



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL STUDIES**  
**CENTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**

**EXPLORING TEACHER AND PARENT PERSPECTIVES,  
ATTITUDES, AND KNOWLEDGE ON PLAY PEDAGOGIES IN  
PREPRIMARY EDUCATION IN MEKELLE AND WUKRO CITIES**

**BY:**

**RAWDA HADI**

**MAY, 2024**

**ADDIS ABABA**

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**UNLOCKING THE POWER OF PLAY PEDAGOGIES IN**  
**PREPRIMARY EDUCATION OF MEKELLE AND WUKRO CITIES**

**BY:**

**RAWDA HADI**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE CENTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND**  
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**DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**  
**(ECCE)**

**MAY, 2024**

**ADDIS ABABA**

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University. In compliance with internationally accepted practice, I have duly acknowledged and referenced all materials used in this work.

Declared by:

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As the candidates' advisor, this thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval.

Advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPROVAL SHEET**

The thesis entitled “**Unlocking the Power of Play Pedagogies in Preprimary Education of Mekelle and Wukro Cities**” by Rawda Hadi is approved as fulfilling the Thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education.

**Approved by the board of examiners**

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## ABSTRACT

*This research attempted to examine the power of play pedagogies in Mekelle and Wukro preprimary educational settings. It argued for the importance of integrating play in the curriculum, teaching and learning process of preschool education. The research reiterated that play pedagogies promote children's holistic development. More so, the effective integration and implementation of play pedagogies contributes to the development of children's curiosity, creativity, and lifelong love for learning. To address the research questions posed, the study employed a convergent parallel/concurrent research design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from randomly selected 135 preprimary school teachers and purposefully selected 12 teachers and 11 parents using questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observation and document reviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed to analyze the quantitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed using applied thematic analysis. The result of the study showed that the correlation coefficients measured for play pedagogies scales ranged from lower to moderate values, with most of the observed values indicating statistically significant relationships. The linear and hierarchical multiple regression analysis also showed the effect of teacher related variables on the practice of play pedagogies. Nevertheless, the general perceptions of teachers about the types of play pedagogies used in their school settings, its degree of effectiveness and alignment with teachers' guide showed variations. The findings obtained from qualitative data analysis showed teachers and parents' level of understanding about play, play pedagogies and its importance in fostering children's development. Though teachers and parents' reflections showed a positive attitude towards play and play pedagogies, it was not supplemented with appropriate conceptions and implementation strategies. Various factors were found to influence the successful implementation of play pedagogies in the observed schools. Based on the major findings, various conclusions were drawn and used as a guide in forwarding recommendations to improve ECCE policy and practices.*

**Key words:** Playful Pedagogies, Preprimary Schools, Holistic Development, Integration

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study and justification/statement of the problem. In doing so, the historical, conceptual and theoretical foundations of play pedagogies is discussed. The chapter also presented the general and specific objectives of the study as it pertains to the leading research questions. In addition, the chapter discussed the significance and scope of the present study. Moreover, the chapter presented the operationalized definitions of the key terminologies that dominantly appear in the study. Finally, the chapter illustrated the overall organization and structure of the study.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Play is a cornerstone of children's development, supporting social-emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills (AAP, 2018; NAEYC, 2022; Zosh et al., 2022; Yee et al., 2022). It enhances executive functioning, language acquisition, early math, peer relations, physical health, and agency (AAP, 2018). As a key component of preschool pedagogy, play intertwines learning and development (Pramling et al., 2019).

Defined as a freely chosen, engaging, and creative activity, play is child-directed but involves adult guidance (Ashiabi, 2007; Sturges, 2003; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Teachers act as co-players, questioners, and demonstrators, enriching the learning experience (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Pramling et al., 2019).

Theorists such as Froebel, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey underscore the cognitive, social, and developmental benefits of play. Froebel emphasized hands-on, interest-driven activities, while Piaget focused on cognitive growth through exploration. Vygotsky highlighted play's role in social and imaginative development, and Dewey saw it as essential for mental and social progress.

Globally, countries like Finland, Scotland, and Australia integrate play-based approaches in ECCE, emphasizing joyful, exploratory learning (Bertram & Pascal, 2016; Mardell et al., 2023). However, variations exist in policies and outcomes (Bertram & Pascal, 2016). In Ethiopia, ECCE policies promote holistic, play-centered learning for skill development in informal settings (MoE, 2009). Free play fosters identity, experimentation, and social learning.

Play-based learning and play pedagogy differ in teacher involvement and curricular alignment. Play pedagogy blends play with curriculum content, encouraging autonomy, collaboration, and critical thinking, while play-based learning emphasizes child-initiated free play (Yogman et al., 2018; Hamilton, 2017; Pramling et al., 2019).

In Ethiopia, limited research explores integrating play with curriculum and teaching practices. This study examines play pedagogies in Mekelle and Wukro, assessing their role in ECCE policies, curricula, and practices.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite extensive research supporting the importance of play for young children's holistic development, many countries fail to appropriately integrate play into their early childhood care and education (ECCE) curricula. Instead, there is an increasing emphasis on literacy and numeracy due to the growing focus on educational accountability and high-stakes testing, which diminishes opportunities for play (Zosh et al., 2022). This has led to rigid, skills-focused curricula and teacher-scripted lessons, replacing child-initiated and playful activities (NAEYC, 2022; Targowska, 2008). Consequently, stress levels have increased among educators, children, and families, and these changes have not improved academic achievement gaps. Play deprivation has also contributed to a rise in attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder among children (NAEYC, 2022; Aamir, 2023).

In Ethiopia, ECCE enrollment has significantly increased, with 50% of children enrolled in pre-primary classes (MoE, 2023). However, the focus remains on literacy and numeracy through formal teaching methods emphasizing rote memorization (MoE, 2021; 2023). There is a widespread misconception about the importance of play in ECCE settings, with school managers, teachers, and parents prioritizing academic achievement over play (Rawda, 2023). The Education Sector Development Program (MoE, ESDP VI, 2021) also highlights this issue, noting that the increased focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic skills affects the quality of ECCE practices. Additionally, ECCE classrooms and playgrounds are not conducive to meaningful play activities due to a lack of teaching competence and educational resources (MoE, 2021).

In Tigray, despite a preschool enrollment rate of 74.1% (MoE, 2020), little research has been conducted on play pedagogies in preschool settings, particularly in major cities like Mekelle and towns like Wukro. Existing studies focus on ECCE attainment and partnerships rather than the integration of play pedagogies (Mulugeta, 2023; Mengistu et al., 2015). This study aims to investigate the extent of play pedagogy integration and the factors affecting its implementation in preprimary schools in Mekelle City and Wukro town. The study underscores that integrating play into ECCE curricula promotes children's holistic development and fosters essential 21st-century skills like collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity (Bertram & Pascal, 2016; NAEYC, 2022; Zosh et al.,

### **1.3 Research Questions**

To achieve the main purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do teachers and parents understand play pedagogies?
2. How are play pedagogies integrated and practiced in preprimary schools?
3. What challenges affect the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preprimary schools in Mekelle and Wukro?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective**

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of play pedagogies in selected preprimary schools in Mekelle City and Wukro Town.

#### **Specific Objectives**

In line with the general objective, the study aimed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of teachers and parents regarding play pedagogy.
2. To examine the implementation and practice of play pedagogies in preprimary schools.
3. To identify factors affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preprimary schools in Mekelle and Wukro.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study explored the power of play pedagogies in preprimary schools in Mekelle City and Wukro Town. The findings contribute to improving preprimary education policy, research, and practice in several ways, advocating for the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preschool instruction. Successful integration requires a sound understanding of playful pedagogies and their implementation mechanisms (e.g., Bergen, 2015; Elias et al., 2017). The study examined teachers' and parents' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about play, revealing why there is a heavier emphasis on academic skills through teacher-centered approaches. It also assessed teachers' perceptions of the practice, effectiveness, and alignment of play pedagogies, showing how well these are implemented in schools.

The findings highlight the limitations in using play pedagogies in preschool settings, indicating a lack of balanced, effective, child-centered teaching and learning approaches. They also reveal the impact of school, teacher, parent, and resource-related factors on the practice of play pedagogies. This information is crucial for policymakers, curriculum planners, and school leaders to understand

the key factors affecting the successful implementation of play pedagogies in preprimary schools. Additionally, it explains why ECCE policy, strategy, and curriculum priorities are not being met as intended.

The study's insights can inform future capacity-building initiatives for teachers and parents, resource provision, and collaboration areas to achieve quality standards. It also encourages further research into the role of play and play pedagogies in promoting children's holistic development. Future studies with larger samples can explore the quality and outcomes of ECCE policy, curriculum, and instructional practices in greater depth.

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

Preprimary education in Ethiopia encompasses Kindergarten (KG), 'O' class and Child to Child (MoE, 2020). Nevertheless, this study will be delimited to education provided in private or NGO KGs and public 'O' classes. Compared to KG and 'O' classes, Child to Child program is less organized (MoE, 2021). Furthermore, reports from MoE indicates that the number of government 'O' class, private and NGO KGs showed tremendous growth over the last decade. Though there are regional disparities, Tigray Regional State is one of the best performing regions in terms of increased access to preprimary education (MoE, 2020). However, there are disparities between major cities, towns and rural areas, with more concentration in major cities (Mekelle City Education Office, 2023). Accordingly, this study was delimited to randomly selected preprimary schools (KG and 'O' classes) in Mekelle city administration and Wukro town. This enabled to obtain enriched quantitative and qualitative data that played salient role in understanding the power of play responsive pedagogies in preprimary education.

### 1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

The following words, terms and phrases that seems to denominate several concepts appeared in this study repeatedly. Therefore, providing operational definitions for these words, terms and phrases is essential to facilitate clarity and harmonize understanding.

☞ **Preschool education:** is a pre-primary education program that is delivered through kindergarten and 'O' Class (MoE, 2020).

☞ **Play:** is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. It is also an activity where children show their remarkable ability for exploration, imagination and decision making (Smith, 2023).

- ☞ **Play pedagogy:** refers to a way of integrating children’s play experiences with curricular learning, giving children the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy and their independent motivation-to-learn (Hamilton & Wood, 2020).
- ☞ **Practice of play pedagogy:** refers to the design, implementation and evaluation of diverse play pedagogies in preschool instruction (Parker, Thomsen & Berry, 2022).
- ☞ **Challenges of play pedagogy:** refers to barriers that impede the successful integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preschool settings.
- ☞ **Knowledge:** refers to teachers’ pedagogical competence to integrate and implement diverse play pedagogies to support children’s learning and development.
- ☞ **Attitude:** refers to teachers and parents’ perceptions, views, opinions and feelings about the educational value of play and play pedagogies (Wright, Pasek, Lee, et al., 2023).

## 1.7 Organization of the Study

This study was organized in five chapters. The first chapter dealt with the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope and delimitation of the study. The second chapter dealt with the review of related literature; while the third chapter covered the research design and methodology. Data presentation and analysis were presented in the fourth chapter and the fifth chapter finally presented the summary of major findings, conclusion and recommendation of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. Review of Related Literature

This chapter discusses the conceptual, theoretical and empirical foundations of play pedagogies in ECCE. The chapter outlines and detailly presents the importance of integrating play responsive pedagogies in ECCE curriculum and instruction. In addition, the chapter discusses the integration of play pedagogies in Ethiopian ECCE policy, strategy and curriculum frameworks.

#### 2.1 The conceptual foundations of play and learning in preschool education

The following section discusses the concepts of play, learning and play based learning. In so doing, the section attempts to provide a conceptual framework that established the intricate relationships between play and learning in ECCE settings.

##### 2.1.1 The concept of play

Play is considered an elusive word which makes it difficult to find a single universally agreed definition. Depending on the contexts it is used and the type of activities that are considered, the word play is defined in a number of ways (Mardell, Ryan, Krechevsky, Baker, Schulz & Liu-Constant, 2023). The existing debate among researchers in the field revolved around what human actions are included in play activity, why children engage in it, and how it impacts learning and development (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). Nevertheless, children's play has been described as freely chosen, actively engaging, opportunistic, pleasurable, creative, and concerned more with means than ends (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play is active, interactive, intentional, open-ended, and concerned with process over product (Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016). In explaining what play involves, Mardell et al (2023, p. 17). stated that play is seen as chosen and directed by the players and thus meaningful to them. It also involves the imagination where players envision new possibilities. It is actively engaging to the level players can lose themselves in play. It is often social and generally enjoyable. Although people seek novelty in play, play often has a repetitive or iterative quality, where players try out ideas and activities again and again until they feel satisfied with the results. Therefore, for an activity to be considered as play, it should be actively engaging, joyful, meaningful, iterative and socially interactive (UNICEF, 2018).

##### 2.1.2 Types of children's play

Literature identifies three distinct types of children's play: *free play*, *pretend play* and *adult guided play*. Free play is typically described as play that is child-directed, voluntary, internally motivated, and pleasurable (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013; Danniels, 2018; Pramling, 2023). The notion of free play is generally understood as being the opposite of teacher-organized activities. In free play, children lead their activity and use their imagination, and no specific skills or knowledge are expected to be learned. Pretend play is a type of play that involves taking on different roles in pretend situations (Lindqvist, 2001). It is important to note that some scholars consider pretend play as exclusively child-directed and therefore a type of free play (Weisberg et al., 2013). On the other hand, adult guided play is described as lying between the traditional direct instruction and children's free play (Weisberg et al., 2013). In guided play, the activity can be either child-initiated or adult-initiated, but it is emphasized as a child-directed practice where, just like in free play, the locus of control is placed with the child. Children direct their own learning within the established play contexts, while teachers enhance the learning experience by playing the role of commenters, coplayers, questioners, or demonstrators of new ways to interact with the materials involved (Weisberg et al., 2013). Guided play, maintains the joy of free play while allowing children to connect authentically with content. When children co-construct their learning with their teachers and peers, they apply it to their own lives making meaningful, personal discoveries as they progress towards learning goals. Children naturally learn through play by engaging in and making sense of their world. Guided play is self-chosen, enjoyable, and process-oriented. These opportunities are experiences that are child-directed and teacher-facilitated in which teachers take an active role as intentional planners, observers, and guides.

Though scholars underscore the importance of play in promoting children's learning and development, they differ in the type of play they choose to be considered in ECCE settings. For instance, Pramling (2023) argued against the romantic view of play. This view suggested children's play is built on the idea that children learn when they play. However, in the context of ECCE, there are specific skills and knowledge children are expected to learn. Besides, there are goal oriented and structured activities that are embedded in the ECCE curriculum. Therefore, striking a balance between structured activities and less structured activities such as free play is essential. Similarly, the idea of free play poses a challenge to the determination of the 'what' of learning. Regarding this, Pramling et al. (2019) questioned what children learn while they are freely playing. In addition, scholars argued as to what should be the role of adults in children's play. This included discussion on whether the interference of adults in children's play are necessary to support appropriate learning, or whether such intervention damage children's sense and development of agency (Pramling et al. 2019; Pramling, 2023). Nevertheless, contemporary

definitions of play support the incorporation of free or voluntary play, guided play, constructive play, collaborative play, learning through games, physical and digital games, among others (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). Similarly, there is a tendency of pursuing a continuous learning process through play, from free play to guided play through teacher-led play (Yee, Radzi, & Mamat, 2022).

### **2.1.3 The concept of play-based learning**

Play-based learning is, essentially, to learn while at play (Daniels, 2018). Learning is not necessary for an activity to be perceived as play but remains fundamental to the definition of play-based learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Accordingly, play-based learning is defined as a teaching approach involving playful, child directed elements along with some degree of adult guidance and scaffolded learning objectives (Weisberg et al., 2013). It provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. This approach allows for different types of play and recognize the intentional roles that both children and educators may take in children's learning (AGDE, 2022). Play-based learning incorporates various forms of play, including imaginative play, constructive play, and socio-dramatic play. Play-based learning with intentionality can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn, promoting positive dispositions towards learning (AGDE, 2022). The integration of various forms of play in KG instruction fosters children's creativity, problem-solving skills, collaboration, and critical thinking. To facilitate play based learning, the educational environment and the classroom setting needs to be organized in a manner that it creates the necessary spaces essential to organize and facilitate various types of play. Beyond preschool education, the importance of learning through play strategy are essential to push forward children's involvement, engagement, inclusion, and holistic skills growth (Parker & Thomson, 2019).

## **2.2 Play pedagogy in ECCE settings**

The following section discusses the concepts, principles and characteristics of play responsive pedagogies. It also discusses in great length the role of teachers in various forms of play based pedagogical approaches.

### **2.2.1 The concept of play pedagogies**

Pedagogy, the art, science, or craft of educating children, involves professional knowledge, practices, and creativity to foster children's learning, development, and well-being (Yee et al., 2022; AGDE, 2022). In Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings, two primary pedagogical approaches are discussed: direct instruction and child-centered approaches.

In direct instruction, children's play is seen as separate from learning. Learning is considered a result of teacher-led practices, with traditional methods used to teach predetermined academic content (Wood, 2010; Pramling & Johansson, 2006). Critics argue this method is developmentally inappropriate as it doesn't actively engage children and deprives them of stress-relieving play breaks (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008).

Child-Centered Pedagogical approaches leverage children's natural curiosity and inclination to explore. Instructional decisions are based on children's needs, interests, and ideas, valuing their curiosity and enabling them to celebrate their interests and express themselves (AGDE, 2022). Play is integral, allowing children to construct their own understanding and strengthen brain functioning. It promotes agency, intentionality, and participation in learning decisions (Mardell et al., 2023). Play is seen as an intrinsically motivated, voluntary activity where children solve problems, take risks, and learn through hands-on experiences, making connections based on their interests and strengths (Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016; Pramling et al., 2019).

Play pedagogy integrates play into the instructional process, providing space, time, and opportunity for children to learn through direct, active play, guided by attentive adults. Teachers organize materials to enhance play opportunities and establish respectful relationships with children and their families to develop a relevant curriculum (Wood, 2010; Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016). Play allows children to build relationships, test ideas, challenge thinking, and engage in critical thinking (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Educators view children as active participants and decision-makers, requiring an understanding of each child's unique qualities and capabilities (AGDE, 2022).

