana where early childhood education undoubtedly can be described as being in its embryonic stage.

Early childhood experiences arguably ought to contribute towards children's holistic development through the provision of a good start in life, as well as opportunities to play (Krogh & Slentz, 2001). Play provides children the opportunity to discover their world and find new answers through voluntary learning. Play and recreational activities make children stronger and help them to develop self-confidence, learn and solve problems, take initiatives and think critically. Through play children make friends, develop social skills and express their feelings as well as thoughts. Potentially, play is described as being able to support children socially, emotionally, linguistically, cognitively/ intellectually and for their general well-being as long as they are invited to participate through effective pedagogies (Lynch, 2015). Through play children learn informally and relate their play to real life experiences.

Early childhood education and care should certainly offer children opportunities for a good start in life which can best be achieved through developmentally appropriate practices. For example, Gopnik (2011) opines, that early childhood education should rely on a play-based curriculum situated in meaningful adult-child interactions, healthy relations between the home and programme, as well as developmentally appropriate practices. A principle of child development and learning that informs developmentally appropriate practice according to Bredekamp and Copple (2009), is that play is a vehicle for the development of self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. This means that play in the child's life and for that matter the kindergarten child is vital for the holistic development of the child.

Regarding what constitutes pedagogy for kindergarten education in Ghana, the Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service in a report "Scaling-Up Quality Kindergarten in Ghana" (2012), indicate that the Ghanaian child at play shows a high level of energy, curiosity and resourcefulness, and is active to explore his/her environment. The child according to the report has the ability to stay on task for a long period of time if the environment is stimulating and interesting. These qualities the Ghanaian child exhibits should therefore be nurtured and developed in an effective kindergarten education which includes but goes beyond the teaching of academic skills. Hence, rote learning style which is neither child-centred nor activity-based should be reconsidered in the Ghanaian kindergarten curriculum. In addition, Ghanaian kindergarten pedagogy by the report should lay emphasis on an activity-based, child-centred and child-led learning. Research into effective pedagogy in early years suggest that children learn best through a balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated learning experiences (Siraj-Blatchford, Eya, & Igbokwe, 2002). Teachers therefore have a responsibility to fashion activities to suite the child's interest and thinking and provide the needed interactions including open questions to maximize their cognitive development.

In attainment of the above described requirement as associated with effective and efficient early childhood education, a number of studies have pointed to the fact that play provides great opportunities, and promotes active agency, participation, and self-expression among

children (see; Jans, 2004; Ertmer, 2005; Alderson, 2008; Kjørholt, 2008). Play has a leading role not only in kindergarten education but is a fundamental lifestyle and way of learning for children. Play improves children's imagination and helps them to see other people's perspectives. Pre-school settings which offer quality experiences are ones which encourage children`s interactions, communications and participation in the teaching and learning process (Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood, 2010). Indeed, when Froebel established kindergarten from 1782-1852, play was a big focus, but it was not free play; instead it was teacher-directed (Moller, 2015). For Moller (2015), over time, as more early childhood programmes were developed, teacher-directed instruction became more learner-centred and play-based. In learner-centred classrooms, learners are directly involved and invested in the discovery of their own knowledge. Thus, play allows children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others, and on their own.

Guided play as presented is an approach to teaching and learning where pupils are given the opportunity to explore realistic situations by interacting with other pupils in a managed way in order to develop experience and try different strategies in a support environment (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015). With such situations, the teacher designs the classroom environment and involve pupils in activities to have fun while they learn from each other. The teacher is expected to provide feedback, extend conversations and bring in appropriate resources when using guided play pedagogy (Graue, 2009). In other words, guided play pedagogy can be described as learning experiences that combines the child-directed nature of free play with a focus on learning outcomes and adult mentorship.

Vygotsky (as cited in Burghardt, 2011), posits that "in play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour, and that in play it is as though he was a bit taller than himself" (p. 102). This observation suggests that guided play pedagogy can awaken children to think at a higher level. It is an important and effective medium of teaching at the kindergarten setting. Indeed, Bers and Raijmakers (2015), are of the view that educators can most effectively harness the power of children's learning by presenting new ideas and reinforcing concepts by use of guided play, a potential which is intrinsic in children. Based on the foregoing observations, this study is conducted to ascertain the extent to which this important requirement especially at an important sector of the Ghanaian educational enterprise; kindergarten education is adhered to. This has become necessary due to the limited and/or lack of empirical studies in this area (guided play pedagogical practices).

