

# Navigating Play-Based Pedagogy: Perceptions and Challenges of Early Grade Educators

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**Abstract:** This study examined the perceptions and challenges faced by educators and headteachers regarding play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District. It was guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). Utilizing an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study design, the research aimed to explore early-grade teachers' perspectives on the importance of play in education. Nine participants with relevant experience were selected through purposive sampling, and data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. Trustworthiness was established following Guba's criteria for qualitative research. Thematic analysis revealed a consensus between teachers and headteachers about the benefits of play-based pedagogy, emphasizing its role in reducing stress, fostering creativity, and enhancing learning outcomes. The support of headteachers was identified as essential in cultivating a culture of play. However, teachers encountered challenges such as resource constraints, particularly in rural areas, which often required improvisation. Additional challenges included student resistance and physical limitations within the learning environment. Nevertheless, teachers employed strategies like seeking parental involvement to navigate these obstacles. The study recommends that educational authorities create training programs for headteachers that focus on play-based pedagogy and promote community engagement to address resource limitations in the Ho West District.

**Keywords:** *Perceptions, Challenges, Play-Based Pedagogy, Teachers, Headteachers.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has sparked intensified demands for educational reform, influencing educational systems worldwide from early childhood to higher education. Many countries are now drawing on global research to reshape their teaching approaches, with a particular emphasis on play-based learning. This method has gained traction in early childhood education as a key strategy for fostering social-emotional development (Hagan & Laing, 2018; Pyle et al., 2018). Over the past decade, research has highlighted the benefits of play-based learning; however, opportunities for free play have been on the decline, particularly in U.S. kindergarten classrooms (Eberle, 2011). In recognition of its advantages for cognitive development such as language skills, memory enhancement, and critical thinking governments around the world are increasingly advocating for early-grade education (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2016; Barnett, 2018). While Ghana has been slower to establish formal early childhood education programs, it put forth a policy in 2007 mandating two years of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as part of basic education (Opoku-Amankwa & Nyarko, 2017). In this context, play is woven into daily activities, with both child-led and teacher-initiated

play fostering essential skills like independent decision-making (Ashiabi, 2007; Graue, 2009; Pyle, 2017). Play is vital in early education, promoting social skills, conceptual understanding, and language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2013). Vygotsky (1996) highlighted that play enables children to attach personal meaning to their experiences, which facilitates growth in both cognitive and social areas. It also enhances socio-emotional skills such as empathy and problem-solving (Edwards, 2017; McInnes et al., 2011). Despite the significant benefits of play-based pedagogy, its implementation faces numerous challenges, including limited resources, space constraints, and inadequacies in teacher training (Edwards, 2017). Additionally, conflicting views on the academic role of play and the extent of teacher involvement complicate its application (Pyle, DeLuca & Danniels, 2017). Some educators tend to prioritize structured play for achieving specific learning outcomes, while others advocate for free play to support developmental growth (Pyle et al., 2017). Given these differing perspectives, examining the viewpoints of early-grade teachers on play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District can offer valuable insights for developing policies and practices that enhance early-grade education.

### ➤ *Problem Statement*

Early-grade classrooms have traditionally been vibrant and creative environments filled with art supplies, books, blocks, toys, and interactive play areas that promote social interaction and friendships among young learners (Eberle, 2011). However, recent trends indicate a shift towards more structured and academically focused learning in these settings, driven by the pressure to meet specific educational benchmarks and targets (Ashiabi, 2007). This shift has led to a reduced emphasis on play-based learning, despite its well-documented benefits for early childhood development. In Ghana, although the government has made significant policy commitments to improve early-grade education, challenges related to access and quality remain prevalent (Ali et al., 2018; Tatsi & Yeng, 2024; Yeng & Tatsi, 2024). According to the Ministry of Education, more than half of early-grade educators lack formal training, resulting in a considerable shortage of adequate learning materials. This resource deficit is compounded by pedagogical and curriculum challenges, as identified by Right to Play Ghana (2016), which highlights the disconnect between policy intentions promoting play-based learning and its actual implementation in classrooms.

Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Miller & Almon, 2009; Bhroin, 2017; Bodrova & Leong, 2014) indicates that the limited incorporation of play in early education may be influenced by teachers' perceptions of play as an instructional strategy. Graue (2009) found that many early-grade educators lack both the knowledge and confidence to effectively integrate play into their teaching and often feel they have limited control over play activities. Supporting this view, Eberle (2011) noted that some educators question the effectiveness of play as a pedagogical approach. While existing studies on play-based pedagogy have primarily explored its benefits for early grade development, instructional challenges, and the role of school administrators, most research has been conducted outside of Ghana (Bhroin, 2017; Bodrova & Leong, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Miller & Almon, 2009). This international focus creates a significant gap in understanding how play-based pedagogy is perceived and implemented within the Ghanaian context, particularly in regions such as the Ho West District. Current research (Adams et al., 2024; Avornyo & Baker, 2018; Tatsi & Yeng, 2024; Yeng & Tatsi, 2024) has begun to illuminate the application of play-based pedagogy within the local educational framework; however, these studies often fall short of providing a detailed exploration of the perceptions and challenges faced by early childhood teachers and headteachers, especially in subject areas like mathematics. Understanding the specific perceptions and challenges of teachers and headteachers in the Ho West District is crucial because teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of play-based learning significantly impact their instructional choices and the overall learning environment they create for children. Identifying the unique challenges, they face, whether related to curriculum, training, or support from school administration, can inform targeted professional development and policy interventions. Capturing the perspectives of both teachers and

headteachers is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of how play-based pedagogy can be effectively integrated into the Ghanaian educational framework. Addressing these gaps will not only enrich academic discourse but also contribute to improved educational practices that support the holistic development of young learners in Ghana.

### ➤ *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and challenges of early-grade educators regarding play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana.

### ➤ *Research Questions*

The study is driven by the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of teachers and headteachers in promoting play-based pedagogy in Ho West District?
- What challenges do teachers encounter in using Play-Based Pedagogy in Ho West District?

### ➤ *Significance of the study*

This study sought to offer valuable insights into the perceptions and challenges faced by early-grade educators regarding play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District of the Volta Region of Ghana. By identifying these challenges, policymakers and educational stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to support the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the findings of this study would contribute to a contextualized understanding of play-based pedagogy that acknowledges the unique cultural, social, and economic factors influencing education in the Ghanaian context. This understanding is crucial for ensuring that educational policies and programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of schools and students in Ghana. Additionally, the study's results will inform policy decisions and professional development initiatives, thereby supporting the implementation of play-based pedagogy in Ghanaian schools. By equipping educators with the necessary training and resources, policymakers can facilitate the effective and sustainable application of play-based methods. Ultimately, this study has the potential to positively impact the education sector in Ghana, particularly in the Ho West District of the Volta Region.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study draws primarily from Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory and the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), which together provide a foundation for understanding the significance of play-based pedagogy in early-grade education. These theories support the study's exploration of teachers' perceptions of play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District and help explain the factors influencing its implementation in this context. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that children learn through social interactions and that their cognitive development is mediated by language, culture, and relationships with others.

Central to this theory is the idea that children acquire knowledge through guided interactions with more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers or peers, in a process called "scaffolding" (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky emphasized the importance of play as a key medium through which children make sense of the world and develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills. In play-based learning, children actively construct meaning by engaging with their environment, interacting with peers, and negotiating social roles and rules, all of which facilitate critical developmental milestones. In the context of this study, Vygotsky's theory supports the idea that teachers play a crucial role in guiding children's learning through play, positioning play as an instructional strategy rather than merely a recreational activity. Play provides children with the opportunity to develop symbolic thinking, problem-solving abilities, and social competencies, all of which are foundational for later academic success. Understanding teachers' perceptions of play through a Vygotskian lens allows this study to explore how early-grade educators in the Ho West District interpret and integrate play as a socially and culturally embedded pedagogical tool in their classrooms.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), conceptualized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), emphasizes that early-grade education should be tailored to the developmental stages of children, focusing on fostering each child's holistic development across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP advocates for child-centered, play-based approaches, arguing that play naturally aligns with children's developmental needs by promoting engagement, curiosity, and exploration. According to DAP, effective play-based pedagogy involves a balance of child-initiated and teacher-facilitated play, allowing children to take an active role in their learning while receiving guidance and support from teachers. The integration of DAP principles is crucial in understanding teachers' perspectives on play-based pedagogy, as it offers a standard against which they may assess their practices. In Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum, play is recognized as a developmentally appropriate method for fostering essential skills like literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development. However, in settings with limited resources and formal training, as is the case in many regions of Ghana, implementing DAP and play-based learning may present significant challenges. Thus, DAP informs this study by framing play as a fundamental approach to early grade education, providing insights into how teachers view their role in supporting development through play-based methods and the difficulties they face in aligning with these standards.