Recent debates highlight the challenge of balancing direct instruction and child-led play (Chien et al., 2010). Effective early childhood programs involve a continuum from self-directed play to direct instruction, with guided play in the middle. In guided play, teachers create environments reflecting children's interests, providing time for self-directed play while guiding them towards learning goals through comments, suggestions, and questions (NAEYC, 2022)

### **2.2.2 The role of teachers in play pedagogies**

Teachers play numerous roles in ECCE settings. As instructional leaders, they play salient roles in ensuring that play pedagogical approaches are integrated and implemented in the day-to-day instructional processes. In child centered and play integrated learning environment, teachers make instructional decisions. To enhance learning opportunities for all children, teachers make decisions about and adjusts the daily schedule, the learning environment, the teaching materials, interactions and

play activities based upon the strengths, needs, interests, and input of the students within and out of the classroom (Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016). Teachers also play a role of facilitating children's play and learning. The teacher is a facilitator of children's play, expanding learning, extending activities and designing the environment to support children's development. In facilitating play experiences, they acknowledge children's independence to choose what to play and how to play. The role of the teacher is integral to supporting children's learning and development. Teachers provide support (i.e., scaffold) to extend the duration and complexity of children's play as well as encourage children to incorporate language, literacy, and numeracy within their play. When teachers consider individual children's abilities, interests and preferences, they create an environment that is engaging for all (Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016). Apart from this, teachers are expected to monitor and assess learning. While the element of choice is critical to the children's development, a teacher can monitor the child's progress and achievement during play. The teacher must recognize when it is best to intervene with appropriate suggestions to scaffold learning experiences and respond to teachable moments (Wood, 2010).

Based on contemporary theoretical trends related to play-based learning, Wood (2010) summarized the role of teachers in play pedagogical approaches. The key roles include planning and resourcing challenging learning environments; supporting children's learning through planned play activity; extending and supporting children's spontaneous play; extending and developing children's language and communication in play; assessing children's learning through play; ensuring continuity and progression; combining adult-directed and child-initiated activities; emphasizing well-planned, purposeful play (indoors and outdoors), planning for continuity between play and work; allowing time for children to become engrossed, and work in depth; and engagement between children and adults. Wood (2010) argued that in direct instructional approaches, adult-directed activities take center stage in planning, assessment and feedback, and child-initiated activities, including play, are left at the margins of practice. In integrated pedagogical approaches, adults are involved with children in planning for play and child-initiated activities, based on their observations and interactions. Planning and pedagogical decision making are informed by children's choices, interests, capabilities and knowledge, which feed forward into further curriculum planning. Teaching and learning, therefore, become co-constructive processes, where the focus is on dynamic interactions between the people, resources and activities in the setting, with the curriculum being used as a framework rather than a straitjacket.

Stressing the importance of intentionality, AGDE (2022) stated a number of teachers' roles in play pedagogies. The summary of the roles stipulated included planning and creating both indoor and

outdoor environments that promote and support different types of play for children's active engagement, agency, problem solving, curiosity, creativity and exploration. In addition, teachers are expected to make purposeful decisions about when to observe and when to join and guide the play. Similarly, they are required to extend children's learning using intentional teaching strategies and sustain, extend, challenge and deepen children's ideas and skills through shared thinking and scaffolding learning. Apart from this, they are expected to use a range of strategies to plan, document and assess children's learning in play-based experiences. Moreover, they engage in planning and implementing worthwhile play-based learning experiences using children's interests, curiosities and funds of knowledge. They also assist children to recognize unfair play and offer constructive ways to build a caring, fair and inclusive learning community (AGDE, 2022, p. 22).

The successful realization of these roles is dependent on teachers' professional judgements. In making professional judgements, teachers intentionally weave together their professional knowledge and skills, contextual knowledge of each child, their families and communities, and understanding that relationships with children and families are critical to creating safe and trusting spaces. In addition, they employ their awareness of how their beliefs, values, personal styles and past professional experiences impact children's learning and wellbeing. Apart from this, the successful realization of these roles requires teachers to draw on their creativity, intuition and imagination, including engaging in critical reflection to evaluate and adjust their practice to suit the learners, the time, place and context of learning (AGDE, 2022).

### **2.2.3 Characteristics of play pedagogies**

Play pedagogies emphasize flexibility, imagination, and a child-focused, student-centered approach (Wood, 2010; Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016). They foster exploration, creativity, and problem-solving through the intentional selection of materials and activities, both indoors and outdoors. Teachers play a crucial role in integrating curriculum outcomes in purposeful and meaningful ways, acting as co-constructors, co-learners, and co-explorers alongside students. Key characteristics of play pedagogies include the teacher's role in planning, observing, guiding, and documenting play experiences while adapting the learning environment to enhance opportunities for growth. The classroom environment is flexible, predictable, and respectful, offering activities tailored to students' interests and needs. Relationships between teachers and students are built on sensitivity, respect, and active listening, fostering a supportive atmosphere where students' ideas and feelings are valued. Pedagogical practices are responsive to social, cultural, and physical contexts, balancing structure with

spontaneity and integrating child-led and educator-led learning tasks (Walsh et al., 2006; Wood, 2010). Effective implementation of play pedagogies requires adaptability and a commitment to ensuring that learning remains contextually and developmentally appropriate for every child.

### 2.3 Theoretical foundations of play pedagogies in preschool education

Different theories, world views and knowledges inform early childhood pedagogical approaches, methods, and practices. In essence, the field of play scholarship draws on many contrasting disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives (Wood, 2010). Nevertheless, a theory of play is understood as a set of ideas surrounding how play relates to and affects the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development through childhood and beyond (Pramling et al., 2019). Though various theories of play pedagogies are discussed, this section discusses the major theoretical perspectives that were used in this study.

Play theories provide essential insights into understanding and implementing play-based pedagogies in preschool education. **Behavioral theories** view play as a means of adapting behavior for survival or success, defining it as repeated, pleasurable, and reinforcing activities. This approach emphasizes practices like pretend play with set models and gamified educational tasks that reinforce learning through rewards (Burghardt, 2010). **Constructivist theories**, informed by Piaget and Vygotsky, emphasize active learning and social interaction. Piaget highlighted the role of hands-on exploration and sensory play in promoting cognitive development, while Vygotsky focused on play as a zone of proximal development, where scaffolding from adults supports imaginative thinking and social skill acquisition (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978).

**Froebel's theory** regarded play as a natural and essential activity for young children, fostering self-expression and understanding through imaginative and symbolic activities. Froebel advocated for nurturing environments where children could safely explore and express themselves. **Susan Isaacs' theory** expanded on Froebel's ideas, emphasizing the integration of play and learning to support cognitive, emotional, and social development. She viewed play as a tool for problem-solving and emotional expression, encouraging educators to design rich play environments that prioritize educational and developmental goals (Sara, 2021).

These theories collectively highlight the importance of creating developmentally appropriate play environments that support children's growth, creativity, and exploration. They guide educators and parents in designing and implementing effective play pedagogies, emphasizing intentional integration

of play into preschool learning. Understanding these theories is crucial for fostering enriching, age-appropriate learning experiences (Wood, 2010).

## 2.4 Models and methods of play pedagogies in preschool education

Similar to the theories discussed, numerous models and pedagogical approaches were developed to enhance the holistic development of children in ECCE settings. Several approaches to early childhood education emphasize play as a central component of learning. **The Montessori Method**, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, prioritizes child-led play within structured environments tailored to individual interests. Children are given autonomy to explore age-appropriate activities that foster independence, curiosity, and sensory engagement (Bonnay, 2022; Sara, 2021). **The Reggio Emilia Approach**, founded by Loris Malaguzzi, views children as capable learners who construct knowledge through exploration and creative expression. This approach emphasizes emergent curricula based on children's interests, collaborative learning with parents and educators, and rich, nature-inspired play environments. It rejects standardized testing in favor of project-based assessments documented by educators (Bonnay, 2022).

**David Weikart's HighScope Approach**, influenced by Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky, focuses on intellectual development through the "plan-do-review" process. Children plan activities, carry them out with purpose, and reflect on their experiences. This structured approach assesses children using anecdotal notes across diverse developmental domains, shared with parents to demonstrate progress (Bonnay, 2022). **The Integrated or Blended Approach** combines elements from various play theories and pedagogies, recognizing that no single method fits all. It integrates active, experiential, inquiry-based, and project-based learning to balance teacher-directed and self-directed activities. This approach fosters a range of skills, including cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical development (Pramling et al., 2019; Parker & Thomsen, 2019).

This study adopted an integrated framework to assess play pedagogies in preprimary schools, combining diverse theoretical perspectives and practical models. Tools like surveys, interviews, and observations incorporated elements from major theories and educational methods to evaluate implementation. The framework, guided by Wood (2010), emphasizes effective integration of play pedagogies into early childhood education, balancing structured guidance with opportunities for self-directed exploration.

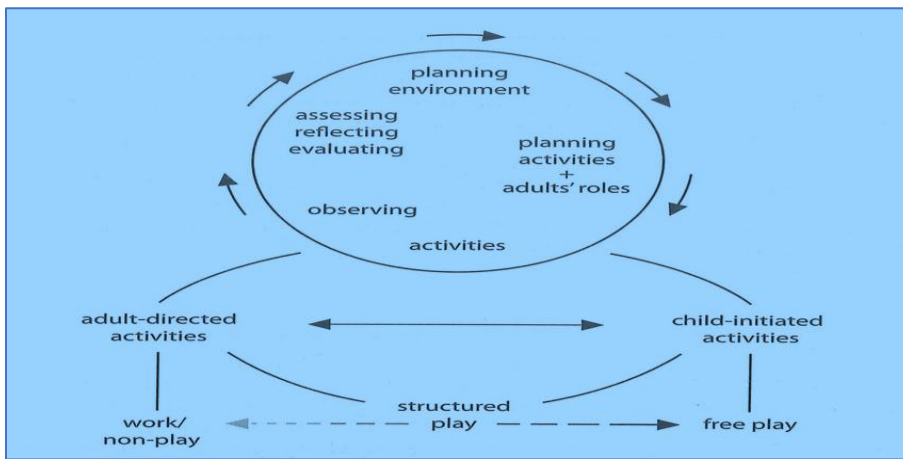


Fig. 1: Model of integrated pedagogical approaches (Wood, 2010)

The framework for integrating play pedagogies emphasizes a balance between child-initiated and teacher-directed play in early childhood education. Child-initiated play allows children to choose their goals, co-players, and seek help, fostering choice and imagination. In structured play, teachers guide the learning process with playful curriculum content. The framework promotes a cyclic planning process, considering the play environment, play activities, and the teacher’s role in observing and reflecting (Bakar et al., 2015). It highlights the importance of adult-child involvement, co-constructive engagement, and relational strategies for effective implementation. The practice of play pedagogies is assessed through planning, implementation, roles, and available resources to support successful learning.

## 2.5 Empirical foundations of playful pedagogies in preschool education

Research consistently highlights the positive impact of playful pedagogies in early childhood education (ECCE), showing significant benefits for children's social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development. Play-based learning enhances children's social competence, well-being, and positive learning orientations (Edwards & Brooker, 2010), while fostering self-regulation and cognitive skills (AAP, 2018; NAEYC, 2022). Studies support play as a key characteristic of high-quality education in countries like Finland, England, and Australia (Wood, 2010; Pramling et al., 2019).

Daniels (2018) identified two strands of research: one focused on play’s role in promoting developmental learning, including social-emotional skills and self-regulation, and another on its impact on academic skills like literacy and mathematics. Research suggests child-directed play enhances knowledge construction and problem-solving, while teacher-directed play supports academic learning. Effective integration of developmental and academic play requires a continuum that balances free play and academic content (Daniels, 2018).

Bakar et al. (2015) found that playful pedagogies benefit early education but face challenges in classroom implementation, such as teachers' reluctance to use play for learning. The Australian Government (2022) affirmed that play-based approaches support children's holistic development by fostering creativity, self-regulation, and relationships. Teachers play a crucial role by responding to children's individual strengths and needs, guiding their learning through open-ended questioning and 'teachable moments.'

Finally, research by Parker and Thomsen (2019) demonstrated that playful pedagogies are more effective than traditional methods in developing children's social, emotional, cognitive, and creative skills. Effective play pedagogies include balancing adult-led and child-initiated activities, encouraging socio-dramatic play, and engaging children through sustained shared thinking (Wood, 2007). Overall, playful pedagogies are essential for promoting well-rounded development in young children

## **2.6 Factors affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies**

Various factors affect the successful integration and implementation of play pedagogical approaches in ECCE settings. For instance, Wood (2010) stated that factors such as the indoor and outdoor environment, the curriculum, teacher: child ratio, the resources available, the rules, and the values, beliefs and practices of the adults affect the integration of play responsive pedagogical approaches (Wood, 2010). Apart from this, teachers' lack of the necessary pedagogical competence to integrate and implement play responsive pedagogies exerted significance influence. In fact, in developing countries teachers tend to use direct and traditional pedagogical approaches in ECCE settings (Bakar et al., 2015). This in part is due to the heavy emphasis placed on promoting students' academic performance as measured by achievement in literacy and mathematical skills. Regarding this Yee et al. (2022) echoed that preschool teachers frequently use teacher centered teaching to achieve specific academic goals. Furthermore, UNESCO (2023) listed several factors that caused learning through play not to be deeply integrated into many countries. The comprehensive list of factors include lack of understanding the value of play, parental or caregiver misconceptions, curriculum and early learning standards that do not address play, lack of teacher professional development and large class sizes that limit children's freedom to play.

Education and Early Childhood Development (2016) discussed teachers' beliefs about the role of play in affecting the integration of play pedagogies. Moving along a continuum from a traditional teaching to a more play-based pedagogical approach requires change in attitude and practice. This will be a gradual change for some teachers as they learn which of their traditional routines and activities align

with play-based pedagogy and which ones need to be revised or rethought. As teachers become more comfortable with their role during the play process (e.g., at times an observer, at times a facilitator, and at times a play-partner) they will recognize that curricular outcomes are being met in an integrated and complementary way. As children make natural connections to outcomes in their play-based learning, the time teachers spend on traditional adult-directed activities may slowly decrease. Teachers will recognize, as well, that they have a variety of tools and strategies at their disposal, including those related to direct instruction, guided learning, differentiated instruction, and skill-building activities. These strategies can be incorporated into classrooms which adhere to pedagogy of play, as teachers find the balance between teacher-initiated/ adult-led activities, guided play-based learning, and child-initiated play activities (Education & Early Childhood Development, 2016).

## **2.7 Play-based learning in Ethiopian ECCE policy, strategy and curriculum frameworks**

The following section discusses the policy and practices of play-based pedagogies in Ethiopian ECCE contexts. The section detailly presents the concepts of play pedagogies in Ethiopian ECCE policy, strategy and curriculum frameworks. It also discusses the role of teachers, parents and communities in promoting children's holistic development through play. Apart from this, the section discusses the factors that are impeding the effective integration and implementation of play pedagogical approaches.

### **2.7.1 The concept of child development and learning**

The Ethiopian ECCE policy and guideline (MoE, 2010a; 2010b) clearly stipulated the importance of promoting children's holistic development. The policy and strategic intentions emphasized the development of motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional development in preschool education. It also underscores the importance of creating opportunities for developing developmental skills such as self-control, independence and persistence, learning to cooperate, share and helping others. The preprimary education curriculum framework (MoE, 2009) also underscored the importance of children's all-round development. While discussing about the essence of Kindergarten Education, the curriculum stated that "*kindergarten (KG) education focuses on the all-round development of children encouraging their curiosity to learn and helping them to make sense of the world around them in preparation for a full life both in and out of school (p.10)*". It also gives impetus to promoting children's ability to relate with others. It is stated, "*children need to have relationships and feel a sense of belonging. They also need to understand feelings of others by relating them to their own. To enhance this, they need experience by observing people, interacting with them; and discovering relationships in*

*the family, the immediate community and different services in the community.* (p.10)”. Apart from this, the national ECCE inspection standard (MoE, 2015) acknowledged the importance of nurturing children’s personal and socio-emotional growth. It requires preschools to design activities that aims to foster positive self-identity, empathy, respect for diversity, and the development of pro-social skills. Children are encouraged to engage in tasks that hold personal meaning and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Through a well-structured curriculum and age-appropriate activities, children are required to be exposed to a wide range of learning opportunities that promote their cognitive, language, physical, and socio-emotional development. Therefore, learning and development are considered inseparable in these policy and strategic priorities. Besides, creating a learning environment that promotes children’s holistic development is highly emphasized.

### **2.7.2 The role of play in fostering children’s holistic development**

In Ethiopian ECCE policy and strategic frameworks, play is considered as a vehicle through which children’s holistic development is promoted. For instance, the ECCE policy framework clearly stated the importance of ensuring that *“all children the right to a healthy start in life, nurtured in a safe, caring and stimulating environment and develop to their fullest potential”* (MoE, 2010a, p. 16). Similarly, the ECCE Guideline stressed the importance of providing preschool children with the opportunities and support to acquire and develop a wide variety of skills, including fine motor skills, language, social-emotional and thinking skills. To this end, the guideline recommended the use of a wide range of activities that will further develop a sense of mastery of a variety of skills and concepts. It also stressed on the importance of providing hands on experiences that enables children to engage in experimentation with pre-writing and pre-reading skills, manipulation of objects that support learning and exploration for learning through action. The development of these skills through playful approaches was considered essential in improving children’s creativity, their ability to become self-reliant and to develop sense of independence (MoE, 2010b, pp. 7-8).