Specially, this study aims at investigating the place of guided play pedagogical practices of teachers at some selected kindergarten centres at the Sissala East district of the Upper West region of Ghana, and to bring to bear the extent to which guided play pedagogy is practiced at these centres. In this direction, the following objectives hope to be attained:

i. Identify and describe how kindergarten teachers in the Sissala East district use guided play as a method of teaching.
ii. Examine how kindergarten teachers' background information (age, gender, qualifications and teaching experience) influence children's learning, and
iii. Identify challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in using guided play pedagogy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review relative to this study is done in the areas of; theoretical framework that shaped the study, play and guided play based method of instruction, influence of teachers' background information on the use of guided play pedagogy, and benefits and challenges associated with guided play pedagogy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is guided by the Sociocultural theory of development as postulated by Vygotsky (1985). From a social constructivist perspective, children according to Vygotsky (1978) build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with the outside world. Vygotsky emphasized that the social influence represented by the roles adults and peers play in what and how the child learns is extremely important in child development (Mooney, 2000; Crain, 2000; Berk, 2006). The basic notion of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development is that learning and development happens in a social interaction. It emphasizes the mediating role of social interaction on the construction of knowledge and this shapes the early childhood education curriculum and pedagogy in a significant way (Hedge & Cullen, 2011).

Vygotsky (1985) believed that formal and conceptual knowledge emerges from a repertoire of daily experience and interaction with adults and peers. Children may work with objects together with an adult. Thus, for Vygotsky, cognitive development of children occurs as a result of one's cultural experiences and social interaction. He argued that learning occurs efficiently and effectively within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1966 as cited in Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). Play creates a zone of proximal development that influences cognitive learning among children (Vygotsky, 1978). Like Piaget, Vygotsky believes that much learning takes place when children are involved in activities (Mooney, 2000) where they can interpret their experiences and determine the conditions of the make-believe; discuss roles, objects, and directions.

Vygotsky (1985) addresses the significance of play in the development of symbolic thinking as a cornerstone of cognition. He argues that play contains all the developmental tendencies (cognitive, physical, social and emotional) and thus creates a zone of proximal development that pulls the child forward. For this reason, play activities are essential in the preschool years because it leads to development, giving rise to abstract thinking, self-awareness and self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1985). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory suggests that teachers observe and are prepared to assist the child's learning experiences at levels 1 and 2, so he/she can become independent at that particular task or learning experiences (Sowers, 2000).

From the sociocultural perspective, adult interaction serves an important role in children learning. Teachers who believe in this perspective are encouraged to participate broadly in children's play activities (Trawick-Smith, 2008), take on multiple teaching roles and use a variety of play activities in the classroom to scaffold children's learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Teachers who are able to systematically provide scaffolds to advance the child's cognitive and intellectual front best serve Vygotsky's notions of guided participation (Essa, 2007; Berk, 2006; Crain, 2000). The child should be positioned in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to advance from the existing position to the next level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). As Vygotsky puts it "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (1978, p. 87). Informed and shaped by this theory, this study attempts to investigate the extent to which teachers in the study area are able to actualize the sociocultural theory relative to guided play pedagogy as presented by Vygotsky.

Play And Guided Play Based Instruction

Recent studies indicate that play-based instruction ensures that learners are in fact, learning. Gopnik (2011) wrote, "While learning from a teacher may help children get to a specific answer more quickly, it also makes them less likely to discover new information about a problem and to create a new and unexpected solution" (p. 1). Gopnik (2011) argued that preschool should not be like school and that while adults may think that most learning

happens because of teaching and that learning is less likely to happen through spontaneous exploration.

Play is a critical element of the early childhood curriculum. It influences children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Play allows children to communicate their ideas and feelings and to verify their knowledge of the world. Play is intrinsically motivated, interpreted for its own sake, and conveyed in a relaxed manner providing a positive outcome. Play is free and unconscious. Play activities or their origins have always been integrated in the early childhood educational curriculum (Saracho & Spodek, 2008).