The theoretical perspectives provided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and DAP offer valuable lenses for interpreting the study's two central research questions: teachers' perceptions of play-based pedagogy and the challenges they face in implementing it in the Ho West District. Vygotsky's insights into social learning highlight the importance of teachers' attitudes toward play as a

vehicle for guided learning, while DAP underscores the importance of play in fostering developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Together, these frameworks allow the study to analyze how teachers understand and utilize play in their classrooms, what constraints they encounter, and how they negotiate these challenges in light of developmental and cultural expectations. In Ghana, where educational reforms have increasingly emphasized the role of play in early-grade education, these theoretical perspectives help explain the gap between policy and practice. This study provides actionable insights into how play-based pedagogy can be better supported, both at the policy level and within the professional development of early-grade educators in the Ho West District.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretivist framework, employing a qualitative research approach that incorporates a case study design to explore early-grade teachers' perceptions of play-based pedagogy. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on the subjective experiences and personal meanings individuals attach to social phenomena, facilitating a deeper understanding of teachers' unique insights into play-based teaching (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is well-suited for examining how teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and contextual factors shape their adoption of play-based methods, aligning perfectly with the study's goal of capturing nuanced, real-world perspectives. The case study design enables an in-depth exploration of the various contextual influences affecting teachers' perceptions and practices related to play-based pedagogy. By concentrating on a specific group of teachers within a defined geographic area, this approach yields rich, detailed data that illuminates the complexities of their experiences. Although case studies often face criticism for their limited generalizability, this method was chosen specifically for its capacity to provide a comprehensive, action-oriented understanding of play-based pedagogy within a particular community, making it highly relevant for this research (Stake, 1995). Using purposive sampling, nine participants were selected, ensuring they possessed specific knowledge and experience in early-grade play education. This method allows the researcher to gather informed, insightful perspectives, enhancing the quality and depth of the collected data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Patton, 2002).

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, using a guide crafted by the researcher to facilitate open-ended discussions. This format encouraged participants to express their thoughts on play-based pedagogy in their own words. Conducting face-to-face interviews enabled probing and follow-up questions, revealing deeper insights into teachers' attitudes, challenges, and experiences with play-based methods. To ensure the findings' trustworthiness, the study adhered to Guba's (1989) four criteria for qualitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was bolstered through prolonged engagement and member checks, ensuring an accurate representation of participants' perspectives. Dependability was secured by thoroughly documenting the research

process, allowing for potential replication. Transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, enabling other researchers to evaluate the relevance of the findings to similar settings. Confirmability was achieved by maintaining a clear audit trail and documenting the researcher's reflections, decisions, and methodological adjustments throughout the study.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, which included coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data to identify significant patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and ability to capture the complexities inherent in qualitative data, allowing for a detailed examination of the perceptions, practices, and challenges faced by early-grade teachers regarding play-based pedagogy. The analysis process began with familiarizing oneself with the material and reviewing interview transcripts and observational notes to gain an overall understanding. This was followed by open coding, breaking down the data into manageable segments to identify preliminary codes. These initial codes were then organized into categories and refined into themes that reflected the core findings of the study. To enhance reliability, a second coder reviewed a subset of the data, and any discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion, contributing to the robustness of the results. This thematic approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of teachers' perceptions, shedding light on key insights into the role of play in early-grade education within the Ho West District, and offering valuable implications for both policy and practice.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### *A. Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of teachers in promoting play-based pedagogy in Ho West District?*

Research Question 1 examined the perspectives of both headteachers and teachers regarding the promotion of play-based pedagogy in the Ho West District. This inquiry aims to uncover the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that educational leaders and teachers hold about integrating play-based approaches in the teaching and learning process. This provided a comprehensive understanding of the role played by school leadership and educators in fostering a culture of play-based pedagogy within the educational landscape of the Ho West District.

##### ➤ *Theme 1: Promoting play-based pedagogy*

Theme 1 delved into their perspectives regarding integrating play-based approaches in the educational process. The theme provided insights into the collaborative dynamics between educational leaders and teachers, shaping the overall promotion of play-based pedagogy in the district.