Apart from this, the national preprimary education curriculum framework also focused on the *“all-round development of children encouraging their curiosity to learn and helping them to make sense of the world around them in preparation for a full life both in and out of school”* (MoE, 2009, p. 10). To achieve this, the curriculum framework underlined that preschool education should use a child-centered approach where children can learn through play in an informal environment at their own pace. Besides, the framework underscored the importance of free play in encouraging the child to engage in learning voluntarily, experimenting and making their own discoveries both independently or with other children and adults. This also considered to contribute to the formation of their identity, expression and social

learning. Therefore, the ECCE policy and guideline and the preschool curriculum framework emphasized on the importance of integrating free play along with a varying degree of direct instructional approaches. Besides, the integration of various hands-on activities that allows the child to experiment and discover independently was highly stressed.

### **2.7.3 The integration of play pedagogies in instructional process**

Instruction encompasses all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning, development and wellbeing. What is included or excluded from the instruction affects how children learn, develop and understand the world. Instructional decisions involve a continuous cycle of planning, assessment and critical reflection. This involves teachers knowing the children, their family and community contexts and drawing on their professional knowledge to plan for individual children and groups. These plans are implemented, evaluated and reflected upon to inform further planning (AGDE, 2022). To design and implement play based instruction, teachers are required to identify children's strengths, choose appropriate teaching strategies and content, design the learning environment, and collaborate with children to co-construct learning (Pramling et al., 2019; AGDE, 2022). To this end, they plan, analyze and assess children's learning and critically reflect and evaluate planning and practice for and with children. Teachers need to be intentional in all aspects of the curriculum and should act deliberately, thoughtfully and purposefully to support children's learning through play (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). They need to recognize that learning occurs in social contexts and that joint attention, interactions, conversations and shared thinking are vitally important for learning.

An integral aspect of the ECCE curriculum is the recognition of a child-centered approach as the fundamental element to address the unique strengths, interests and needs of each individual child (MoE, 2009). The preprimary education curriculum (MoE, 2009) emphasized the importance of free and planned play as a central component of children's learning experiences. Play is recognized as a vital avenue for exploration, creativity, problem-solving and fostering holistic development in young learners. It also considers play as an important element in the organization of learning activities that facilitate children's all rounded development, attitudes, values and skills. By engaging in play, children develop essential social skills, empathy, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities (MoE, 2009). Apart from this, the ECCE standard inspection guideline (MoE, 2015) encourages the integration of play pedagogical approaches in facilitating ECCE programs. The integration and implementation of this pedagogical approach was advocated because of the assumption that children

consider play as their primary learning activity. When children engage in play, their physical development progresses, their minds become enriched, and their social and emotional values are enhanced. As a result, children's physical, mental, emotional, and social thinking skills are cultivated, preparing them for formal education through individual and collective games. By implementing play pedagogies, therefore, teachers are able to use play as primary tool to foster children's holistic development (MoE, 2015).

Though the ECCE curriculum framework and the national inspection standard (MoE, 2009; 2015) underscored the importance of integrating various playful pedagogies, the instructional process seems to fail to properly integrate and implement playful pedagogies. Preprimary school instruction seems to focus on formal teaching methods that emphasized rote memorization and structured lessons. The amount of time given for child initiated free play or for teacher guided play activities is minimal. Besides, children's engagement in free play activities is loosely connected with the instructional outcomes and is not properly guided by teachers (MoE, 2021). Factors such as emphasis on academic achievement, misconceptions about play, lack of teacher training, time constraints, curriculum demands, and parental expectations contributed to the neglect of implementing play responsive pedagogical approaches in ECCE settings (MoE, 2010a, 2021). In particular, the emphasis placed on developing preschool children's reading, writing and arithmetic skills contributed to lack of properly integrating and implementing play pedagogies in the day-to-day teaching and learning process. This contributed to the limitation of the educational setting in achieving developmental milestones set in the ECCE policy, strategy and curriculum framework (MoE, 2010a, 2021).

#### **2.7.4 The role of teachers and parents in implementing play pedagogies**

Parents serve as a child's first and most influential teachers, and their active participation in the implementation of play pedagogies is invaluable. The ECCE policy and curriculum framework clearly stipulated the role of teachers and parents/caregivers in facilitating children learning experiences. Their role in supporting and nurturing children's specific interests and abilities and creating an environment that promotes children's academic, socio-emotional and personal growth is considered pivotal for the successful implementation playful pedagogies. In addition, teachers and parents are expected to provide a safe and caring environment where children feel valued and understood. They are also encouraged to establish a positive relationships and empathetic interactions to help children develop various skills and competencies (MoE, 2010a, 2010b, 2009, 2015). Recognizing the crucial role of families and communities in promoting children's all-round development, the policy and strategic priorities

necessitated the active participation and collaboration among teachers, parents/caregivers, and community members. The organization of family engagement activities, community events, and parent-teacher partnerships are considered instrumental to create a supportive network that promotes children's holistic growth.

Besides, the strategic guideline underlined the importance role of adults in recognizing and encouraging the child's reasoning, creativity and problem-solving efforts. Similarly, the curriculum stated the significance of the involvement of teachers and parents in supporting their children's academic and socio-emotional development. In particular, parents and caregiver's role in children's language and literacy development is boldly stated (MoE, 2009). They are expected to promote a language-rich home environment through engaging in conversations, reading together, and encouraging storytelling sessions. Nurturing these skills not only enhances communication but also lays the groundwork for future academic success. Apart from this, teachers are expected to implement child centered pedagogies that goes in line with the children's needs and level of understanding. They are also expected to value children's differences in learning and integrate these differences while designing the teaching and learning process. In so doing, they are required to create rich opportunities for learning many areas of the curriculum (MoE, 2009, p. 10). This shows the key role teachers, parents and caregivers are expected to play in implementing play pedagogies.

### **2.7.5 The organization of school environment and provision of educational resources in play pedagogies**

The organization of the teaching and learning environment and the provision of the necessary resources underpins play pedagogies. The Ethiopian ECCE policy, strategic and curriculum framework stated the importance of creating a supportive educational environment for the successful integration and implementation of play responsive pedagogies. For instance, the ECCE curriculum incorporated various play-based learning strategies. It also underscored the need to recognize the importance of children's active engagement in hands-on and playful experiences. Moreover, the curriculum encourages teachers to adopt interactive teaching methods that actively involve children in various developmentally appropriate playful educational activities. To realize this, the provision of various teaching materials, the organization of the classroom including the indoor and outdoor spaces are required to ensure the effective implementation of play pedagogies. Emphasizing on the need to organize the educational environment for playful experiences, the curriculum framework stated the following:

*... that the setting of the physical space should allow for free movement of both children and adults. There should be an area for displaying the children's creative work. A variety of stimulating play and learning materials that promote not only simple but also higher thought processes (as with puzzles, riddle and guessing games, stories and fairy tales, etc.) should be available. To enhance creativity, there should be a variety of visuals rich in color, texture and shape on the walls. The learning environment should be friendly, providing adequate opportunity for interactions among children as well as between children and adults. Adequate opportunities for exploration and discovery should be made available (MoE, 2009, p. 10).*

Therefore, the preschool curriculum framework emphasized on the importance of creating a space for indoor and outdoor play-based educational experiences (e.g., sports, dance, music, visual arts and role-play). Besides, creating ample space for various hands-on activities that allows the child to experiment and discover independently and with their peers was highly stressed. Apart from this, ensuring the accessibility and utilization of various educational materials and resources suitable to advance the implementation of play pedagogies was deliberated.

However, the limited availability of resources, including qualified teachers, books, teaching materials, and various indoor and outdoor play materials posed significant challenge to the successfully implementation of the policy, strategic and curriculum intentions (MoE, 2021). Shortage of these fundamental educational resources also limited the implementation of a range of activities that support the implementation of play pedagogies. In particular, lack of adequate classrooms facilities and shortage of qualified teachers and classroom facilitators in government operated O-classes resulted in overcrowded classrooms that are taught by inadequately trained, less motivated and underpaid teachers. This also contributed for the prevalence of teacher dominated traditional pedagogical approaches in ECCE educational settings (MoE, 2021).

In summary, the integration and implementation of play pedagogies requires utilizing the available resources effectively. Engaging children in outdoor activities, encouraging free and guided playtime and providing the required educational resources and facilities are essential. In addition, implementing playful teaching strategies in Ethiopian ECCE settings requires effective collaboration and support from various stakeholders. Educators, policymakers, and community members must work together to provide adequate training and resources for teachers, integrate play pedagogical approaches in the curriculum, and create a supportive learning environment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3 Research Approach, Design and Methods

This chapter discusses the research approach and design used to address the research question posed. In addition, the chapter discusses the specific methods, techniques and procedures used to select study areas and samples, data collection tools and instrumentation, data analysis and interpretation.

#### 3.1 Research Approach

This study adopted *mixed research approach*. In this approach, the researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data, integrates the two approaches while analyzing and interpreting the data using specific designs relevant to adhered philosophical assumption and theoretical framework. The central premise behind this research approach is that all methods have their pitfalls and employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach minimizes the effect of such limitations and enables the researcher to have a complete picture and clear understanding of the research issue being investigated (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Recent trends show the increased adoption of mixed research approach to examine research problems in the fields of social and humanities. Besides, a good research design combines appropriate elements and techniques from across traditions and epistemological perspectives (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2014). This seems to emanate from the fact that methodological triangulation and seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative data is considered to be a common feature of all good research (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2012) and enhances construct validity (Patton, 1990).

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study employed a *convergent parallel/concurrent research design*. The purpose of a convergent (or parallel or concurrent) mixed methods design is to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem. In addition, convergent parallel design consists of taking qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis and comparing or relating the two and then interpreting them. Areas of convergence or divergence between the qualitative and quantitative results should be discussed. A basic rationale for this design is that one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weaknesses of the other form, and that a more complete understanding of a research problem results from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

### 3.3 Research Methods

Research methods represent the specific procedures adopted for collecting and analyzing data. It is associated with the procedures and techniques used to obtain samples and the specific instruments used to measure the variables essential to address the research questions posed.

#### 3.3.1 *Sampling frame and sampling techniques*

In any research endeavors, defining the unit of analysis, target population and study participants or samples is essential. This allows the researcher to identify the level at which data is collected, the nature of informants and the techniques used to select respondents.

##### *i) Study area*

The study area from which sample preprimary schools were obtained included Mekelle city and Wukro town. In Mekelle city, there are 41 public ‘O’ classes, 104 private and NGO operated KG schools (Mekelle City Education Office, 2023). Similarly, there are 5 public ‘O’ classes and 15 private KG schools in Wukro town. In this study, 24 preprimary schools (15 public ‘O’ class, 5 private KG and 4 NGO Preprimary school) were involved.

##### *ii) Target population*

The **target population** from which the study participants and samples were drawn encompassed all teachers and parents in Mekelle City and Wukro town preprimary schools.

##### *iii) Study participants and sampling techniques*

In order to obtain samples for the study, stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used. The study is geographically delimited to preprimary schools that are located in Mekelle City Administration and Wukro town. Existing data from Mekelle City Education Office (2023) shows that the number of preprimary schools operated by public, private and NGOs in both cities varies. The same hold true for Wukro town. In addition, the number of teachers and students varies in these preprimary schools. Moreover, the provision of educational infrastructures and resources to advance play-based pedagogy also varies between and within public “O” classes, private and NGO operated preprimary schools. The existence of such difference creates variance in sample characteristics. To ensure representation, therefore, forming strata based on the types of schools was found to be pivotal to select sample schools from each sub group proportionally. After forming the strata, sample preprimary schools were selected through simple random sampling technique. The use of simple random sampling

provided equal chance for all preprimary schools in each stratum to be included in the study and exclusion from the study only happened because of chance factor. After selecting the schools, sample teachers were also randomly selected to fill in the questionnaire. The following figure 2 illustrates the process followed while selecting sample preprimary schools and teachers for the study.

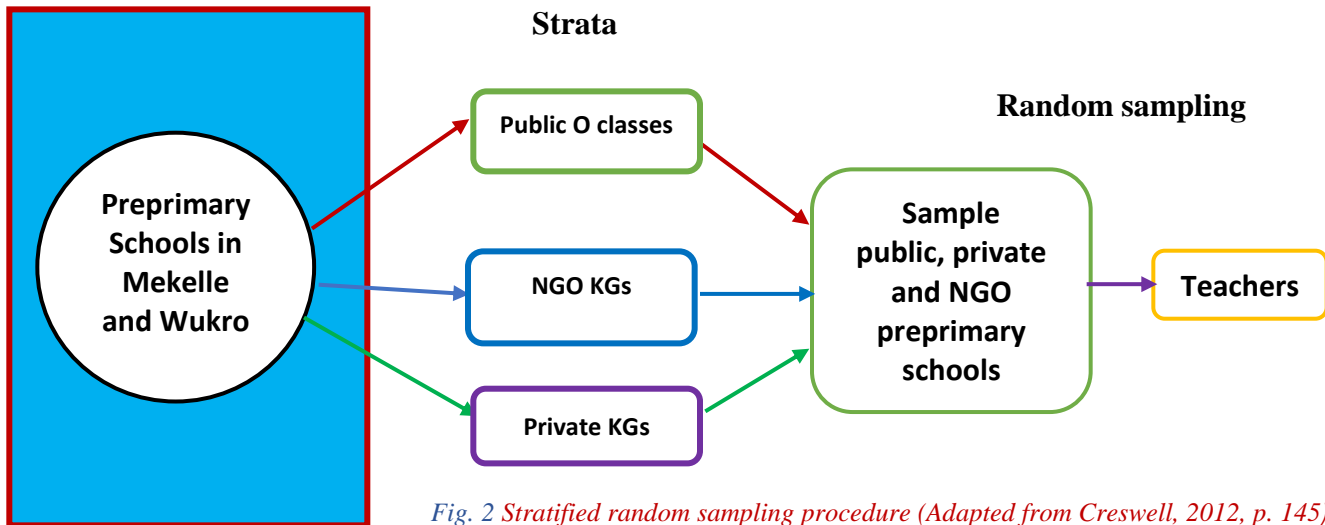


Fig. 2 Stratified random sampling procedure (Adapted from Creswell, 2012, p. 145)

For the qualitative aspect of the study, participants i.e., teachers and parents were selected through *purposive sampling*. This sampling technique is used when the researcher’s prior knowledge convinces him or her that the samples possess the necessary information that would help explain the phenomenon under investigation. More specifically, the study employed theoretical or concept sampling technique. This form of purposive sampling helps to select individuals because they help the researcher understand a concept or a theory. From the randomly selected schools, teachers with more years of teaching experience and parents who actively engage in school affairs were purposefully selected to take part in the semi structured interviews. The following Table 1 shows the sampling distribution.

Table 3.1: Purposefully selected study participants

Cities	Schools		Purposefully selected participants			Data Source
			Teachers	Parents	Total	
Mekelle	Public 'O' class	3	3	3	6	Semi structured interviews, observations and documents.
	Private KG	3	3	5	8	
	NGO KG	4	4	2	6	
Wukro	Public 'O' class supported by NGOs	2	2	1	3	
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>	

### 3.3.2 Data Source and Types

In order to obtain data for the study, both primary and secondary data sources were used. The sources were screened based on their relevance in addressing the research questions posed. Teachers and parents were potential primary data sources. Besides, relevant annual statistical abstracts, national preprimary school curriculum, teacher guideline, annual plans, student portfolios, exercise books and other documents were used as secondary data sources.

### 3.3.3 Data Gathering Tools

The following instruments were used to gather both primary and secondary data for the study.

#### i) Semi-structured interviews

An interview is an oral, in person question-and-answer session between a researcher and an individual respondent (Gay, Mills & Airasian (2012). Interviews permit researchers to obtain important data related to perceptions, feelings and thoughts that may otherwise be hidden while collecting information using a questionnaire or observation alone. In addition, it allows researchers to obtain information about past events or the way things used to be before. Two forms of interviews are distinguished in research: structured and unstructured. In *structured or formal interview*, researchers formally engage in asking predetermined set of specific questions. On the other hand, in *unstructured or informal interview*, the researcher uses a set of questions as a guide in order to allow participants to engage in the discussion related to the what, why, when, who and how a certain phenomenon unfolded. Unstructured interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to find out participants past experiences and more complex or personal information. In this research, in-depth semi-structured interview was employed to collect data from purposefully selected teachers and parents. The items in the interview were designed in such a way that it assists the exploration of conceptions, perceptions and provisions related to the practice of play pedagogies in participant preprimary schools. In addition, it was designed in a way that it enables the researcher to examine the existing curriculum intentions, teaching, learning

and assessment process and its role in improving the quality of children's learning experiences through play-based pedagogies. The guiding interview questions were also be designed based on the overarching research questions and purpose of the research while allowing participants to engage and refine ideas and positions.

#### *ii) Observation checklist*

A qualitative observation checklist that comprised 41 items was developed in light of the research questions posed. The checklist was used to observe the instructional spaces created, the type of materials and equipment available to promote the implementation of play pedagogies. In addition, it was used to evaluate the existing teaching, learning and assessment practices in the classrooms and in play grounds. It was also used to triangulate the data obtained through semi-structured interviews and questionnaire.

#### *iii) Document Reviews*

Document analysis also called "archival analysis" is one of the technique of data collection used by researchers. The data obtained from document review would enable the researcher to gain important insights, potential trends and developments about the phenomenon being measured. Based on the research and objectives of the study, a document review checklist with 24 items was developed to facilitate the review process. Accordingly, valuable documents such as national and regional ECCE policy and strategic documents, national and regional annual statistic abstracts, preprimary school curriculum framework, teachers' guidelines, annual plans and reports, student portfolios, parent teacher communication books were reviewed to assess intentions, strategic priorities and processes set forth to enhance the design, development, implementation and evaluation of play-based pedagogies in selected preprimary schools.

#### *iv) Survey Questionnaire*

Based on the overarching research questions and objectives, a survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect quantitative data. A questionnaire is a written collection of survey questions to be answered by a selected group of research participants. Using a questionnaire is considered advantageous in research areas that emphasized on investigating the perceptions and practices regarding the power of play-based pedagogies. It is also less expensive and gives more opportunity for respondents to reflect on and evaluate on their perceptions, the existing processes and practices of play-based approaches. In addition, a questionnaire enables the collection of sensitive information, which

may only be known to respondents in regard to the implementation of play-based pedagogies. It also enables the researcher to obtain objective data. A survey questionnaire with three points of Likert scale was devised and adapted. The questionnaire comprised of 53 items.