Research supports the theory that play is linked to learning. When 4-year-olds were provided opportunities to engage in high amounts of child-initiated, free-choice activities supported by a variety of equipment and materials to explore, at age 7 those children outperformed their peers who did not have such opportunities on cognitive and language tasks (Montie, Xiang & Schweinhart, 2006). Gopnik (2011), explored how curiosity and imagination impacted learning. In this study, Gopnik (2011) noted, "it's more important than ever to give children's remarkable, spontaneous learning abilities free rein. That means a rich, stable, and safe world, with affectionate and supportive grown-ups, and lots of opportunities for exploration and play" (p. 3).

How teachers view play is very critical to effective play-based instruction. Not all teachers view play in the same way. Sandberg, Samuelsson, and Pramling (2003), analysed the importance of play and the preschool teacher's view of play. Their study connected teachers' own childhood play experiences to their views of children's play today. Preschool teachers know that play is important, but not all understand the pedagogy behind play. The interviewers explored teachers' memories of play in their childhood, perceptions of children's play today compared to their own childhood experiences, and their approach to play in their classrooms.

Some teachers believed that ideal play was equated to their own play from childhood. Others believed that children's play today is no different from the kind of play they experienced in childhood and that play is expressive and though it might look different in different periods of time, ultimately it is the same. The researchers suggested a need for an attitude change and that teachers needed to know that play has pedagogical value. Children want to play, and they need to play, and teachers need to understand the importance of play in preschool.

Guided play can be seen as learning experiences that combines the child-directed nature of free play with a focus on learning outcomes and adult mentorship (Burghardt, 2011). Guided play emphasizes the need for keeping the activity engaging from the child's point of view (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018), because children learn best when they are active and involved (Cook, et al, 2011). It is important to note that adult guidance is very important. Without it even older children might struggle to learn some types of content, because demands of the learning context may exceed their capacities for translating and storing relevant information (Sim & Xu, 2017).

In summary, it can be said that guided play is an approach to teaching and learning that takes place in a fairly restricted environment with some amount of scaffolding by adults to bring about the achievement of learning goals set out by the teacher to achieve with his/her pupils. It allows for self-directed exploration while enhancing learning and fun. The role of the adult is to prepare the environment and use open-ended ways to encourage the child towards a learning goal. Maintaining this balance between child leadership and adult scaffolding is the essence of guided play's successful formula for learning (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Influence Of Teachers' Background Information On The Use Of Guided Play Pedagogy

Studies have shown that there is a relationship between teacher background information (qualifications and years of teaching experience) and children's learning. This relationship is taken to be the percentage of variance in student scores accounted for by teachers' background information when other variables are held constant or adjusted (Cochran-Smith, 2001, p. 531). In many countries teachers' background information that are considered to be related to student learning have become desirable targets of teacher education reform. Some of these reforms call for the professionalization of teacher education by making it longer, upgrading it to graduate programmes, and regulating it through mechanisms of licensure, certification, and promotion aligned with standards (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Berry & Thorenson, 2001).

The need to improve children's learning in Ghana is very critical. However, teachers' method of teaching that actually affect children's learning in Ghana have not been identified by any empirical study and so are not well understood. A growing body of research shows that a substantial portion of difference in children's learning is attributable to teachers and their qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ingvarson & Varella, 2004).

A number of studies have shown that variations in student achievement can be linked to differences in the effectiveness of teachers (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008). Some researchers indicate that evidence demonstrating a strong connection between teachers' qualifications and students' achievement remains sparse and that teachers' qualification is arguably the sole teacher attribute consistently associated with student achievement (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane & Staiger, 2008). In addition to teacher qualification influencing learners' performances, a number of other studies do attribute learners performances to the level of experience of the teacher (Angrist & Lavy, 2001; Jacob & Lefgren, 2004), whiles others such as Mashiya (2014) presents gender as being the most important factor in teacher performance.

Benefits And Challenges Associated With The Use Of Guided Play Pedagogy

The advantages of play as a tool for learning especially at the kindergarten level has received a lot of attention in the field of research. Play according to Gaskins, Haight, & Lancy (2007), provides children with experiences that support social, cognitive, and language development and creativity. For Vygotsky (1978), children's play can support the highest level of development. The idea of learning through play is highly valued by scholars and educators. Moller (2015) asserts, that children who involve themselves in child-initiated play may have longer concentration spans in learning. On the contrary, didactic classrooms, in which there is little or no play, possibly produce less learning according to Moller (2015).