- *Sub-theme 1: Benefits of Promoting Play-Based Pedagogy*

This sub-theme provided a nuanced understanding of how play-based pedagogy contributes to a more effective and enjoyable educational experience for children in the Ho West District. The perceived benefits of promoting play-

based pedagogy as expressed by participants, including both headteachers and teachers. The responses highlight a sense of release and freedom, enhanced understanding of curriculum objectives through dialogue, the development of independent thinking skills, and the overall positive impact on the speed of learning and teaching processes. The participants espoused:

*"The feeling of release is notable, and it contributes to a successful understanding of what we aim to impart to a child. Dialogue becomes the easiest way for children to grasp the curriculum in KG."*

*"Play-based pedagogy is instrumental in helping children to engage in activities independently and fostering their ability to think critically."*

*"The experience with play-based pedagogy is described as lovely, with an observed acceleration in both the learning and teaching processes"*

The interview responses highlight a positive and impactful perception of play-based pedagogy within the educational context. Participants consistently express a notable "feeling of release" associated with play-based pedagogy. The recognition that dialogue becomes the easiest way for children to grasp the curriculum in kindergarten underscores the communicative and interactive nature of play-based methods. Play-based pedagogy is credited with helping children engage in activities independently and fostering critical thinking skills. This acknowledgment highlights the role of play in promoting autonomy and encouraging children to think creatively. Participants describe the experience with play-based pedagogy as "lovely," indicating a positive and enjoyable dimension to the educational process.

- *Sub-theme 2: Impact on Learning Experience and Attitudes*

Sub-theme 2 examined the observed contributions of play-based pedagogy to children's overall learning experience and their attitude toward education. Participants emphasize the motivational aspect, reduced feelings of tiredness, improved attendance, and a sense of freedom in learning. Additionally, play-based pedagogy is seen as a catalyst for promoting independent thinking and encouraging children to apply their learning outside the classroom. Below are some excerpts from participants on their observed contributions of play-based pedagogy to children's overall learning experience and their attitude towards education.

*"Play-based pedagogy" is a great motivator. It somehow prevents them from feeling tired, and they approach learning with more enthusiasm. It's like it makes the whole experience enjoyable for them."*

*"Play-based pedagogy seems to have a positive impact on attendance and punctuality. It motivates the children to come to school, and once they are here, they are more*



*engaged and punctual in their activities. It's like it sets a positive tone for their overall attitude towards education".*

*"Play-based pedagogy fosters a sense of independence. It helps them develop the skills to do things on their own. Moreover, it encourages them to think more, not just within the classroom but also when they are at home. It's like it extends their learning beyond the school environment."*

The interview responses highlight play-based pedagogy as a multifaceted approach that not only facilitates learning but also motivates students, positively influences attendance and punctuality, and fosters independence and critical thinking skills. Play-based pedagogy serves as a significant motivator for students. Participants note that play-based pedagogy has a positive influence on attendance and punctuality. It motivates children to come to school, setting a positive tone for their overall attitude toward education. Once in school, students are more engaged and punctual in their activities. The play-based approach catalyzes creating a favorable and participatory learning environment. Play-based pedagogy is recognized for fostering a sense of independence among students. It helps them develop the skills to engage in activities on their own. This emphasis on independence and critical thinking suggests that play-based methods contribute to holistic cognitive development.

- *Sub-theme 3: Administrative Support*

This theme explored the strategies and initiatives at the administrative level aimed at supporting and encouraging the integration of play-based pedagogy. Participants highlight collaborative efforts among teachers, recognition of the benefits of play by the head teacher, and the role of the curriculum in shaping teaching practices. However, challenges related to resource availability in rural areas are acknowledged, prompting improvisation to align with the curriculum. The theme underscores the significance of administrative support in providing materials essential for the successful implementation of play-based schemes.

The participants had these to say on strategies or initiatives that have been put in place at the administrative level to support and encourage the integration of play-based pedagogy:

*"We, the teachers, both the primary and the KG, all came together and said playing is good for children. It will open their brain to learn and to think. So even the head teacher is always encouraging us to let them make more play in our teaching."*

*"Erm, they support us with the teaching-learning materials, to support the play scheme running successfully in this."*

*"The curriculum has helped...But just that sometimes the resources and then the materials at hand in the rural area may be the way we feel like completing everything, and then the children will get the understanding correctly."*