#### *3.3.4 The psychometric properties of the survey instrument*

Before the actual administration of the survey questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out at Marif International Schools, Mekelle branch. Conducting pilot testing or trying out of a newly developed or adapted data collection instrument is regarded as one of an essential component of a good research design (Teijlingen van & Hundley, 2001). The pilot test involved obtaining expert review and feedback, checking that all questions are understood well and answered as expected, discarding all unnecessary, difficult or ambiguous questions and re-wording or re-scaling any questions that are not answered as expected. To minimize ambiguity and improve response rate, the English version was translated into Tigrigna by language expert. The Tigrigna version was also back translated into English. This was done to ensure that the intentions of the questionnaire were accurately conveyed, to preserve the nuanced context of questionnaire and minimize possible errors. The evidence obtained from pilot testing and expert review served in examining the face, content, and construct validity of the developed survey instrument.

After the actual data was collected, various exploratory analysis was performed to assess the psychometric property of the survey instrument used to collect the quantitative data. Examining the psychometric properties of an adapted survey instrument is one of the procedures used to test the validity and reliability of an instrument used in different contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The analysis involved checking the normality of distribution, missing value analysis, and item and scale reliability coefficient analysis. The result of the frequency and descriptive analysis along with histograms showed the data were normally distributed. The normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov) indicated the normality of distribution. One piece of evidence examined to measure the validity of the survey questionnaire is related to assessing the extent to which the questionnaire consistently measures the construct it purports to measure. To achieve this, reliability analysis for all items in the questionnaire and the scales were conducted. The following table 3.2 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of the scales designed to measure teachers' perception, attitudes and various forms of play pedagogies implemented in preprimary educational setting.

**Table 3.2: Psychometric properties of play pedagogy scales**

Scales	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Teachers perception, knowledge and attitude	9	2.88	.13	.41
Use of lectures and direct instruction	5	2.73	.29	.54
Use of free play	5	2.94	.16	.42
Use of teacher directed play	4	2.75	.31	.39
Use of mutual or guided play	4	2.78	.21	.42
Use of play responsive learning	3	2.91	.19	.38
Play type practiced in preschool	23	2.48	.35	.37
Effectiveness of the play type to support children’s learning	23	2.56	.35	.41
Alignment of play types with teacher’s guide	23	2.41	.37	.45

Note. *N* = No of Items, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach Reliability Coefficient.

The reliability of the adapted survey questionnaire (99 items) indicated a higher reliability of  $\alpha= 0.93$ . This result suggested a higher internal consistency of the responses obtained from the survey questionnaire. However, the reliability coefficients for the 9 scales measured was  $\alpha= 0.45$ . Existing literature suggested a value of 0.7 and higher to be a good indicator of reliability (Field, 2018). The inter-item correlation values for all scales ranged between -0.26 and 0.56, which indicates that the items seem to fairly measure the variable they purport to measure, i.e., *the practice of play pedagogies* (Clark & Watson, 2019). Various authors (e.g., Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Field, 2018) argued that the number of items in a scale and the number of respondents can influence reliability values. Hence, the observed variations between reliability values for all items in the questionnaire and the nine scales might have resulted from differences in the number of items in the scales.

### 3.3.5 Data Analysis

Convergent/parallel design analysis technique guided the analysis process of the data collected. This form of analysis entails the analysis and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative simultaneously giving equal weights to both forms of data (Creswell, 2012; 2014). To analyze the voluminous qualitative data, applied thematic analysis approach were used. This form of analysis used to analyze the qualitative text data obtained from interview transcriptions, observation and document analysis. The utilization of this analysis technique offers the researcher the opportunity to use a combination of quantitative and interpretive techniques essential to address the research questions posed (Guest, et.al. 2014). Besides, it offers the researcher with the opportunity to systematically analyze the voluminous qualitative data and link it to broader conceptual or theoretical models (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This process of analysis involved reading and rereading the text data, looking for key words, trends, themes or core ideas in the data. In addition, it involved generating or constructing themes based on the meaning created or patterned response observed in the data set. Though various alternative steps are provided to conduct thematic analysis inductively, the *six steps of qualitative data*

analysis suggested by Creswell (2014) were selected to facilitate the analysis process. The following figure 3 shows the steps followed in analyzing the qualitative data.

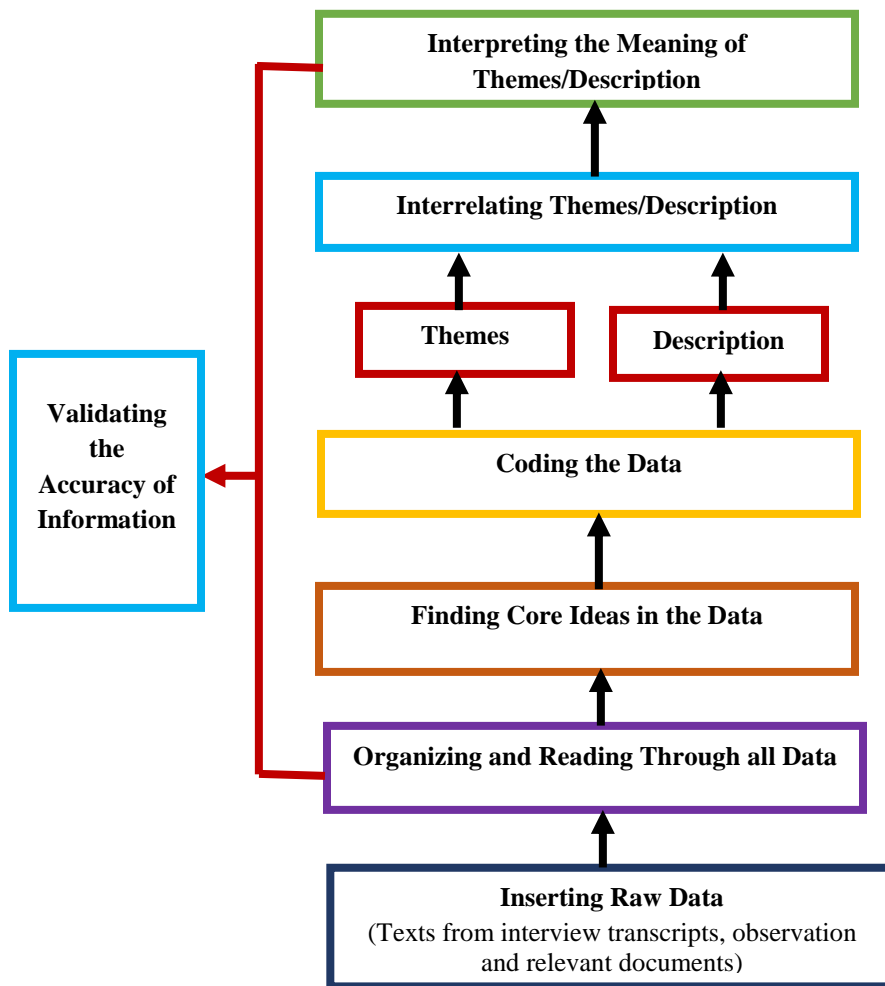


Fig. 3. Steps in Qualitative Data Analysis (Adapted from Creswell, 2014, p. 197).

As for the quantitative data which was collected through survey questionnaire, *descriptive statistics* (Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation). This helped in analyzing the mean response trend among respondents. Similarly, *inferential statistics* (Correlation and Regression Analysis) were also computed. In order to get insight into the existing associations between various play pedagogy scales and examine the predictive role of various variables of interest on the implementation of play pedagogies, linear and multiple regression analysis was conducted. To fit the data for regression analysis, the average scores of five play pedagogy scales were computed and grand mean centered. In addition, two approaches were followed in performing multiple regression analyses. In the initial step, the effect of each predictor variable on the implementation of play pedagogies was examined. After assessing the relative importance and significance level of each predictor entered in the first regression, the final regression analysis was performed with only those variables that significantly contributed in

predicting the outcome variable. These variables were entered hierarchically to provide more meaningful predictions. Accordingly, the variables that significantly predicted the implementation of play pedagogies were entered step by step in the multiple regression model.

### **3.3.6** *Ethical Considerations*

The researcher attempted to conduct the study in an ethical manner through adhering to the ethical principles stipulated for educational research. This was achieved through establishing trust with selected preprimary schools' community and ensuring the confidentiality of the responses obtained from respondents. In addition, the researcher explained the importance of the study to school managers/principals, teachers and parents. Moreover, the researcher implemented all the necessary procedures to protect the anonymity of respondents. Apart from this, the researcher properly acknowledged all reference materials used through utilizing proper and consistent citation procedures.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results obtained from quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The analysis results of survey questionnaire, interviews, observation and document analysis are discussed. The presentation is organized in a manner that reflects the specific research design used for the study. Accordingly, the quantitative data were simultaneously analyzed and interpreted along with the qualitative sources.

#### 4.1 Assessment of teachers and parents' knowledge, perceptions and attitude about play pedagogy

One of the objectives of this study was to examine teachers and parent's knowledge, perception and attitude about play pedagogies. This section discusses the results obtained from survey, interviews, observation and document reviews regarding teachers and parents' demographic characteristics, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes.

##### 4.1.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Teachers and parents' demographic characteristics were collected to get insight into the nature of respondents and to facilitate further analysis. The demographic data was collected both for survey respondents and interview participants.

###### *i) Characteristics of teachers who filled the survey questionnaire*

As Table 4.1 below shows, compared to public 'O' classes and NGO operated preschools, the number of private primary schools who participated in the survey was higher. Similarly, over 99% of teachers who filled in the questionnaire were females. This figure reveals an overwhelming dominance of female teachers in the teaching position of preprimary schools. Besides, the perception measured regarding play pedagogies tended to reflect the perspectives entertained by females. Considering the qualification of teachers, the majority of teachers (71%) had obtained certificate in KG teaching, followed by bachelor's degree holders (18%) and a college diploma (9.6%). This seems to indicate teachers' fulfillment of the minimum educational requirement set to teach in preprimary schools (MoE, 2009). It appears that the majority of teachers (95%) received some sort of training before assuming teaching responsibilities and while they were on the job. This seems to show teachers' participation in

various kinds of training related to play-based learning approaches. When their work experience range was examined categorically, about 32% of teachers have worked from 4-7 years. The second inline was teachers with a work experience of over 11 years, with 21% of teachers having between 0 and 3 years of teaching experience. Though small in magnitude, around 18% of teachers have worked between 8 and 10 years.

**Table 4.1: Background of teachers who filled the survey questionnaire**

<b>Parameters</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
School type	Public 'O' class	33	24.4
	NGO KGs	35	25.9
	Private KGs	67	49.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>135</b>	<b>99.9</b>
Gender	Male	1	0.7
	Female	134	99.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>
Qualification	10th Grade Completed	2	1.5
	Certificate in KG Teaching	96	71.1
	College Diploma	13	9.6
	BA/BSc	24	17.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>
Training received	Training before assuming teaching responsibilities	21	15.6
	On the job training	23	17.0
	Training in both cases	84	62.2
	No training	7	5.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>
Teaching experience in years	0-3 Years	29	21.5
	4-7 Years	43	31.9
	8-10 Years	25	18.5
	Over 11 Years	37	27.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>134</b>	<b>99.3</b>

Source: Field data from Survey Questionnaire (March, 2024)

Considering teachers' qualification, training received and years of work experience, we can infer those respondents possessed (at least) the minimum level of knowledge and experience that enable them to respond to the survey items by examining their perception, level of knowledge and implementation status of play pedagogies in their respective schools.

*ii) Characteristics of teachers who participated in the interview*

As can be seen from Table 4.2 below, all interview participants were female, with no male participants. This seems to suggest the perceptions reflected in responding to the leading interview questions represents the perspectives hold by female teachers who assumed teaching roles and responsibilities.

**Table 4.2: Interviewed teachers' profile**

Participants	N	Background																	
		Sex		Age						Qualification			School type			Years of working experience			
		M	F	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	> 50	Certificate	Diploma	Degree	O class	NGOs	Private	0-5	5-10	10-15	> 15
Teachers	12	0	12	1	2	6	1	2	0	7	5	0	4	3	5	2	4	3	3

The age of teachers who participated in the interview ranged between the ages of 25 and 45. Thus, early and middle-aged adults seems to dominate the teaching posts in the observed preprimary schools. Considering years of experience in teaching, the interview participants had between 4 and 30 years of working experience in the observed preprimary schools of Mekelle and Wukro.

*iii) Characteristics of parents who participated in the interview*

As can be seen from Table 4.3 below, there were seven (64%) male and four (36%) female participants. This figure reveals a balanced representation of both sexes in the interview. Having both sexes in the interview enables in obtaining a balanced perspective regarding the interview questions discussed.

**Table 4.3: Interviewed parents' profile**

Participants	N	Background																	
		Sex		Age						Employment status			School type			Number of children in preschool			
		M	F	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	> 50	Employed-private	Employed-	Unemployed	O class	NGOs	Private	1	2-3	>3	
Parents	11	7	4	0	1	4	0	4	2	6	5	0	3	3	5	7	4	0	

The age of parents who participated in the interview ranged from the ages of 25 to over 50. Thus, early and middle-aged parents with more experience in parenting children were involved in the interview. Considering parents' employment status, almost half of parents who participated in the interview were

employed the private sectors while the other half were employed by the government. The profession they were engaged included but not limited to teaching in private schools and public universities, small businesses and trade, carpentry etc. While most parents who participated in the interview were sending at least one child in private KGs, few of them indicated their children are attending public and NGO preprimary schools.

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge, perception and attitude of teachers about play and play pedagogies**

Teachers' epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning influence their practices. Research has shown that the conceptions of teaching and learning held by teachers affect their teaching practices and the way in which their own students conceive and approach learning (López- Íñiguez & Pozo, 2014). Hence, exploring the conception, beliefs and attitudes held by preschool teachers about play is essential to examine the power of play pedagogies in promoting children's learning and holistic development. The following discussion summarizes the results obtained from teachers' reflections and regression analysis.

##### ***i) Conception of play and play pedagogies in preschool education***

Teachers' conception of play and play pedagogies shapes the way they teach and assess children's learning and development. When asked to explain the definition of play and play pedagogies, Respondent 1 stated the following:

*For me, play is very important for children because it makes them happy and helps them relax. The place where they live decides what kind of play they can do. Often, children need more time to play than to do things like writing or reading. The government also says that children should learn through play because play and childhood go together, like two sides of a coin. If a child doesn't play, it can be a sign that something is wrong, because all healthy children need the fun and energy that play gives them (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

Rather than defining the concept, the discussant highlighted the importance of play for children's learning and development. In doing so, the interviewee attempted to disclose the intricate relationships between play and learning. On the other hand, Respondent 2 provided the following when asked about the what of play and play responsive pedagogies.

*Play can be divided into two types: fun play and learning play. Fun play includes activities that children choose because they enjoy them, helping them relax and have fun. Learning play, on the other hand, is linked to learning goals. For example, when teaching numbers, we might use songs in Amharic or English that match the lesson. This combination of play and learning is called play pedagogy. There are many ways to use play in teaching, depending on what is being taught. Children naturally like to play, and by using play in lessons, we make it easier for them to understand and enjoy the material (Interview, April 1, 2024)*

Respondent 2 categorized play into child initiated and adult directed. For the Respondent, play types that are organized to achieve a desired learning outcome are imbedded within the realm of play pedagogies. The Respondent also underscored the importance of integrating various forms of play activities in the instructional process to advance children’s learning and development. Similarly, Respondent 3 offered a deeper insight as to the meanings of play and play pedagogies. The Respondent’s reflection is summarized as follows:

*Play is a strong motivator, bringing enjoyment and happiness, and is often a favorite activity for people of all ages, from young children to adults. It’s not just for kids; adults also find value and fun in play. Because of this, it’s important for teachers and educators to understand how play works—what games or activities to choose, when to play, and with whom, whether it’s with children or adults. This understanding helps educators learn what children like and enjoy, which can be used to support and guide their development. So, play is an important tool for entertainment and growth for everyone. Play can be divided into two main types: indoor and outdoor. Indoor play lets children choose from a variety of toys or participate in educational activities led by a teacher. Outdoor play usually happens on playgrounds with equipment like swings, seesaws, and merry-go-rounds. Outdoor play can also include organized activities where children interact with their teacher in different settings. When play is combined with learning, it takes advantage of a child’s natural interest in play. Children learn from their families, neighbors, and schools, picking up knowledge from everything around them. Play is a great way for children to learn. Even if it’s not obvious at first, when children are playing, they are actually learning. Therefore, when we see children playing, it’s important for adults to understand that they are learning. This view helps us see play as an essential part of children’s development and education (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Respondent 3 recognized the power of play and play pedagogies in fostering children’s holistic development. The Respondent also lauded the importance of carefully analyzing children’s needs, interests and inclinations towards play. Conducting such rigorous analysis seems instrumental in order to purposefully design and integrate play in the day-to-day instructional process. In addition, the Respondent identified two forms of play i.e., indoor and outdoor. According to the discussant, indoor play is more controlled and guided by the teacher while outdoor play allows for children to take charge of the educational process. It is also interesting to note that play can serve a dual purpose. According to the Respondent, engagement in various forms of play not only enhance children’s learning and development. It also improves teacher’s knowledge, skills and excitement in teaching.

Though all discussants seem to be well versed with the concept of play, their understanding level about play pedagogies seems to be varied. For instance, while Respondent 1 reflected, “*play-based learning is pivotal, indicating that students benefit more from play than from traditional classroom learning. This approach emphasizes the need for a balance, ensuring children engage actively and creatively*

through play” (Interview, March 20, 2024), Respondent 2 stated “*I am not familiar with this particular topic*” (Interview, April 1, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 3 reflected the following:

*I apologize for the misunderstanding about this approach you explain to me. Let me clarify. In our teaching approach, we primarily focus on preparing lessons and utilizing various teaching aids. For instance, if the topic is about numbers, we meticulously plan how to teach each number, when to introduce them, and the methods we'll use. However, the specific type of play is not pre-planned. During the lesson, I spontaneously incorporate play activities based on what comes to mind at the moment. For example, I might use bottle caps for counting exercises or engage the students in a game of searching for specific numbers. This approach allows for flexibility and adaptation to the students' needs and interests during the lesson* (Interview, March 28, 2024).