Notwithstanding the seemingly benefits associated with guided play pedagogy, a number of literature also points to challenges that accompanies the use of guided play pedagogy. Among these include the lack or unavailability of play materials. For example, Ndani (1994), studying factors that influence a teacher's attitude towards teaching social science and ethics, argued that without the necessary tools even the best and most experienced teacher is handicapped. Hence, according to Cook, Goodman, & Schulz (2011), lack of instructional materials in especially in play based pedagogy has always being a major determinant of failure in the teaching and learning process. It is therefore important to enrich children's experiences with numerous objects so as to give them opportunities to manipulate them.

Aside lack of teaching materials, teaching experience is also presented as a challenge in the literature that affects teachers' use of play as a teaching method. Different scholars have

different opinions on whether the numbers of teaching years have an influence on teacher's attitude and self-efficacy. In a study by Wilson & Stutchbury (2009) on whether experience influences teacher's attitude towards arithmetic, revealed that experienced teachers had more positive attitude towards the subject than the less experienced teachers. In this study, it was expected that teachers who had experienced positive results in the use of play as a teaching method would reinforce the play use behaviour during teaching and learning sessions.

Informed by the literature accompanying this study, the study proceeds to answer the following research questions:

1. How do kindergarten teachers in the Sissala East district use guided play as a method of teaching?
2. To what extent does kindergarten teachers' background information (age, gender, qualifications and teaching experience) influence children's learning at the study area?
3. What are the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in using guided play pedagogy in the Sissala East district?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive research of the survey type that used the mixed methods approach. This is because kindergarten teachers' use of guided play as pedagogy is a social construct that could be studied by employing the principles of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Particularly, the study utilised the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. This approach occurs in two distinct interactive phases. The study started with the collection and analysis of quantitative (numeric) data, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative data of the study were designed so that it followed from the findings of the quantitative data. The sampled population was 100 kindergarten teachers selected from public (government), and private schools at the Sissala East district at the Upper West region of Ghana.

The instrument for data collection was self-developed questionnaire and interview guide (15 kindergarten teachers were selected for interview). The self-developed questionnaire had two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A considered the bio data of kindergarten teachers (for example, gender, age, qualification and teaching experience). The Section A comprised 4 closed-ended statements. Section B focused on statements that helped to address the research questions. It was made up of 35 statements. Using a 5-point Likert scale participants were made to respond to a number of questions. The Likert scale was measured as: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. Meanwhile, negative questions on the questionnaire were measured using the reverse scoring. In addition, there was also an interview guide (semi-structured) for data collection.

Descriptive (frequency counts and percentages), and inferential (linear multiple regression) statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. Specifically, frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse research question 1, 3 and 4, while linear multiple regression was used to analyse research question 2. This was because research question 2 sought to find out the extent to which background information of teachers influence their use of guided play pedagogy. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The interview data was first transcribed focusing on the key elements in the narrative that highlighted the aims of this research. Personal and identifying details were left out to ensure the anonymity of participants.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Background information of participants of the study shows that majority of the kindergarten teachers were females (70%) as compared to males (30%). This result indicates that there were more female teachers at the kindergarten level as compared to their male counterpart. The results also indicated that majority of them were between 30-39 years (51%), followed by 20-29 years (25%), 40-49 years (17%), and 50-59 years (7%). Again, majority of participants hold their first degree (36%) as compared to post diploma (32%), diploma (22%), and masters (0%). Finally, the results also show that majority of teachers had 11-20 years teaching experience (52%), followed by 1-10 years (23%), 31-40 years (11%), 21-30 years (10%), and 41-50 years (4%). These results are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Background Information of Kindergarten Teachers

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	30
	Female	70	70
Age (in years)	20-29	25	25
	30-39	51	51
	40-49	17	17
	50-59	7	07
Qualification	Certificate 'A`	10	10
	Diploma	22	22
	Post Diploma	32	32
	1st Degree	36	36
	Masters' Degree	0	0
	Doctorate	0	0
Teaching Experience	1-10	23	23
	11-20	52	52
	21-30	10	10
	31-40	11	11
	41-50	4	4
	51-60	0	0

Source: Field work, 2018. Total Number of Kindergarten Teachers =100

Results emanating from responses of participants relative to how kindergarten teachers use guided play pedagogy at the study area shows that majority of the kindergarten teachers strongly agreed to the statement that they allowed children to learn writing from sand and mud (68%) as compared to children are made to solve puzzles during teaching and learning (62%), allow children to create their own sculptures to represent the characters in a book (60%), allow children to collect seeds, flowers and grasses and sort them, measure them and divide them into fair shares (56%), children as made to role play during teaching and learning (53%), use flash cards to teach spelling (41%), give breaks and to children because their recess is often too short (33%), sometimes use games to teach children (2%), and children are made to role play during teaching and learning (4%). These results can be found in in Table 2 of this study.