The insights from the interview highlight both the positive consensus among teachers regarding play-based learning and the practical challenges faced in resource-limited contexts. The collaborative spirit, curriculum reliance, improvisation strategies, and head teacher support collectively shape the dynamics of play-based pedagogy in the educational landscape. The recognition that "playing is good for children" underscores a collective understanding that play catalyzes opening children's minds to learning and critical thinking. This shared perspective reinforces the importance of play as a valuable educational tool. The interview highlights challenges faced in resource-constrained rural areas. While the curriculum is acknowledged as a guiding framework, the availability of resources and materials becomes a critical concern. The statement, "The curriculum has helped," indicates a reliance on the curriculum for guidance. However, challenges arise in accessing necessary materials in rural settings. The teachers' mention of improvisation as a strategy to support the curriculum signifies a proactive effort to overcome resource limitations and ensure effective implementation. The role of the head teacher emerges as crucial in providing support and encouragement for play-based pedagogy. The consistent encouragement from the head teacher to incorporate more play in teaching underscores a top-down approach to fostering a culture that values and promotes play-based learning. The provision of teaching-learning materials by the head teacher further demonstrates a commitment to overcoming resource challenges and facilitating the successful implementation of play schemes.

- *Sub-theme 4: Support, Encouragement, and Resource Provision*

This sub-theme highlights the collaborative efforts between the head teacher and KG teachers to cultivate a culture of play-based pedagogy. This collaborative leadership approach aims to foster an environment where play-based pedagogy is not only endorsed but also actively facilitated, contributing to enhanced learning experiences for the children in the Ho West District. The participants emphasize the support provided by the head teacher in terms of necessary materials for the classroom, encouraging the incorporation of play in teaching, and actively engaging with teachers to ensure effective utilization of these resources. The perceptions of participants on the collaborative efforts that exist between their head teachers and them to foster a culture of play-based pedagogy are shared below:

*"The headteacher always supports us with the materials that are needed, that are supposed to be used in the classroom. To be honest, they have been doing, but not everything."*

*"The support and resources from the head teacher are invaluable. It shows a commitment to the importance of play-based pedagogy. While there might be constraints, the fact that there's active encouragement and tangible support is genuinely appreciated. It makes a significant difference in creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning through play."*

*“The headteacher actively encourages us to integrate more play into our teaching methods. There’s a belief that it helps children learn more effectively and stimulates their cognitive development. So, encouragement is more like an endorsement of the benefits of play-based pedagogy’.*

*“The headteacher occasionally visits our classrooms at the KG level. During these visits, they provide additional materials and ensure that we’re effectively using the resources. It is more than just providing materials; there’s a hands-on involvement to check if the materials are being utilized optimally for the benefit of the children.”*

*“The headteacher also makes sure that as a classroom teacher at the KG level, he comes in once in a while and then supports you the teacher with materials to see that and use them.”*

The expressions of gratitude and acknowledgment from the teachers regarding the head teacher’s support shed light on the significant role played by leadership in fostering a culture of play-based pedagogy. The head teachers’ consistent provision of materials for the classroom is viewed as invaluable by the teachers. While recognizing that not everything might be covered due to constraints, active support in supplying needed materials is seen as a tangible commitment to the importance of play-based pedagogy. This support becomes instrumental in creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning through play. Also, the head teachers’ active encouragement to integrate more play into teaching methods reflects a belief in the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy. This endorsement of the benefits of play goes beyond mere support; it signifies a shared conviction that play enhances children’s learning experiences and stimulates cognitive development. The head teachers’ advocacy contributes to a shared understanding and commitment among the teaching staff. The hands-on involvement of the head teacher extends beyond material provision. Classroom visits at the KG level indicate a proactive approach to ensure the optimal use of resources. The head teacher’s engagement goes beyond checking the availability of materials; it includes assessing their effective utilization and seeking feedback from teachers. This level of involvement demonstrates a commitment to the success of play-based pedagogy in practice.

The findings from research question 1, focusing on the perceptions of headteachers and teachers in promoting play-based pedagogy in Ho West District, align with Tatsi and Yeng (2024) which emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts between school leaders and teachers in implementing innovative pedagogical approaches. The positive impact of play on releasing stress and fostering creativity echoes findings from studies highlighting the holistic benefits of play-based learning (Dockett & Perry, 2018; ECE Taskforce, 2012). The active support and encouragement from headteachers in promoting play-based methods align with the findings of studies (Blatchford et al., 2009; Mulford, 2003) emphasizing the pivotal role of school leadership in shaping the pedagogical practices within schools. The collaborative perceptions of headteachers and