From Respondent 3 reflection, one can observe the existing gap in understanding what play pedagogies are. Besides, it indicates the existing lack of proper integration of play pedagogies in the instructional process of preschool education. Though teachers utilize various forms of play in their day-to-day teaching, the type of play used is derived from the nature of the instructional content that is going to be taught in the classroom. Moreover, play pedagogies are not carefully integrated in the design and implementation of instructional process. Despite these limitations, the linear regression analysis result showed the effect of teachers’ knowledge and perception on the implementation and use of various play pedagogies. As can be seen from Table 4.4 below, teachers’ knowledge and perception about play and play pedagogies significantly predicted the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = .34, p = .000$ ).

**Table 4.4:** The effect of teachers’ knowledge and perception on the implementation of play pedagogies

Variables	Model	
	B	SE
Constant	1.80*	.25
Teachers’ knowledge and perception	.35*	.08
<b>Model statistics</b>		
$R^2$	.11	
$\Delta R^2$	.11	
$F$	16.87	
$\Delta F$	16.87	

Note. N = 135. B = Unstandardized coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

The effect of this variable was accounted for 11% of the variation in the use of play pedagogies. This result shows the importance of teachers’ knowledge and perception on the implementation of play pedagogies in preschool settings.

**ii) Teacher’s attitude towards play**

Attitude is very important for teachers. It affects their students in many ways and can shape their learning experience. Teacher beliefs and attitudes have relevance for their professional and instructional

practices, interactions with students, and learning processes (Rengel, 2014). In light of this, teachers were asked a number of questions designed to measure their attitude towards play and play pedagogies. When asked to reflect on the role and importance of play pedagogies, Respondent 5 stated the following:

*The idea of play pedagogy is very important. It's not enough for students to just learn; they also need enough time to play. This is why, even with challenges like damaged playground equipment due to the war, we continue to encourage outdoor play. In the classroom, we use songs related to our lessons to add playful elements, even if we don't have all the materials, we need for play. I recognize the great benefits that different types of play bring in helping children grow into thoughtful and well-rounded individuals, and I know many games to support this, even without specific play materials (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

To Respondent 1, children needs to be given ample time to allow them to engage in play activities. Even in a dire instructional resource context, play should not be underemphasized. As such, integrating various forms of indoor and outdoor play is instrumental to promote children's learning and over all development. Similarly, Respondent 2 stated the following:

*Play pedagogy benefits both teachers and students by making learning more engaging and fun. In my opinion, it would be very helpful to make play pedagogy a formal part of our education system and to encourage teachers across the country to understand its value (Interview, April 1, 2024).*

Respondent 2 seems to claim that despite the importance attached to play and play pedagogies, there is limited effort made to improve the value of integrating play pedagogies in preschool education. On the other hand, Respondent 3 highlighted the significance of play pedagogies as follows:

*I understand and strongly support the idea of learning through play, as I have seen how children understand concepts more easily and quickly when they are truly interested in the activity. Children naturally enjoy playing more than sitting and listening to lectures from their teachers. Therefore, it is important to use their natural interest—play—to help them learn. This approach not only grabs their attention but also makes learning more enjoyable and memorable. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

The respondent seems to contrast between play pedagogies and traditional teacher centered pedagogical approaches. According to the Respondent, children are naturally inclined towards play. It is a vehicle through which they learn concepts, create relationships and explore the world around them. They learn better, engage deeply in the learning process and enjoy their educational experience when learning is facilitated through play rather than teacher directed educational methods and approaches. Therefore, integrating play pedagogies into preschool instructional process creates the opportunity for teachers to design and implement learning experiences that fosters children' learning and holistic development. From the observation made teachers in the observed public, private and NGO preprimary schools did not demonstrate a sound understanding of play pedagogies. However, they all showed a positive attitude towards children's engagement in playful learning experiences. On the contrary, there were clearly observed differences between and within the schools on the level of emphasis given to the

implementation of playful pedagogies. While some schools attempted to emphasize on implementing playful pedagogies, others seem to rely more on traditional teacher centered approaches.

### *iii) Teacher's perceptions about the benefits of play and play pedagogy*

Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills. For this reason, play opportunities and environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective pre-primary programs (UNICEF, 2018). Playful pedagogy puts play experience as central to learning, giving pupils the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy and motivation (Hamilton & Wood, 2020). Accordingly, teachers were asked to discuss their perceptions about the benefits of play pedagogies. Their response is organized in three areas and presented as follows.

#### *A. Observed benefits of play for children's learning and development*

When asked to discuss the benefits of play for children's learning and development, Respondent 12 stated, *"Using play in education provides many benefits. It boosts students' interest in lessons, helps them understand better, and keeps them happy and entertained. For teachers, play offers a more engaging and enjoyable way to teach lessons."* (Interview, April 4, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 9 indicated *"Play gives children a chance to have fun and reduce stress. When students refresh themselves through play, they become better able to stay active and engaged. This not only helps the students but also supports teachers in smoothly guiding them into the main topics of the lesson"* (Interview, March 27, 2024). In addition, Respondent 5 stated the following:

*First, giving children opportunities to engage in different types of play teaches them about various games and how to participate. Second, it encourages them to be more active. There is a clear difference between children who have had plenty of playtime and those who haven't. Children who play regularly tend to have higher self-confidence, while those with little or no play experience may have lower self-esteem. Play serves as an energizer for children, helping stimulate their growth and development* (Interview, March 22, 2024).

Apart from this, Respondent 3 stated the following:

*Play pedagogy offers many benefits that greatly improve the learning experience. It makes lessons more appealing and effective, capturing students' attention and interest. Children become more energetic and engaged, showing greater enthusiasm for learning. This approach also encourages teachers to be well-prepared and flexible, adjusting their teaching methods to actively meet students' needs. Additionally, students remain engaged in activities, promoting active participation instead of passive learning. This engagement not only makes learning enjoyable and fun but also supports the development of important skills like social, cognitive, and physical abilities. Overall, play pedagogy creates a lively and interactive learning environment where students are motivated to explore, discover, and learn.* (Interview, March 28, 2024).

The overwhelming response obtained from all teachers indicated the observed benefits of teaching children through play. The areas of benefit discussed included, but not limited to, improved students learning interest, better understanding of concepts, increased enthusiasm, enjoyment and excitement to be in schools, improved self-esteem and active engagement in the instruction.

*B. The role of play in promoting children's creativity and problem-solving skills*

A number of studies indicated the benefits of play in improving children's creativity and problem-solving skills. When children play individually and with others their cognitive skills, such as thinking, remembering, learning and paying attention are all being developed. When they are taught through play, children develop problem solving, the power of imagination and creativity (e.g., UNICEF, 2018; Parker & Thomsen, 2019; Parker, Thomsen & Berry, 2022; Mardell et al, 2023). The response obtained from teachers seems to support these research findings. For instance, Respondent 8 clarified the relationship between play, creativity and problem-solving skills as follows:

*When children play, they have fun, which helps them think creatively and improves their ability to absorb educational material. This enjoyment and creative involvement are important because they boost creativity skills. As their creativity grows, so does their ability to solve problems. Improved problem-solving skills come directly from increased creativity, showing the positive impact of allowing children to play alongside formal education. (Interview, April 1, 2024).*

On the other hand, Respondent 1 highlighted the importance of children's interaction with their peers during play activities in improving their creativity and problem-solving skills. The Respondent was quoted, *"through play, children have the chance to interact with their peers, necessitating the management of emotions and behaviors. This interaction naturally leads to the development of problem-solving skills. Teaching real-life scenarios through play also encourages creativity, as children learn to apply abstract concepts in tangible ways (Interview, March 20, 2024).* Agreeing with Respondent 1, Respondent 2 was quoted, *"Playing helps children interact with other kids and adults, which helps them improve their social skills. These interactions are important for building confidence, and this confidence helps children become better at solving problems and being creative. The more confident children feel through socializing, the better they can face challenges in creative ways"* (Interview, April 1, 2024). For Respondent 10, the power of play in exposing children to new concepts and experiences plays major role in improving children's creativity and problem-solving skills. The Respondent reflected:

*Play encourages children to try different activities and face new challenges. As they experience new things during play, they come across various concepts and objects. This helps them think creatively and come up with new ideas. These creative ideas are important because they help children develop problem-solving skills. By dealing with the challenges they face during play, children grow and improve their ability to solve problems and overcome obstacles. (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

Similarly, Respondent 3 stated the following:

*Play pedagogy plays a key role in developing creativity and problem-solving skills in children. When children participate in different types of play, especially through repetition, they learn to think in new ways and solve problems creatively. Through play, they try out different ideas, experiment with scenarios, and learn from their mistakes. This process helps them become more creative, resilient, and persistent. Play allows children to face challenges, explore various solutions, and see the outcomes of their actions in a safe and supportive environment. In the end, play pedagogy encourages curiosity and exploration, both of which are crucial for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

The overwhelming response obtained from all interview participants indicated the observed benefits of play and play pedagogies in improving children's creativity and problem-solving skills. Play activities are associated with helping children articulate their ideas, grasp concepts and widen their interaction and experiences. This is essential to foster their self-confidence which in turn, enhances their creativity and problem-solving skills. Empirical evidences indicated that playful pedagogies make play experiences central to learning, giving children the flexibility to find their own solutions to both new and existing problems. It engages children in personally meaningful activities, learning about themselves and others, and encourages autonomy, creativity and motivation (Hamilton & Wood, 2020). Play often presents children with challenges and obstacles, requiring them to think critically and problem-solve. Play also fosters a sense of resilience, perseverance, and adaptability. As children navigate through these challenges, they develop essential skills such as planning, strategizing, and flexible thinking, which are essential for success in various aspects of life (NAEYC, 2022).

### *C. The role of play pedagogy in enhancing children's holistic development*

Respondents were asked to explain in what ways play pedagogy enhances children's wellbeing, language and literacy, social, communication, emotional and physical development. The response obtained seems to suggest the key role play pedagogies play in enhancing children's holistic development. While Respondent 1 emphasized on describing the importance of play in improving children's *cognitive development*, Respondent 2 maintained the role of "*playful interactions with peers in contributing to the development of social skills and their creative potential*" (Interview, April 1, 2024). On the other hand, Respondent 3, detailed how play pedagogies promotes children's holistic development as follows:

*Play pedagogy is essential for helping children develop social skills and build friendships. Through play, children learn to communicate, cooperate, and understand their peers, which are key aspects of social development. Play encourages interaction, leading to the formation of friendships and creating a supportive social environment. It also teaches children to manage their emotions and handle relationships more effectively. Additionally, the physical activity involved in play supports both gross and fine motor skills, improving coordination, strength, and dexterity through actions like running, climbing, and manipulating objects. Beyond social and physical development, play pedagogy also aids*

*cognitive growth. For example, playing with flashcards and charts helps children learn letters, words, and concepts, while sensory play, such as shaping letters in sand, supports literacy and reinforces writing skills (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

It is interesting to note that most Respondents considered children's engagement in a wide array of activities to be instrumental in facilitating their interaction with peers and adults. This in turn enhances their social skills and their ability to communicate with both children and adults. This interaction plays also plays a critical role in their language development. Moreover, playing on the playground is considered to contribute to children's physical development such as physical well-being and coordination skills. Teaching literacy and numeracy through playful approaches is widely discussed to further enrich children's learning experience, leading to more significant improvements in their thinking, imaginative, problem solving and creative skills. Hence, playful approach promotes children's social, physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being through providing meaningful and enjoyable experiences.

#### *D. Success stories from the use of play pedagogies in preschool settings*

Respondents were asked to discuss on the success they experienced as a result of implementing play pedagogies. The response obtained seems to indicate the wider benefits of teaching children through play. For instance, Respondent 1 stated, *"Play pedagogy plays a significant role in children's development, fostering various skills. While some students may not verbally express their understanding of a lesson, their ability to sing about it shows how teaching through play can contribute to academic success"* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Respondent 2 emphasized, *"Play pedagogy has been highly effective in our teaching, making it easier for students to grasp lessons. They are more confident in reading and writing, thanks to the integration of games and songs into their learning process"* (Interview, April 1, 2024). More broadly Respondent 3 stated the following:

*The success of play pedagogy in my classroom is reflected in the positive learning outcomes observed in all students. This approach has been particularly effective in leveling the playing field, allowing most students to achieve a similar level of understanding and skill. A particularly rewarding example of the impact of play-based learning is the significant progress made by a student with special needs, who initially struggled with restlessness and lacked interest in traditional learning methods. By incorporating play into our educational activities, this student has shown a remarkable increase in engagement and improved performance. This transformation highlights the powerful influence of play pedagogy in engaging diverse learners and creating meaningful educational experiences (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Apart from this, Respondent 10 was quoted stating the following:

*I've noticed a significant difference between the traditional teaching methods I used before my training and the play-based pedagogy I use now. In the past, with traditional methods, we often overlooked the unique needs of children, treating them more like small adults and expecting them to absorb information as we dictated. Now, with play pedagogy, I'm much more attuned to the children's developmental needs.*

*This approach allows us to teach in a way that is gentle and kind, aligning more closely with their natural ways of learning and interacting with the world. It's a shift that emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and nurturing childhood during the educational process. Additionally, play pedagogy fosters a more inclusive classroom environment. This inclusivity is one of its greatest strengths. By addressing the diverse needs of all students, play-based learning allows each child to engage at their own pace and according to their unique strengths and interests. This approach not only respects and validates the childhood experience but also promotes equality and accessibility in education, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

It is quite interesting to note the wider recognition of the importance of play pedagogies in fostering children's learning and development. Irrespective of differences in school types, the response obtained from other interview participants also suggested a positive outcome. It seems that play pedagogies transformed the teaching and learning process of the schools. From the preceding discussion, play pedagogies were found to be instrumental in promoting inclusivity, adapting instruction to the specific learning needs of children, in promoting children's academic, social and emotional development

### **Knowledge, perception and attitude of parents about play and play pedagogies**

The following discussion summarizes the conception and attitude of parents regarding play and play pedagogies.

#### ***i) Conception of play and play pedagogies in preschool education***

All interviewed parents were asked to explain what play is. The response obtained seems to indicate a good understanding of play in general. For instance, Respondent 3 *"Play is an activity that individuals can participate in either alone or with others. It requires active involvement, capturing full attention, and providing enjoyment."* (Interview, March 28, 2024). The position which was shared by most parents were raised by respondent 1. The Respondent was quoted, *"Play is a natural activity for children. My child, in particular, is very energetic and hardly ever rests."* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Respondent 8 also stated the concept of play, *"for me, play is primarily about enjoyment and refreshing the mind, influenced by one's experiences and knowledge"* (Interview, March 28, 2024). For Respondent 4, *"Play can be a solitary activity or a shared experience with friends and peers. It requires active participation and provides entertainment, bringing joy and enjoyment."* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Adding the significance of play, Respondent 6 stated the following:

*Play is very important for children. It helps them grow physically and learn how to interact with other kids. When children are excited to play with friends at school, they enjoy going to school more. Offering different play activities at school can make them feel happy about being there and help them love learning and spending time at school. (Interview, March 19, 2024).*

Similarly, Respondent 7 offered the following explanation as to the meaning of play and its importance for children.

*Play is a basic part of being human. It is a fun activity that involves creativity, imagination, and exploration. Play is not just for entertainment; it is also a strong tool for learning and growth at every stage of life, helping to promote learning, creativity, and social development.* (Interview, March 29, 2024).

From this and other Respondents' discussion it appears that parents were able to define what play is in their own words. Besides, they were able to clarify the importance of play to children learning, socialization and development. In addition to the defining play, parents were also asked to describe what play pedagogy means to them. Their response seems to suggest a fair understanding of the concept of play pedagogies. In particular, parents who were working as a university instructor and school teacher provided an in-depth explanation as to the concept of play pedagogies. For instance, Respondent 6 stated, *"Play pedagogy is a teaching approach that recognizes the different learning styles of students, influenced by factors like language, family structure, background, and cultural identity."* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 11 was quoted, *"To me, play-based pedagogy is an educational approach that acknowledges and values the role of play in children's learning and development. This approach involves educators actively participating in children's play, guiding and expanding their learning experiences within a play-centered context"* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Sharing this explanation, Respondent 10 stated, *"Play pedagogy focuses on teaching that responds to children's natural play behaviors. This approach involves creating time and space for children to engage in independent play without interference, except when safety concerns arise. It's about giving children the freedom to explore and learn on their own within a safe environment."* (Interview, March 22, 2024). The explanations provided indicated the importance of recognizing and valuing play in children's learning and development. From the Respondent's discussion, it can be observed that many parents seem to know the connection between play and child development. They seem to appreciate the role that of play in children's learning and overall development.