Table 2: Frequency Analysis on How Kindergarten Teachers use Guided Play as a Method of Teaching

	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1.	I allow children to learn writing from sand and mud	68(68) *	29(29)	3(3)	0(0)	0(0)
2.	Children as made to role play during teaching and learning	53(53)	30(30)	3(3)	10(10)	4(4)
3.	I sometimes use games to teach children	2(2)	10(10)	10(10)	45(45)	33(33)
4.	I use flash cards to teach spelling	41(41)	28(28)	15(15)	6(6)	10(10)
5.	Children are made to solve puzzles during teaching and learning	62(62)	10(10)	0(0)	8(8)	20(20)
6.	I give breaks and to children because their recess is often too short	33(33)	45(45)	10(10)	10(10)	2(2)
7.	I allow children to create their own sculptures to represent the characters in a book	60(60)	34(34)	0(0)	2(2)	4(4)
8.	I allow children to collect seeds, flowers and grasses and sort them, measure them and divide them into fair shares	56(56)	30(30)	0(0)	4(4)	10(10)

Source: Field work, 2018 N=100 *Percentages are in Parentheses

On the contrary, also as provided in Table 2, the results show that majority of participants strongly disagreed to the statement that they sometimes use games to teach children (33%), followed by children are made to solve puzzles during teaching and learning (20%), use flash cards to teach spelling (10%), allow children to collect seeds, flowers and grasses and sort them, measure them and divide them into fair shares (10%) and allow children to create their own sculptures to represent the characters in a book (4%), and give breaks and to children because their recess is often too short (2%). These results were collaborated in the findings from the qualitative data. For example, a participant during the interview stated:

> *I bring the children to gather so as to describe a picture to them. Afterwards I ask them what they saw on the picture. They then describe the pictures based on what they saw [KT-1].*

The above comment is not that different from that of another teacher who said:

> *I use guided play by demonstrating to the children for them to follow suit. For example, if I want to teach them sorting, I first demonstrate for them to see and afterwards guide them to perform the action. In this situation, I provide them the needed support so as to enable them carry out the activity successfully [KT-6].*

Table 3: Summary of the Linear Multiple Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.954	.921	.931	.867

Source: Field data, 2018

Responses to the question as to whether teachers background had any influence on the use of guided play based pedagogical practices, linear multiple regression test results from Table 3 revealed that 92.1% of the variance in children's learning was jointly described by the predators (qualifications and years of teaching experience) which was found to be statistically significant [F (3, 47) = 279.105, p= .000] at 0.05 alpha level. The results suggest that the model performed well with about 7.9% shrinkage in the variance which was explained by the population. This result implies that the sample was a good representation of the population. The shrinkage could be as a result of the differences in the characteristics of the sample and the population. Table 4 presents the coefficients result of the linear multiple regression.

Table 4: Coefficients Result of Linear Multiple Regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Teachers' Background Information	-10.323	1.119		-9.225	.000
Children's Learning	.470	.010	.855	46.397	.000

Source: Field data, 2018 **(p>0.05).**

Results from Table 4 show that teachers' background information contributed significantly to children's learning (β=.855, p= .000) at 0.05 alpha level. This result implies that the independent variable (kindergarten teachers' background information such as age, gender, qualifications and teaching experience) influenced the dependent variable (children's learning). This result could also imply that for example if kindergarten teachers have higher qualification and long years of teaching experience (say 5 years and more), it was likely to have positive influence on their teaching methods through the use of guided play pedagogy, hence, helps to improve children's learning.