teachers in Ho West District reinforce the notion that successful implementation of play-based pedagogy requires a shared vision and commitment at the leadership and teacher levels, aligning with the broader educational literature on effective pedagogical implementation. The findings from Research Question 1, which explores the perceptions of headteachers and teachers in promoting play-based pedagogy in Ho West District, reveal a positive alignment with the principles of the Social Constructivist Theory. The collaborative efforts between headteachers and teachers reflect the theory’s emphasis on the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Headteachers actively supporting teachers with materials and encouraging the integration of play-based methods resonate with Vygotsky’s notion of a supportive social environment. The engagement of headteachers in occasional classroom visits further underscores the collaborative nature of the educational process, aligning with the social constructivist principles that stress the significance of shared responsibility and community in learning. The findings affirm the relevance of a collaborative and supportive educational culture in successfully implementing play-based pedagogy, aligning with the core tenets of the Social Constructivist Theory.

#### *B. Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers encounter in using Play-Based Pedagogy in Ho West District?*

Research Question 2 explored the challenges faced by teachers in the Ho West District when implementing Play-Based Pedagogy. This investigation sought to identify the practical challenges educators encounter while incorporating play-based teaching methods, providing insight into the limitations teachers face when adopting play-based approaches.

##### *➤ Theme 2: Challenges in using Play-based Pedagogy*

Theme 2 examined the obstacles and difficulties encountered by teachers in the Ho West District when implementing play-based pedagogy. Participants discussed challenges such as maintaining student engagement, managing disruptive behavior, and addressing the diverse needs of learners, including those with physical or sensory impairments. The theme highlights the impact of limited resources on the effective use of play-based approaches, offering a view of the practical strategies teachers employ to overcome these obstacles in the context of the Ho West District.

##### *• Sub-theme 1: Navigating Attention Dynamics and Behavioral Challenges*

This sub-theme explored the practical challenges teachers face in maintaining students’ attention, managing disruptions, and addressing the unique needs of children with physical challenges during play-based activities. Participants shared the following insights:

*“Hmm, sometimes we look at them not to paying much attention to us, because as for children in that aspect and level, you may feel like maybe I’m feeling bored. I am doing, they are not listening, they are not, but some of those*

*challenges are there. It is actually a specific challenge, but as a classroom teacher, you have to know how to manage it and then you go on with your activity."*

*"Because sometimes after teaching, maybe you then tell them to also draw it on their paper. Some will then jump here; others will be here. You feel like you are not doing anything. Sometimes I will just start the song again, then when they sing, then you see them in comfort, then you can then control them."*

*"When most of the children in the class are having physical challenges. It can bring disorder in the class because you must listen to them sometimes and then pay attention to their needs too so that they will come back to join their normal ones."*

These responses indicate that teachers face significant challenges in keeping young students engaged and managing classroom dynamics. Strategies such as using songs to refocus students and providing attention to those with physical challenges highlight the complexities and adaptive strategies used by educators to implement play-based pedagogy effectively.

- *Sub-theme 2: Resource and Materials Constraints and Limitations*

This sub-theme focused on the challenges related to resource limitations that impact the effective implementation of play-based pedagogy, particularly when addressing diverse learning needs such as visual or hearing impairments. Participants' perspectives include:

*"Yes, lack of resources and materials affects us so much in teaching using play. Look, all these types of things. You, a teacher in the class, will see it to be something like we should go outside and then seek help. If not, you have nothing to do again. There are no available play-based materials aside from the little I produce myself. This is a very big challenge."*

*"Resources are not all that much, even though the head teacher has given us some, but it's not enough for the people. And we are also doing some improvisation to add it, but, for now, I will say no. We have KG one and two books, only the literacy one. And then the other, they gave us some is different."*

The teachers express a strong need for sufficient resources, underscoring that limited materials hinder effective play-based pedagogy. Improvisation is commonly employed as a response to resource shortages, yet teachers feel that the lack of varied materials and tools constrains their ability to fully implement play-based methods.