#### **ii) Parent's attitude towards play and play pedagogies**

. In order to assess parents' attitude towards play and play pedagogies, they were asked to state their attitude towards play and play pedagogy. In replying to the question, Respondent 11 stated, *"My attitude towards play pedagogy is very positive. I believe play is an essential part of early childhood education and that it supports the overall development of children. I highly value the role of play in encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and social skills."* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 8 stated, *"Playful learning, supported by play pedagogy in classrooms and schools, helps*

*children develop skills like collaboration, rule negotiation, and imaginative creation. This approach fosters their social, physical, and cognitive development."*

(Interview, March 28, 2024). The Response obtained from Respondent 7 indicates the belief hold by many parents regarding play pedagogies. The Respondent stated, "*Play-based learning is a powerful approach that matches how children naturally learn and grow. Play pedagogy encourages creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and social development, all of which are crucial for success in school and life. I believe play pedagogy is a valuable and effective educational method* (Interview, March 29, 2024). While recognizing the importance of play and play pedagogies, Respondent 10 argued that the educational setting is not capable to deliver on its promises. This is observed from the following quote:

*Supporting playful learning in classrooms and schools helps children develop important skills like collaboration, rule negotiation, and relationship management through play. I believe learning through play is essential, but it raises the question: are our educational settings and classrooms truly equipped for this? In this school, the environment and materials are relatively better compared to other schools, which still rely heavily on traditional methods like blackboards and chalk* (Interview, March 22, 2024). *Supporting playful learning in classrooms and schools allows children to learn.*

The Respondent claimed that even if the classrooms and the school environment is conducive for play pedagogies, teacher centered pedagogical approaches seem to dominate. Similar reflection was also obtained from Respondent 6 who claimed, "I fully support the approach of integrating play into learning. Children tend to understand concepts better when they are engaged through play. I believe all schools should adopt this method. At times, the teaching methods used are too formal, resembling adult learning environments where children sit at desks and are expected to write. "*I fully support the approach of integrating play into learning. Children often grasp concepts more effectively when engaged through play. I believe all schools should adopt this method. Sometimes, the teaching methods used are too formal, resembling adult learning environments where children sit at desks and are expected to write*" The Respondent also added, "*The playground facilities at their school are in poor condition, and there are no toys for them to enjoy or entertain themselves with. We can't afford frequent visits to amusement parks, so if the school could provide a well-equipped playground and toys, it would greatly improve their opportunity to play and have fun.*" (Interview, March 19, 2024). Apart from this, Respondent 9 shared parents' misconception about play and its role in children's learning. The Respondent was quoted:

*I am fully convinced that play is an effective way to teach children. Observing my child, I've noticed that she learns a lot from her peers and the toys she plays with. However, some parents may not see the value of play pedagogy because they don't understand its benefits and view play and education as separate.*

*They often complain about children "just playing" at school and the absence of homework, without realizing the subtle educational benefits of play. (Interview, March 27, 2024).*

Though their response seems to suggest a positive attitude, it also shows variations among parents on the importance of play and play pedagogies to children's learning and development. Besides, some parents felt that schools lack the required instructional resources to enable the implementation of play centered pedagogies. Moreover, emphasis given to direct instructional approaches and teaching literacy skills seem to undermine the implementation of play pedagogies.

## **4.2 The practice of play pedagogies in preprimary schools**

The practice of play pedagogies was examined using the results obtained from quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The following section summarizes the views and reflections of the respondents.

### **4.2.1 The practice of integrating play pedagogies in preschool instruction**

The indicators were intended to measure the extent the teaching plans incorporated a range of learning outcomes that emphasizes on play-based pedagogies (e.g., direct, child-initiated and mutually guided approaches). From the review made it can be seen that except in one private, two public 'O' classes and two NGO operated KGs, the setting of a learning outcome that centers on and around play in 7 public 'O' classes, 4 private and 1 NGO preschools were observed to be poor.

Creating an effective play-based learning environment that enhances student engagement and holistic development requires a careful designing of the instructional processes. In order to gain insight on the extent the design of the instructional process emphasized on creating opportunities for a range of playful activities, the annual, weekly or daily plans of the preschools was examined using 5 indicators (See Appendix G, H & I). The indicators were intended to assess the extent the instructional plans incorporated a range of playful pedagogies in line with set learning outcomes. Besides, the balance between direct instruction and child-initiated playful activities were examined by carefully assessing the instructional plans. Though schools allowed children to play within and out of the classrooms, the play activities were not carefully planned and integrated in the annual, weekly or daily plans. The review made also showed except in one private, two public 'O' classes and two NGO operated KGs, the design of the instructional process did not incorporate diverse playful educational experiences. Intentional and careful instructional design enables teachers to create a learning environment that aligns with children's developmental stage, that also challenges them to extend their learning.

Teachers were also asked to shade light on how they incorporate play pedagogies into their daily teaching practices. In replying to the question Respondent 1 stated the following:

*I integrate play into my teaching methods by using songs and stories that are connected to the lesson content. For example, when teaching the alphabet, I have a song for each letter, and during class, I encourage students to sing their chosen song and share any story they like. This approach makes the lessons more engaging and enjoyable by combining play with learning. (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

It seems that songs, storytelling and games are widely used to engage children in play-based learning. Similar reflections were also observed among all interviewees. For instance, Respondent 4 stated the following when asked the same question:

*Yes, I use play in my teaching by including different games for each lesson, like songs, movements, and activities. For example, when teaching colors, I use games and songs to help students learn the colors. We also use small stones from around the area for practice. I ask students to find 10 stones to help them understand the number 10. This makes learning fun and helps students work together and move around while playing. (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

One dominant perspective discussed by teachers was the idea of incorporating various play activities in line with the topic of the day. For instance, Respondent 3 stated:

*Yes, I do use play as a teaching tool, especially with indoor activities that are educational. These indoor play sessions are designed to match the topics in our lesson plans. By combining play with the lessons, I make sure the activities connect directly to what we are learning. This approach creates a more engaging and effective learning experience for the children, as they interact with the material in a fun and hands-on way. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Similarly, respondent 5 stated the extent play based pedagogy is integrated in the instructional plan of the school. The Respondent reflection is stated hereunder:

*We carefully plan for the year, detailing the types of play and materials we will use in our annual plan. This planning also includes daily plans, specifying the kinds of play (both indoor and outdoor) and materials, ensuring that the learning environment is structured yet flexible, designed to increase student engagement and learning through play. (Interview, March 22, 2024).*

It appears that most teachers reflected the importance of integrating play pedagogies in the daily instructional process. Nevertheless, little has been said on the mechanisms used to incorporate play pedagogies. In addition, the nature of play activities that are widely practiced seems to be similar across all the schools observed. The observation data also showed differences between schools in integrating a variety of play pedagogies into their daily routines and teaching plans. Compared to public 'O' classes and private KGs, NGO operated schools showed a better culture of integrating appropriate play pedagogies into their daily routines and curricular experiences. Similarly, teachers' engagement in play activities and the tradition of using play for assessment purposes were observed to be lower in private and public preprimary schools. Apart from this, the level of supports given by the school administration to the implementation of play pedagogies also showed differences between the schools observed. While all school administrators in the observed NGO KGs were keen to supporting the implementation of

play pedagogies, mixed results were observed considering the support given by private and public ‘O’ school administrators. Similarly, in all the schools observed, the search for evidence of collaborative planning or discussion among teachers and parents in implementing play-based learning were not successful (See Appendix D, E & F).

In order to shed light on the types play pedagogies that are incorporated in preschools, parents were also asked to reflect on the types of play pedagogies the schools were using to enhance their children’s learning and development. The reflection obtained seems to suggest parents’ differences in the way they perceive the integration and benefit of play pedagogies. For instance, Respondent argued that *“children can play at any time, therefore, I don't think that incorporating play into their school curriculum is essential for their growth”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). For Respondent 6, the problem lies in the type of play activities children engage in school. The Respondent reflected, *“teachers should use traditional games and role-playing to educate children about our cultural values. For example, my children sometimes play roles like a doctor or a carpenter, which not only reveals their interests and potential aspirations but also showcases their understanding and capabilities”* (Interview, March 19, 2024). The integration of such play is considered to be crucial as it allows children to express themselves and explore different aspects of life in a controlled educational environment. On the other hand, Respondent 3 indicated that *“various types of play, including physical play, parallel play, and cooperative play, are incorporated into the curriculum. I find these types of play straightforward and comprehensible, without encountering any challenges in understanding them”* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 2 maintained, *“I believe that all forms of play are beneficial for preschool education. Fortunately, I have not faced any challenges with my child in this context. They are eager to express and repeat what they learn, both indoors and outdoors”* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Apart from this, Respondent 11 reflected *“I have observed notable improvements in my child’s creativity, problem-solving abilities, and overall development due to play-based learning. The daily skills they acquire through this method are particularly valuable”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). The following extract by Respondent 7 indicates the broader types of play pedagogies that most parents found useful for children’s learning and development.

*There are different types of play that I think are very helpful for a child’s growth. Imaginative or dramatic play lets children pretend and role-play, which helps them be creative, learn social skills, and improve their language. Constructive play is when children build or make things with blocks or Legos. Physical play includes activities like running, jumping, climbing, and playing sports, which help children become strong and active. Sensory play helps children explore things like different textures, smells, and tastes, which helps their senses and thinking skills. Social play helps children learn how to play with others, and exploratory play lets children discover new things around them. (Interview, March 29, 2024).*

This and other related reflections from parents seem to suggest the general positive perception about the benefit of incorporating various types of play pedagogies in preschool educational settings. While some parents raised concern on free play, others seem to be concerned with the emphasis given to the development of academic skills. In particular, parents who send their children to public ‘O’ classes seems to be less satisfied with the academic performance of their children and the quality of experiences gained.

#### **4.2.2 Mechanisms used to integrate play pedagogies with learning outcomes**

Teachers were asked to reflect on the mechanisms they use to integrate play pedagogies with the desired learning outcomes set. It appears that most teachers associated the question with instructional effectiveness. For instance, Respondent 1 stated “*when a story or song resonates with a child, they often sing it repeatedly and can recall it easily. This repetition helps them grasp the lesson concepts more effectively*” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 2 replied, “*when students enjoy the lesson, it indicates that the teaching aids and methods employed are effective. Conversely, if a lesson causes confusion, it may be a sign of an unsuitable teaching approach*” (Interview, April 1, 2024). There were also teachers who discussed the importance of integration rather than discussing about the mechanisms used to integrate play pedagogies with the learning outcomes. For example, Respondent 3 stated following:

*Integrating play into the lesson plan greatly improves how well students understand and enjoy learning. First, it helps teachers see what interests the children by observing how they engage in the activities. When students are eager to share what they've learned or done, it shows they are highly engaged and excited. Second, this approach leads to better learning outcomes because students tend to understand and remember more when they enjoy the learning process. On the other hand, without play in the lesson plan, learning can become boring and less effective. This demonstrates how important it is to include play in teaching, creating a more engaging and successful learning environment* (Interview, March 28, 2024).

Similarly, Respondent 5 stated the following:

*When we select materials and play activities that align well with the lesson at hand, the learning experience becomes more dynamic, engaging, and interesting. This approach sparks curiosity among the children, drawing them into the lesson and transforming them into active participants. As a result, they not only show a greater interest in the activities but also achieve a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught. Tailoring play to fit the educational content in this way enhances the effectiveness of the teaching and makes the learning process more enjoyable and impactful for the students* (Interview, March 22, 2024).

Similar reflections were also made by other Respondents. This seems to suggest lack of understanding the how of integrating learning outcomes with various forms of play pedagogies. In addition, the dominance of the implementation of few play pedagogies in most of the schools seems to be related with the observed lack of understanding the mechanisms used to integrate diverse play pedagogies in

designing and implementing instruction. Noting the importance of aligning play pedagogies, the study investigated the extent the play pedagogies were aligned with teachers guide.

As can be seen from Table 4.5 below, the majority of teachers considered ‘guided or directed play’ (75%) to be highly aligned followed by ‘free play’ (67%) and ‘associative play’ (60%). Similarly, considerable percentage of teachers rated the alignment of play types such as ‘functional play’ (58%), ‘fantasy play’ (57%), ‘socio dramatic play’ (56%), ‘symbolic play’ and ‘pretend play’ (53%) to be minimum. In addition, play types such as ‘rough-and-tumble play’ (34%) and ‘recapitulative play’ (18%) were perceived to be not aligned with teachers guide. From these results, it can be said that teachers differed in rating the alignment of the play pedagogies with the teaching guide in use. It also shows the integration and implementation of few play pedagogies.

**Table 4.5: Teachers’ perception about the alignment of play types with teachers’ guide in use**

Play Pedagogies	Aligned with teacher’s guide					
	HA		MA		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Free play	91	67.4	42	31.1	-	-
Guided or directed play	101	74.8	30	22.2	-	-
Sensory play	77	57.0	55	40.7	1	0.7
Parallel play	61	45.2	62	45.9	-	-
Associative play	82	60.7	50	37.0	-	-
Cooperative play	63	46.7	65	48.1	4	3.0
Pretend play	50	37.0	72	53.3	5	3.7
Symbolic play	55	40.7	75	55.6	2	1.5
Constructive play	70	51.9	62	45.9	2	1.5
Exploratory play	60	44.4	68	50.4	2	1.5
Locomotor play	72	53.3	60	44.4	-	-
Deep play	51	37.8	70	51.9	11	8.1
Communication play	57	42.2	72	53.3	5	3.7
Socio-dramatic play	55	40.7	75	55.6	2	1.5
Role play	62	45.9	67	49.6	3	2.2
Mastery play	57	42.2	70	51.9	3	2.2
Recapitulative play	41	30.4	67	49.6	24	17.8
Rough-and-tumble play	25	18.5	61	45.2	46	34.1
Creative play	59	43.7	67	49.6	6	4.4
Functional Play	42	31.1	79	58.5	7	5.2
Fantasy play	32	23.7	77	57.0	19	14.1
Physical play	64	47.4	67	49.6	3	2.2
Games with rules	62	45.9	64	47.4	7	5.2

Note. N= Number of Respondents, HA= Highly Aligned, MA= Minimum Alignment, NA= Not Aligned.

It was evident from these results that teachers possessed a sound understanding regarding the importance of play pedagogies in promoting children’s holistic development. They also reiterated the selection of play pedagogies is dependent on the topic of the lesson. But, when it comes to the

mechanisms of integration used, they all fall short of ideas. This seems to show the limited attention given to the integration of play pedagogies in preschool instruction. It also shows the limited understanding of the value of integrating play pedagogies. UNICEF (2018) discussed that many teachers are not adequately prepared to implement play-based pedagogies in their classrooms. This in part has to do with lack seeing learning through play in practice.

### 4.2.3 Types of play pedagogies used in schools

In order to examine the implementation state of various play pedagogies, teachers were asked to rank the types of play pedagogies they frequently used. As can be seen from Table 4.6 below, the majority of teachers (85%) rated ‘free play’ as the most dominantly used play pedagogy in schools. This is followed by ‘physical play’ (80%), ‘locomotor play’ (79%), ‘associative play’ (76%), guided or directed play’ (75%), and ‘constructive play’ (70%). On the other hand, play types such as ‘rough-and-tumble play’ (15%), ‘recapitulative play’ (20%), ‘fantasy play’ (29%) were found to be the least frequently used play pedagogies by teachers in the observed schools. This result shows differences in the implementation state of various types of play pedagogies in preschool settings.

**Table 4.6:** Types of play pedagogies frequently implemented in preprimary schools

Play Pedagogies	Play type practiced in preschool					
	Y		M		N	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Free play	115	85.2	20	14.8	-	-
Guided or directed play	101	74.8	25	18.5	-	-
Sensory play	89	65.9	35	25.9	6	4.4
Parallel play	76	56.3	47	34.8	2	1.5
Associative play	103	76.3	26	19.3	1	0.7
Cooperative play	85	63	42	31.1	3	2.2
Pretend play	65	48.1	58	43.0	5	3.7
Symbolic play	76	56.3	50	37.0	5	3.7
Constructive play	95	70.4	35	25.9	-	-
Exploratory play	86	63.7	43	31.9	4	3.0
Locomotor play	107	79.3	20	14.8	2	1.5
Deep play	52	38.5	56	41.5	22	16.3
Communication play	78	57.8	45	33.3	10	7.4
Socio-dramatic play	74	54.8	51	37.8	7	5.2
Role play	76	56.3	47	34.8	9	6.7
Mastery play	68	50.4	37	27.4	25	18.5
Recapitulative play	28	20.7	54	40	50	37.0
Rough-and-tumble play	20	14.8	32	23.7	80	59.3
Creative play	76	56.3	46	34.1	9	6.7
Functional Play	58	43.0	51	37.8	19	14.1
Fantasy play	39	28.9	41	30.4	46	34.1
Physical play	108	80.0	20	14.8	5	3.7
Games with rules	82	60.7	44	32.6	9	6.7

Note. N= Number of Respondents, Y = Yes, M= Minimum, N= Never.

The interview and observation result seem to support this assertion. For instance, interviewed teachers were asked to reflect how they implement play pedagogies in their classrooms. In replying to the question, Respondent 1 stated the following:

*n our classes, we focus on free play and guided play, using songs, stories, and riddles to support learning. After introducing a lesson, we give the children time for free play. Songs that match the lesson are a regular part of our play-based approach. The children often use the playground, which is in poor condition, for their activities, and they choose different songs that relate to the topics they are learning (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

Reflecting on the question, Respondent 2 stated the following:

*Our teaching tools mainly include songs, flashcards, and activities on the blackboard, along with cultural games during break and home time. Our school focuses on helping students develop reading and writing skills to get them ready for grade school, which matches what parents expect. We make sure to supervise free play time to keep it safe and respectful. Guided play sessions are linked to the lessons, and we often use songs to help students understand better. During home time, we encourage storytelling, where students can share the stories they know. (Interview, April 1, 2024).*

Apart from this, Respondent 3 stated the following:

*In our teaching approach, we mainly use guided play and free play as the main types of play-based learning. Many schools have playgrounds and toys, though the quality can differ. While outdoor play is common, we also include indoor play in our lessons, often using flashcards for interactive activities and adding songs to the learning process. Storytelling is another popular method, especially in kindergarten, to help engage children and improve their understanding of concepts. These different approaches make sure that children get a balanced education that meets various learning styles and interests. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

The reflection obtained from Respondent 5 offers a broader view on how the schools are trying to balance the implementation of structured and unstructured learning experiences for children. The Respondent was quoted:

*In my classroom, structured play activities are carefully planned and connected to the lesson topic. These activities have a set amount of time and are chosen by the teacher to match the lesson. The goal is to enhance the learning objectives for the day. On the other hand, unstructured or free play doesn't require planning. In free play, students can choose what they want to play and what materials to use, giving them the freedom to be creative and explore their interests. I try to balance both types of play, considering the children's age and development. For example, in nursery classes, I focus more on free play to encourage exploration and sensory learning. As children move to K2 and KG3, I include more structured play to meet the growing academic needs. This approach helps children enjoy both guided learning and the freedom to learn at their own pace. (Interview, March 22, 2024).*

From respondent's reflection, it seems that various degrees of structured and unstructured play pedagogies are implemented. Teachers use both free and guided play. Free plays are organized to allow children to play within and out of the classroom. This form of play seems to have no or little connection to children's learning. On the other hand, guided play is tuned with the topic of the lesson covered. The

nature of the topic and the learning objectives determines the type play activities that are used. It is also worth noting the heavy reliance observed on the use of songs and storytelling as play pedagogy.