The results from Tables 3 and 4 suggest that the independent variable (kindergarten teachers' background information such as (age, gender, qualifications and teaching experience) significantly influenced the dependent variable (children's learning). Again, comments given by teachers suggested that, this background information could sometimes positively influence their use of guided play pedagogy. For example, one teacher said:

> *My age sometimes prevents me from performing some activities when using guided play method [KT-10].*

Likewise, KT-3 said:

> *My teaching experience impact positively on my use of guided play. For example, I have been at the KG for 6 years and someone who just came into the teaching service may not necessarily have the same experience as I have. The experience I have in teaching helps me to overcome challenges I may encounter when using guided play as compared to a newly posted kindergarten teacher [KT-3].*

These comments suggest that with the exception of age, all the other background information (gender, qualification, and teaching experience) of teachers positively influenced their use of guided play pedagogy. Based on the results from the quantitative and qualitative data it was concluded that background information (such as gender, qualification, and teaching experience) of teachers positively influenced their use of guided play pedagogy.

In the area of challenges associated with guided play pedagogical practices, the results as provided by responses of participants of this study were in line with what other studies say. In fact, results from Table 6 show that majority of the kindergarten teachers that participated in

the study strongly agreed to the statement that some parents see guided play pedagogy as a waste of time (71%), followed by use of guided play pedagogy consume time; hence, I don't normally use it (70%), lack of teaching and learning materials negatively influence my use of guided play pedagogy (53%), kind of training I received sometimes influence the use of guided play pedagogy (53%), large class size sometimes influences my interest to use guided play pedagogy (18%), and nature of my school does not permit me to use guided play pedagogy (7%). Evidence of challenges in the use of guided play pedagogy were also revealed in some comments that some kindergarten teachers provided. For instance, one kindergarten teacher said:

> *Lack of materials is one of the challenges I face when using guided play. The nature of our curriculum sometimes serves as a challenge. Some of the characters are very difficult to get and this sometimes serves as a challenge to me in using guided play method [KT-9].*

Based on the responses provided by participants of this study both quantitatively and qualitatively it is the conclusion of this study that, among other factors challenges faced by kindergarten teachers were: difficulty in controlling children and lack of teaching and learning materials.

CONCLUSIONS DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and findings arising from this study, the following conclusions are drawn: Firstly, kindergarten teachers had adequate knowledge on guided play pedagogy and used it in teaching and learning. These teachers used varied teaching and learning activities when using guided play pedagogy and this made their lessons child-centred. The findings are in sync with the recommendation of Lynch (2015), who argued that preschools follow state curricula and are required to meet certain standards through play-based instruction. Indeed, the practices of teachers in the Sissala east district relative to guided play pedagogical practices can be described as tailored towards the sociocultural postulation of Vygotsky.

Secondly, not all the background information of kindergarten teachers positively influenced their use of guided play pedagogy. Thus, age did not necessary have influence on their use of guided play pedagogy as compared to gender, qualification and teaching experience which had positive influence on the use of guided play pedagogy. These findings complement the findings of Jacob and Lefgren (2004), and Angrist and Lavy (2001). For instance, studies on the effect of teaching experience on children's learning have found a positive relationship between years of experience and children's learning but not always a significant or an entirely linear one (Angrist & Lavy, 2001; Jacob & Lefgren, 2004).

Finally, kindergarten teachers were confronted with challenges in their use of guided play pedagogy. Key among them was: difficulty in controlling children, lack of teaching and learning materials, and pressure from stakeholders especially parents for academics. Some kindergarten teachers argued that students are not academically ready for kindergarten because of play-based preschools. They contend that with too much play, there is not a focus on academics and therefore students are behind on kindergarten curriculum standards.

Guided by the aforementioned conclusions, as well as the literature review, the following recommendations are suggested:

a. Firstly, in-service training on how to use guided play pedagogy should be organised by the supervision team in education directorate of the Sissala east district in the Upper West region of Ghana for kindergarten teachers. This would help them become more enlightened in the use of guided play pedagogy.

b. Second, workshops as well as in-service training on how background information of teachers could influence their use of guided play pedagogy should be organised on regular basis by the supervision team in the education directorate of Sissala east district in the Upper West region of Ghana for kindergarten teachers. This would help them to identify which of their background information could either positively and negatively influence the use of guided play pedagogy.
c. Third, in appointing head teachers for basic schools, as part of the orientation service given them, they should be enlightened on the need to encourage their kindergarten teachers to use more of the guided play pedagogy which will help kindergarten pupils to enjoy lessons taught, retained knowledge gained, speak more fluently, socialise among themselves and developed self-confidence
d. Fourth Guided play pedagogical practices should be made part of kindergarten teacher training curriculum of all teacher training programmes. This is because guided play based pedagogical practices is a skill which must be learnt.

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