- *Sub-theme 3: Addressing Resistance to Play-Based Pedagogy*

This sub-theme explores the strategies used by educators to address resistance to play-based pedagogy from children, parents, or colleagues. Strategies include counseling, individualized attention, encouraging creativity,

and seeking support from peers and administration. Examples from participants:

*"Taking time during leisure or break to understand difficulties, counsel individuals, and collaboratively solve problems is one approach to address potential resistance."*

*"Emphasizing the importance of play in the KG curriculum to parents and highlighting its role in making children comfortable and creative, even incorporating playful interactions with hesitant children, helps overcome resistance."*

*"Allocating extra time, providing individual attention, and seeking support from colleagues or the headteacher during staff meetings are strategies to address challenges faced by children who may initially resist play-based pedagogy."*

The responses highlight the significance of a collaborative and communicative approach in overcoming resistance, as well as the need for ongoing dialogue with parents and colleagues to build support for play-based methods. The finding reveals that resource limitations, particularly in rural areas, are significant challenges in implementing play-based pedagogy. Teachers demonstrated resilience by improvising and adapting resources to meet curriculum objectives. Collaboration between teachers and headteachers proved essential in fostering a supportive environment. This aligns with studies by Amoako and Okyere (2019) and Tatsi and Yeng (2024), which emphasized resource limitations as a barrier in play-based teaching, and Akyeampong et al. (2010), which underscored the role of leadership in promoting effective teaching. The findings resonate with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. The identified challenges, especially resource constraints, align with Vygotsky's view of the learning process as deeply embedded in the social context. The teachers' collaborative and resilient efforts reflect a shared responsibility and commitment, reinforcing the potential of play-based pedagogy in enhancing young learners' educational experiences.

## V. STUDY FINDINGS

These findings provide insights into the implementation, impact, challenges, and perspectives surrounding play-based pedagogy in early-grade education in Ho West District. It was revealed that:

- Headteachers and teachers are aligned in their perceptions of the benefits of promoting play-based pedagogy. Both groups emphasize the positive impact of play in releasing stress, fostering creativity, and enhancing overall learning experiences for children. The headteacher's active support, encouragement, and occasional classroom visits contribute significantly to creating a culture that promotes play-based pedagogy. Collaborative efforts between teachers and the



headteacher play a crucial role in fostering a positive learning environment.

- Teachers face challenges related to resource constraints, especially in rural areas. Limited availability of play-based materials necessitates improvisation to support curriculum objectives. Additionally, challenges arise when students exhibit resistance or physical challenges, disrupting the learning environment. Despite these challenges, teachers employ strategies such as seeking parental collaboration and resource assistance to address these obstacles.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators in the Ho West District adopt a holistic approach to education, effectively integrating a variety of play-based pedagogies, including role play, rhymes, and games. This multifaceted strategy not only engages students but also enhances experiential learning, leading to a deeper comprehension of academic concepts. The application of play-based pedagogy serves as a powerful motivator, helping to mitigate student fatigue and positively influencing attitudes toward education. The enjoyment derived from these methods fosters improved punctuality and attendance, contributing to a positive overall learning atmosphere. However, resource limitations, especially in rural areas, pose significant challenges. Despite these constraints, teachers exhibit remarkable resilience by improvising and adapting materials to meet curriculum objectives, demonstrating their dedication to providing high-quality education. The collaboration between teachers and headteachers is crucial; active support, encouragement, and occasional visits create an environment conducive to effective play-based pedagogy. Teachers employ proactive strategies to address student resistance and navigate challenges, emphasizing the importance of collaborating with parents, seeking assistance from resource individuals, and utilizing teacher-led improvisation. Moreover, play-based pedagogy extends beyond the classroom, promoting independent thinking among students and fostering creativity and critical thinking both inside and outside of their homes.

It is important to note that the study underscores the multifaceted nature of play-based pedagogy, highlighting its motivational impact, the resilience of teachers in overcoming resource constraints, and the significance of collaborative efforts in cultivating a positive learning environment. The adaptive strategies employed by teachers, along with the positive outcomes observed among students, provide a strong argument for the ongoing promotion and enhancement of play-based pedagogy in early-grade education within the Ho West District. Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Given the critical role of headteachers in promoting play-based pedagogy, it is recommended that educational authorities develop specialized training programs that address the unique challenges and advantages of play-based learning. These programs should empower headteachers with the essential knowledge and skills to

effectively support teachers in integrating play-based approaches. Furthermore, periodic workshops and forums should be organized to facilitate ongoing dialogue between headteachers and teachers, fostering a shared understanding and commitment to play-based pedagogy.

- Considering the identified resource limitations in the Ho West District, educational stakeholders should collaborate with local communities to address these issues. Community engagement initiatives may include seeking local support for resource provisioning, encouraging community members to donate materials, and establishing partnerships with local organizations to supplement existing resources.

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