The observation data also showed mixed results. It showed children's engagement in solitary and social play activities. Though the degree varies, the observed schools attempted to create opportunities for children to engage in gross motor play, outdoor play and exploration activities. However, the observed preschools differed in creating opportunities for children to engage in pretend play, role-playing and collaborative play activities. The data showed from no observation in public 'O' class, to few observations in private and NGO preprimary schools. Similar observation was also made regarding the opportunities created for children to engage in nature-based play and exploration. It is also interesting to note that all schools created opportunities for children to engage in music and movement activities, with designated space for dancing and singing. However, the schools differed in creating opportunities for children to engage in imaginative play and in sensory integration activities, with better performance in NGO KGs as compared to Public 'O' classes and Private schools. In most of the schools observed, teachers were not stationed in the play areas to monitor the children's interests during playtime.

In order to gain insight into the types of play pedagogies used in the instructional process, teachers were asked to share their daily/weekly routines. According to Respondent 6, *“teachers schedule daily storytelling, free play in the morning, and guided play during breaks with the assistance of another teacher. Indoor play activities are designed to complement the lesson topics”* (Interview, March 29, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 2 stated, *“our daily routine incorporates free play and songs, while we host weekly competitions in reading, math, and sports. However, these activities are not formally documented”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). More broadly, Respondent 11 stated the following:

*Yes, we include free play in our daily schedule during morning and break times. We also have guided play three times a week outside. This type of play is planned but still allows for creativity and flexibility. We also use guided play that is connected to our lessons, which helps children learn in a fun way. This balance of free and guided play helps children learn freely while also focusing on important lessons, giving them a well-rounded learning experience.* (Interview, March 27, 2024).

Therefore, there are various ways and schedules the preschools use to incorporate various forms of play pedagogies in the daily or weekly instructional process. Nevertheless, there are implementation differences between public 'O' class, NGOs and private preprimary schools.

To complement teachers' reflections, all parents were also asked to share their views on the types of play pedagogies implemented considering the experiences of their children. In replying to the question, Respondent 1 claimed, *“though children learn through music, traditional and teacher centered*

*approaches are more utilized by teachers” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Sharing his view, Respondent 5 also stated, “it is clear from my child’s actions that they are teaching him through singing. However, I haven’t observed any new forms of play being introduced at school; he seems to engage in the same types of play that he does in our neighborhood with his friends” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Raising concerns on how play is used in schools, Respondent 6 maintained, “play and learning are kept separate in their school environment. This separation contrasts with play pedagogy approach, which integrates learning through play. According to my observations of my children’s actions and interactions, play and teaching are distinctly different activities at their school” (Interview, March 19, 2024). For Respondent 7, the type of play activities organized do not fully center around the interests and developmental stages of the children. This is observed from the Respondent reflection, “children are not given the freedom to choose their activities and explore at their own pace, which feels like a deviation from an effective, positive, and engaging learning environment where children are encouraged to explore, experiment, and learn through play” (Interview, March 29, 2024). Reflecting on his observation, Respondent 8 stated, “from my observations at my child’s educational institution, it appears that there is a significant gap in the implementation of play-based pedagogy. I believe that the structure of such methods should be adapted to fit various national factors, including manpower, economic conditions, and institutional capabilities” (Interview, March 28, 2024). On contrary, Respondent 3 stated, “I have confidence in the effective implementation of play pedagogy, as I observe my child actively engaging in various play activities. Through play, my child learns essential skills such as collaboration, rule negotiation, and imaginative thinking” (Interview, March 28, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 10 claimed, “from what I’ve observed in my children’s experiences with play pedagogies, the school has years of experience, and the teachers are well-versed in play-based learning. When I discuss the educational materials used and their purposes, the explanations reflect their expertise. My children even request similar materials at home, such as constructive materials and counting charts, indicating they are engaged and learning effectively through play” (Interview, March 22, 2024). Respondent 11 also maintained, “based on my child’s sharing and my own observations, I feel that play-based pedagogy is being implemented effectively at the preschool using the Montessori teaching method” (Interview, April 1, 2024). From these reflections, there is discrepancy in parents view about the types of play pedagogies implanted in preschool settings. Though schools were observed incorporating some forms of play-based pedagogies, teacher directed instruction seems to dominate, with free play only be used in the form of providing break. It is interesting to note, the level of implementation in some private, public and NGO preprimary schools seems better.*

#### 4.2.4 The organization and resourcing of indoor and outdoor environments to support the implementation of play pedagogies

The organization and resourcing of the instructional environment to facilitate the implementation of play pedagogies were assessed using observation, document review and interview data.

The observation data revealed differences between and within preprimary schools regarding the suitability of the design and organization of the classroom and the physical environment for play pedagogies. While some public and private schools have designed and organized the physical set up of the school to suit the implementation of play pedagogies, others did not. The NGO operated schools were observed to have a well-designed and organized physical environment. Similar scenarios were also observed regarding the organization of the classroom and its potential to provide ample space for children to move freely and engage in different play activities. In addition, the observed schools showed differences with regard to designating areas for different types of play and creating enough open floor space for group activities. While the NGO schools outperformed others, the situation in some public and most private schools is worrisome. Particularly, both public ‘O’ classes and private KGs lacked a designated area for sensory exploration, providing comfortable seating options for children to rest or engage in quiet activities. In addition, they failed in creating a clear pathway within the classroom to ensure safe movement between different play areas. This seems to undermine the effective implementation of play pedagogies within and out of the classroom. Though it might not be a surprise to observe a dire classroom environment in underfunded and overcrowded public ‘O’ classes, observation results about the classroom environment of private schools are disturbing. Similar to NGO operated preschools, the private ones have the financial capabilities to create a classroom environment that is conducive to the implementation of play pedagogies.

Teachers were also asked to reflect on the kind of materials they are currently using to practice play pedagogy. From their response, a distinct variation exists between public, NGOs and private preprimary schools. For instance, Respondent 1 stated, “*Our resources are quite limited, consisting of a broken blackboard, chalk, and damaged playground toys*” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 7 reflected, “*Our teaching resources are severely limited, confined to the most basic tools. This scarcity underscores the broader challenges we face in adopting innovative educational methodologies, including play-based learning*” (Interview, March 19, 2024). Citing the damage caused by the two years’ war, Respondent 4 reiterated the following:

*Before, I used handmade materials like clay, paper, cardboard, and sand to make learning more exciting. But because of the war, I don't have many resources now. Right now, I only have a blackboard, chalk, chairs, and the students to help with learning activities. Even with these challenges, I keep finding creative ways to engage my students and use the tools I have to make sure the lessons are interactive and effective. (Interview, March 20, 2024).*

Interestingly, few Respondents from private schools also discussed the deteriorated state of the instructional resources and its role in undermining the effective implementation of play pedagogies in their respective schools. For instance, Respondent 3 stated the following:

*I use different materials to help with learning through play, such as chart paper, flashcards, bottle caps, balls, cones, and wooden items. Our curriculum is carefully planned to support play-based learning, which is reflected in our textbooks and teaching materials, all designed to get children actively involved in learning. However, even though our curriculum is made to encourage play, we face a challenge because we don't always have enough materials. The lack of resources sometimes makes it hard to use the curriculum fully. This shows that we need more support and resources to make sure we can provide the best learning experience using play-based education (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Accordingly, shortage of instructional resource is not only a problem which is faced in public 'O' classes but also in some private preprimary schools. But the situation in most privately owned or NGO operated preprimary schools reflects the reflection made by Respondent 5. The statement reads as follows:

*We use a variety of materials in our teaching, including Montessori materials like golden beads, red rods, length shapes, number rods, and sandboxes. We also use handmade materials to make learning more engaging for our students. By offering different materials, we aim to meet the unique learning styles and preferences of each child, giving them useful and enjoyable tools for their learning journey. (Interview, March 22, 2024).*

It seems that flashcards, balls, ropes, storybooks, and colored papers are the dominant types of teaching materials used to facilitate the implementation of play pedagogies in the observed schools. Similarly, the observed schools showed differences with regard to play materials and resources they used to facilitate the implementation of play pedagogies. In all observed public 'O' classes, most private and few NGO KGs, there were no ample and quality play materials and resources. Except in NGO KGs, the provision of a variety of open-ended materials that encourages children's creativity and problem-solving skills was not adequate in all public 'O' class and private preprimary schools. Though ensuring accessibility was not a problem in most observed schools, the play materials and resources were not organized in a manner that encourage independent exploration and play. The document review results also indicated lack of properly addressing the issue of resource in designing instruction in most preprimary schools. This finding supports the findings from observation and interviews that suggested the classroom environment and the designated play areas in the observed preschools were not adequately resourced.

This being the case, some public ‘O’ class, private and NGO KGs organized a visual display or charts in a manner that promotes children’s sense of ownership and documentation of their learning. This being the case, in preprimary schools that are operated by NGOs and the private sector the problem does not seem to be lack of resources to implement playful learning experiences. The problem seems to emanate from heavier emphasis on teaching academic skills such as reading, writing and simple math. This is observed in Respondent 2’s reflection. The Respondent stated, *“Currently, we are minimizing the use of varied materials and reducing the preparation of diverse activities to concentrate on reading and writing skills, in response to parental expectations”* (Interview, April 1, 2024)

The analysis results revealed that the classroom environment and the designated play areas in the observed preschools do not provide ample space for children to engage in various play activities. Besides, the physical settings of the classroom and playground were not adequately resourced. This limited the opportunity for children to engage in diverse hands-on educational experiences that plays key role in developing their social, emotional and higher order thinking skills. Moreover, the analysis showed the existence of a gap between ECCE policy and curriculum intentions and existing practices. It appears that most of the requirements set for creating ample space for playful experiences, organizing and resourcing the indoor and outdoor environments were not fully implemented as intended. Besides, the educational experiences detailed in the national KG curriculum was observed to be less emphasized while designing, organizing and resourcing the indoor and outdoor environments.

#### **4.2.5 The role of teachers and children in implementing play pedagogies**

Teachers play numerous roles in preschool settings. As instructional leaders, they play salient roles in ensuring that play pedagogical approaches are integrated and implemented in the day-to-day instructional processes. Nothing such importance, teachers were asked to state their roles and that of children in implementing play pedagogy. The response obtained shows a variety of roles that is played by preschool teachers. For instance, Respondent 8, enumerated, *“when delivering a lesson, it's crucial for the teacher to be both active and inventive, creating new songs that complement the educational content. It's also important for the children to practice these songs adequately”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Stressing on the importance of understanding students, Respondent 9 stated, *“as teachers, understanding our students' capacities and ages is crucial before implementing any teaching method. It's important to recognize both the strengths and limitations of our approaches. The role of the student is also defined by their age and capabilities”* (Interview, March 27, 2024). On the other hand, Respondent 3 emphasized on the role of teachers in understanding the individual differences of their

students while designing and implementing play pedagogies. The respondent's reflection is stated hereunder:

*The role of teachers is to combine lessons with play activities in a smooth and effective way. In the classroom, students can be divided into three groups: fast learners, slow learners, and those who learn at a medium pace. Teachers need to plan their lessons to meet the different needs and speeds of these students. Each lesson should consider the varying learning levels of the class. At the same time, students should actively engage in the teacher's activities and follow the rules set for the class. This means paying attention during lessons and respecting the classroom rules to create a positive learning environment for all. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

For Respondent 10, teachers' commitment, readiness and preparedness seems to matter most. The Respondent reiterated, *"teachers are the primary facilitators in any educational setting, and their psychological and mental preparedness is crucial. No matter how well-designed the curriculum or how advanced the teaching methods, they are ineffective if the teacher is not fully prepared and engaged"* (Interview, April 12, 2024). The Respondent also discussed the importance of empathy and an understanding of children. The Respondent was quoted, *"it is essential that teachers are ready, devoted, and committed, with a genuine empathy and understanding towards the children"* (Interview, April 12, 2024). Nevertheless, the Respondent seems to appreciate a more direct pedagogical approaches that centers around the teacher. This is reflected in the following quote:

*Children are like blank slates, easily influenced by what they are shown, whether it's done with force or kindness. Teachers must keep improving their skills and adjust to the teaching environment. In the past, when we didn't have access to specific learning materials, we would turn used items into teaching tools to keep students engaged. This ability to adapt shows how important it is for teachers to be proactive and creative, making the learning experience better for their students (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

These reflections seem to suggest the dominant role played by teachers as compared to the roles played by children in preschool educational settings. For most interviewees, children are considered the recipient of the instruction. When their active engagement is discussed, it was discussed only in relation to their involvement either in free play or in teacher guided learning activities **The practice of supporting children in implementing play pedagogies**

Learners bring prior experiences, skills and knowledge to the classroom that may impede or support the implementation of playful pedagogies. Play is incredibly valuable for all children, but having some challenges can present barriers which may make it difficult for all children to fully enjoy play experience. The needs of children also vary a lot, so it's often down to the teacher to understand the challenges and adapt to each and every individual child. Teachers are expected to design activities that built on learners' experiences, knowledge and learning needs. Based on this notion, teachers were asked to reflect on how they support children facing some challenges with playful learning. Regarding this, Respondent 1 stated, *"we do not pressure children to master the lesson content perfectly. Our*

*curriculum emphasizes teaching through play, aiming to provide a stress-free learning environment that prepares them for more formal education settings” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Focusing on the need to adapt instruction, Respondent 2 explained, “for students who lag behind, play activities should be adapted to suit their abilities, or additional support should be provided to help them keep pace with their peers” (Interview, April 1, 2024). On the other hand, Respondent 3 elaborated the steps followed to support a child facing some sort of challenge during playful learning as follows:*

*When some children don't seem interested in play or have trouble understanding the lessons, it might be because of things happening at home. To help the child, I do a few things. First, I watch the child to see what problems they might have. Then, I talk to the child's parents to share what I have noticed and work with them to find ways to help. After that, I give the child extra help and practice based on what they need. This way, I can help the child with their problems and make them more involved in learning and play. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Respondent 3 seems to underscore the importance of collecting information about the child facing any difficulty, discussing it with parents and devising strategies to address the challenges faced by the child.

A long description was also made by Respondent 5. It is summarized as follows:

*We believe that no child should be left behind, so we use different strategies for children who may struggle to keep up with faster learners or have difficulty with some play activities. We know that not all play materials are right for every child, so we don't force them to use the same ones. By watching the children closely, we can find out who needs extra help and change the play or materials until we find what works best for them. For example, children who have trouble speaking are given sensory play materials, which often help them start talking. We also provide extra help to make sure every child can take part and get the most from our lessons, adjusting our methods to fit their needs and preferences (Interview, March 22, 2024).*

According to Respondent 5, conducting close observation is instrumental to identify which child is facing challenges with the teaching materials presented. Ensuring the use of varied and learner focused teaching material is considered to be essential to address the challenges faced by children. It appears that most teachers seem to prioritize the implementation of individualized approach to help to foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, where all students feel valued and encouraged to participate. Play should be freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. As such, a child facing various forms of challenge needs to be supported, while also providing them with the freedom to decide what to play and how to go about it.

#### **4.2.6 Assessing the effectiveness of the practice of play pedagogies in preschool settings**

To this end, teachers and parent’s perception of the effectiveness of the play pedagogies used was assessed using data obtained from interview, survey questionnaire and observation.

In filling the survey, teachers were asked to measure the effectiveness of the play types they frequently used in supporting children’s learning. The result of their assessment is presented in Table 4.7 below.

As can be seen from the Table, considering teachers’ perception of the effectiveness of the play types used, the majority of teachers (88%) considered free play as a highly effective pedagogy to support children’s learning. This is followed by ‘associative play’ (77%), ‘locomotor play’ (76%), ‘guided or directed play’ (75%), ‘constructive play’ (75%) and ‘sensory play’ (74%). On the other hand, play types such as ‘rough-and-tumble play’ (27%), ‘recapitulative play’ (40%), ‘fantasy play’ (42%), deep play’ (44%) were perceived to be slightly effective in promoting children’s learning. Hence, teachers measured the effectiveness of the various play pedagogies they frequently used differently. It seems that play pedagogies that foster the development of children’s cognitive and sensory experiences and collaborative skills were considered to be more effective than others.

**Table 4.7: Teachers perceptions on the effectiveness of play pedagogies in supporting children’s learning**

Play Pedagogies	Effectiveness of the play type to support children’s learning					
	HE		SE		NE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Free play	104	88.0	27	20.0	1	0.7
Guided or directed play	101	74.8	32	23.7	-	-
Sensory play	100	74.1	28	20.7	3	2.2
Parallel play	78	57.8	46	34.1	1	0.7
Associative play	104	77.0	31	23.0	-	-
Cooperative play	87	64.4	42	31.1	3	2.2
Pretend play	75	55.6	47	34.8	4	3.0
Symbolic play	84	62.2	44	32.6	4	3.0
Constructive play	101	74.8	31	23.0	2	1.5
Exploratory play	91	67.4	34	25.2	1	0.7
Locomotor play	103	76.3	30	22.2	1	0.7
Deep play	61	45.2	60	44.4	10	7.4
Communication play	75	55.6	51	37.8	5	3.7
Socio-dramatic play	73	54.1	56	41.5	2	1.5
Role play	83	61.5	46	34.1	3	2.2
Mastery play	85	63.0	36	26.7	6	4.4
Recapitulative play	55	40.7	52	38.5	26	19.3
Rough-and-tumble play	36	26.7	43	31.9	53	39.3
Creative play	84	62.2	46	34.1	4	3.0
Functional Play	62	45.9	53	39.3	11	8.1
Fantasy play	57	42.2	51	37.8	21	15.6
Physical play	87	64.4	42	31.1	3	2.2
Games with rules	82	60.7	45	33.3	5	3.7

Note. N= Number of Respondents, HE= Highly Effective, SE= Slightly Effective, NE= Not Effective.

During interview sessions, teachers were also asked to reflect on how they assess the effectiveness of play-based pedagogies used in their preschool setting. In replying to the question, Respondent 1 stated, “currently, no formal assessment procedures are in place” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 7 stated, “the evaluation of the effectiveness of play pedagogies within our educational framework is complicated by the lack of comprehensive assessment mechanisms. Currently, progression to subsequent grades is based primarily on age, rather than academic achievement or

*engagement in play-based activities”* (Interview, March 19, 2024). Therefore, in some of the observed schools, assessment into the effectiveness of play pedagogies is not well established. On the other hand, Respondent 6 claimed, *“the impact of play on learning is measurable; an increase in student performance suggests high effectiveness, whereas a decrease indicates the need for adjustment in the approach”* (Interview, March 26, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 4 stated the following:

*By watching how the children learn, I can tell if the play activities are working well. If the children show that they have learned the skills or knowledge we aimed for, it means the play was both fun and helpful for learning. But if the children don't make the progress we hoped for, it might mean the play was mostly for fun and not as educational. This helps me adjust future lessons to make sure the play activities are both enjoyable and help the children learn what they need to* (Interview, March 20, 2024).

The above reflections seem to indicate that the effectiveness of play pedagogies is measured considering students' performance. Though children's engagement and enjoyment in learning is valued, the attainment of set learning outcomes seems to be more stressed. This is more reflected in Respondent 5's reflection. It reads as follows:

*The effectiveness of play-based learning is checked along with the assessment of classwork, homework, and tests. If the results are good, it shows that the play-based approach is working well. For example, if all students can correctly identify a number taught through play, it proves that the play activity helped them learn. This way, we can measure how well play supports learning, making sure that our teaching is both fun and effective in helping students understand the lesson.* (Interview, March 22, 2024).

There are also contexts in which informal forms of assessment were heavily emphasized than formal ones. For instance, Respondent 10 elaborated, *“we conduct thorough observations of our students and engage them with exercises, oral questions, and the use of a chalkboard to pose various queries. While we do not maintain a formal recording of children's performance, we continually assess their progress through daily observations. This informal, yet effective, approach allows us to track student development and ensure that learning objectives are being met”* (Interview, April 12, 2024).

From discussants reflections it can be noted that the practice of assessing the effectiveness of play pedagogies in the observed schools is varied. While some teachers tended to use formal or informal assessment procedures, others were not using any form of assessment to determine the effectiveness of play pedagogies.

Parents were also asked to share any playful strategies or activities they have found particularly effective in complementing what their children experiences at preschool. Regarding this, Respondent 1 argued that her child is not getting much from staying in 'O' class. The Respondent's reflection is stated hereunder:

*I really think my son should focus more on learning than playing. He already plays a lot, day and night. I send him to school hoping he will learn skills and knowledge that help him in school, especially in*

*grade school. So, I'm not interested in the play-based activities you are talking about.* (Interview, March 20, 2024).

From Respondent 1's reflection, it can be noted that the nature of play experiences children was engaged is not contributing to their learning. It appears that the play activities are loosely connected with learning goals. Similarly, Respondent 5 who also sends his son maintained, *"I check their exercise books and ask about what they've learned, and it's pleasing to hear that they know many songs. My child enjoys imitating his teacher's actions, which shows engagement"* (Interview, March 20, 2024). This response also supports the finding from teachers interview that showed the dominance of music as a method of teaching children through play. Citing on the limitation of using songs, Respondent 6 stated, *"while teaching through songs is indeed an effective strategy, it's essential that the content remains appropriate and respectful. If certain words or actions are inappropriate, it's important to address them with the teacher to ensure a positive learning environment for the children"* (Interview, March 19, 2024). As opposed to this, Respondent 3 stated, *"the most enriching experiences for my child in preschool education include learning through hands-on activities, expressing creativity through art and music, problem-solving, and effective communication through verbal and non-verbal means"* (Interview, March 28, 2024). As opposed to this, Respondent 4 claimed her son is benefiting tremendously from his engagement in play-based learning. The Respondent was quoted, *"my observations regarding my child's experiences indicates that they actively seek solutions to problems, maintain positive relationships with peers and teachers, and can easily recall and apply what they have learned at school. They have developed strong reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills appropriate for their educational level"* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Respondent 11 also noted, *"some effective strategies and activities that complement my child's experiences at preschool include open-ended art and science activities, sensory play, dramatic play, and outdoor exploration. These activities foster creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills in my child"* (Interview, April 1, 2024). The response obtained from Respondent 7 indicates the strategies that would play salient role in promoting children's learning and development. The Respondent's reflection is stated hereunder:

*Things we do to help my child with preschool include reading together, going outside to explore nature, doing arts like drawing, painting, or carpentry, and encouraging dance, singing, or playing music. Playing outside helps with physical activity, exploring, and using their senses. These things help make my child's preschool time better, giving them a mix of fun and learning.* (Interview, March 28, 2024).

It is essential to note, rather than mentioning the strategies they found effective, most parents discussed the kind of strategies they believe improves their children's educational experiences in schools. This might indicate lack of properly understanding the most effective play pedagogies that contribute to their children's learning and development. The above discussion also indicated inconsistencies between

parents' reflection regarding what they consider as an effective teaching strategy for children's holistic development. **Factors that are affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies**

This study enquired about the major factors that are affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies. In this section, the results obtained from survey and interviews are presented.

#### 4.2.7 Teacher's limited competence

Teacher's professional competence affects the successful implementation of play pedagogies in preschool settings. In order to assess the effect of teacher related variables on the implementation of play pedagogies, linear and multiple regression analysis was conducted. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 8, 9 and 10 below.

**Table 4.8:** The effect of teachers' qualification on the types of play pedagogies used

Variables	Model	
	B	SE
Constant	2.98*	.04
Teachers' qualification	-.10*	.01
<b>Model statistics</b>		
$R^2$	.14	
$\Delta R^2$	.14	
$F$	21.21	
$\Delta F$	21.21	

Note. N = 135. B = Unstandardized coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

As can be seen from Table 4.8 above, teachers' qualification level significantly but negatively predicted the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = -.37, p = .000$ ). The effect of this variable was accounted for 14% of the variation in the use of play pedagogies. This result seems to indicate that compared to teachers with higher qualification (diploma or bachelor) teachers with lesser qualification (certificate in KG teaching) seem to utilize play pedagogies in their respective schools. The more competent teachers are, the lesser the use of play pedagogies.

**Table 4.9:** The effect of teachers' perception of the alignment of play types on the use of play pedagogies

Variables	Model	
	B	SE
<b>Constant</b>	2.99*	.08
Alignment of play types with teachers' guide	-.07*	.03
<b>Model statistics</b>		
$R^2$	.04	
$\Delta R^2$	.04	
$F$	4.91	
$\Delta F$	4.91	

Note. N = 135. B = Unstandardized coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

As can be seen from Table 4.9 above, teachers' perception about the alignment of various play types with teachers' guide significantly but negatively predicted the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = -.19, p = .028$ ). The effect of this variable was accounted for 4% of the variation in the use of play pedagogies. This result seems indicate an inverse relationship between alignment of play types with teacher's guide and use of various play pedagogies. This seem to indicate lack of properly aligning various play pedagogies into an instructional guide which teachers solely use to plan the teaching and learning process.

**Table 4.10:** The effect of teacher related variables on the use of play pedagogies

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<b>Constant</b>	1.80*	.25	2.10*	.24	2.15*	.25
Teachers' perception, knowledge and attitude	.35*	.09	.31*	.08	.32*	.08
Teachers' qualification			-.06*	.01	-.05*	.01
Alignment of play types with teachers' guide					-.05	.03
<b>Model statistics</b>						
$R^2$	.11		.22		.24	
$\Delta R^2$	.11		.11		.02	
$F$	16.87		18.70		13.60	
$\Delta F$	16.87		18.32		2.90	

Note. N = 135. B = Unstandardized coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

Table 4.10 above shows the result of hierarchical multiple regression analysis. As can be seen from the Table, after controlling for teachers' qualification and alignment of play types scales, teachers' perception, knowledge and attitude about play and play pedagogies significantly predicted the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = .34, p = .000$ ). On contrary, teachers' qualification level showed significant negative effect on the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = -.33, p = .000$ ). As opposed to linear regression result, teachers' perception about the alignment of

various play types with teachers' guide did not predict the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools ( $\beta = -.13, p = .092$ ). Nevertheless, the effect of these variable accounted for 24% of the variation in the use of play pedagogies. This seems to suggest the existence of other variables that play significant role in determining the use of play pedagogies in the observed schools. The following extract from the teachers interview was intended to explore these factors in detail.

When asked to reflect on teacher related factors, most teachers tended to elaborate more about shortage of materials and other necessary support. The following quotes indicates that. For instance, Respondent 1, *“teachers should be well-versed in various plays, games, and songs as part of the educational process. However, the availability of materials is crucial. Despite knowing numerous games, the lack of resources such as charts or colors hampers my ability to create educational aids like flashcards”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). In contrast, Respondent 5 stated the importance of teacher's creativity in addressing the limitations they experience with regard to teaching materials. The Respondent reflection is stated as follows:

*When there are not enough materials, children may argue over who gets what, and teachers may struggle to decide who should use what. But it's not just about having enough materials. Teachers can be creative and use things around them. Even when we don't have many store-bought materials, we make our own using things like rubber, mud, and bottle caps. We use these homemade items to build houses, shapes, letters, and numbers. This shows how teachers can be resourceful and find ways to make lessons work with what's available* (Interview, March 22, 2024).

In addition, Respondent 4 stated *“lack of professional development opportunities for teachers in hindering them to regularly update their knowledge on playful teaching strategies and methodologies”*. The respondent also raised scarcity of instructional materials and lack of secure storage for teaching aids and materials as a key factor affecting teachers. The Respondent stated, *“this situation, coupled with a resistance to departing from traditional teaching methods and a scarcity of resources like teaching guides, poses considerable challenges in our educational setting”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Nevertheless, the reflection obtained from Respondent 2 and others offers a broader understanding of teacher related factors. For instance, Respondent 2 discussed broader factors as follows:

*The success of using play in teaching depends on a few important factors, like having enough materials, the number of students in each class, and teachers' knowledge and commitment to play-based learning. Children have different backgrounds and interests, so there needs to be a variety of play materials to meet their needs. Also, managing how many students are in each class and how much time is given for each lesson can be challenging when it comes to giving personal attention and assessing each child. Teachers must understand play-based learning well and be truly motivated to use it in their teaching, keeping in mind the unique needs of each student.* (Interview, April 1, 2024).

From Respondent 2's point of views, student, teacher, system and resource related factors are impeding the successful implementation of playful pedagogies in the observed preschool. Similarly, Respondent 10 stated, *"the effectiveness of play pedagogy in education hinges on several critical factors such as the readiness and creativity of the teacher, the classroom environment, available materials, community understanding, and the curriculum"* (Interview, April 12, 2024). In a related note, Respondent 7 discussed student teachers' ratio and the impact of war in deteriorating the resource conditions of the school. The Respondent was quoted *"prior to conflict, our school was equipped with playground toys and teaching aids, but these resources have since been allocated to displaced persons from the war areas and subsequently destroyed. The scarcity of basic supplies like exercise books and pencils—once provided by the government but now a rarity—forces us to rely heavily on oral teaching methods and songs"* (Interview, march 19, 2024). From the discussants reflection it can be observed that most teachers seem to externalize the challenges they faced while implementing play pedagogies. Except few, most of them did not raise teachers' level of professional knowledge and skills as one factor that affected the successful implementation of play pedagogies. Evidences suggest, many teachers are not adequately prepared to implement play pedagogies in their classrooms. UNICEF (2018) enumerated lack of teacher's preparedness in play pedagogies as one of the key factors affecting the quality of playful learning experiences in preschools. Besides, as most interviewees indicated there is no or little on the job training opportunities for teachers. Compared to NGO or privately-operated schools, the situation seems to be worse for public 'O' class teachers. Teachers with better pedagogical skills often reported that they faced shortage of educational resources and materials to implement instruction as they intended. According to UNICEF (2018) teachers do not receive proper professional training to help them find or create play materials with low cost-locally available materials. In addition, many teachers have not seen learning through play in practice and as a result lack confidence in implementing in their classrooms.

#### **4.2.8 The value given by parents and their engagement**

Teachers and parents' view on the role of parents in the implementation of play pedagogies was explored. The result is presented hereunder.

##### ***i) Teachers view on the value given by parents***

Teachers were asked to reflect on how the value given by parents to play pedagogy challenged the implementation of playful pedagogies in their respective schools. In addressing the question Respondent 1 stated, *"parents tend to focus more on tangible academic outcomes, such as reading and*

writing abilities, rather than the teaching methods employed. There's a gap in parental engagement, with many citing excuses for not following up on their children's progress. Expectations for children in 'O' classes are notably low among parents" (Interview, March 20, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 2 stated, "parents generally do not express concerns about the teaching methodology. Our kindergarten strongly emphasizes on reading and writing. Occasionally, parents question why we are teaching content that seems beyond their children's capacity, but we explain that this preparation aims to ease their transition into grade one (April 1, 2024). From these reflections, it appears that parents' level of engagement is lower with great interest shown to measuring their children's academic development. Noting this, Respondent 3 discussed the expectation of parents as follows:

*Managing a busy school schedule requires a lot of planning. We focus on classwork and homework to strengthen learning. This method fits with what many parents expect, as they see homework, especially worksheets and workbooks, as important for their children's education. Parents often use these tasks to stay involved in their child's learning. However, using more interactive or play-based homework can be tricky. The difference between school and home environments makes it harder for parents to get involved in these activities, especially if they don't have the right materials or space. Some families might not have extra stationery or the materials needed for play-based learning, which adds to the difficulty. While most parents support homework, there needs to be a balance. Giving students too much work can lead to complaints, showing the need to consider the limits of what can be done at home. Play-based homework brings its own set of challenges, as it requires creativity and flexibility from both teachers and parents to make it work. This could mean simplifying activities or finding ways to do them that don't need a lot of materials or space.*

(Interview, March 28, 2024).

From this explanation it can be understood that most parents prefer academic tasks than playful experiences. The principal reason may not be associated with the lower value they give to playful experiences, rather it seems to be related with lack of teachers and parent's competency to align and utilize playful experiences in schools and at home. Similarly, parent's inability to provide their children with play materials at home seems to have a profound impact on their engagement in playful educational experiences. Regarding this, Respondent 7 stated, "the socio-economic conditions of parents significantly impact their ability to engage with the education system. Many parents, engaged in daily labor, struggle to provide their children with a proper breakfast, let alone educational materials" (Interview, March, 19, 2024). Apart from this, Respondent 10 underscored the role of giving explanations to parents about play pedagogies in raising their level of engagement and changing their negative perception about play pedagogies. The Respondent was quoted:

*Some parents may react negatively or even criticize us at first because they misunderstand our teaching methods. However, we make an effort to involve them in the learning process by inviting them to observe our classrooms. Once they see how we teach and the positive effects on their children, they usually start to understand and appreciate our approach. This direct involvement helps clear up any misunderstandings and builds a supportive partnership in their (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

Similar reflection was also observed in other Respondents who maintained the value of raising the awareness of parents in improving their perceptions about play pedagogies. This requires teachers to provide solid evidence to support the significance of play pedagogies to children's learning and development. As Respondent 4 elaborated *“parents understandably prioritize their child's well-being and education, and they rely on tangible evidence to gauge their progress and development. One effective way to communicate the benefits of our approach is by consistently sharing concrete outcomes of their children's progress and activities”* (Interview, March, 20, 2024). Respondent 5 also stressed on *“the importance of regularly updating parents on children's academic achievements, improvements in skill development, and positive feedback from teachers regarding their engagement and participation”* (Interview, March, 22, 2024). Accordingly, showcasing the specific ways in which play pedagogies are positively impacting children's growth and learning, can help parents better understand and appreciate the value of the approach used by teachers. Additionally, Respondent 3 highlighted the role of creating opportunities for parents to actively participate and witness their children's learning. The Respondent stated *“through parent-teacher meetings, open houses, or classroom observations, we can further strengthen parents' understanding and confidence in our methods. This direct engagement allows parents to see the impact of our approach in real-time and fosters a sense of partnership in their child's education* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Therefore, by providing solid evidence and opportunities for meaningful engagement, teachers can build trust and collaboration with parents. Parents can extend the learning that occurs during play by asking open-ended questions, introducing new vocabulary, or incorporating educational elements into play activities. Through play, parents can also gain valuable insights into their children's preferences, interests, and developmental milestones. Observing how a child approaches challenges or interacts with others during play provides valuable information for supporting their growth and learning. When parents actively participate in play-based activities, they send a powerful message that learning is enjoyable and worth investing time in

**ii) *Teacher's view on the engagement of parents in implementing play pedagogies***

To understand the nature of parent's engagement in supporting the implementation of play pedagogies, teachers were asked to reflect on the role parents are playing. The reflection obtained seems to indicate a varied degree parents' engagement in supporting the implementation of playful leaning. For instance, Respondent 1 maintained, *“parents express concern mainly about the state of the playground equipment. However, they are generally supportive of our teaching methods, especially if their children start to develop reading and writing skills”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Respondent 2 detailed, *“while parents are generally supportive of their children's education, some express concerns about the*

*workload being too much, though they do not criticize the use of play pedagogy” (Interview, April 1, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 10 reflected, “parents sometimes lack a clear understanding of what's happening in the school. They often measure success solely by whether their child can read and write, overlooking other developmental milestones because they don't pay enough attention to them. Some parents say...we send our kids to school to learn, not to play, they can play at home” (Interview, April 12, 2024). Respondent 11 also added, “parents’ perceptions vary, with some concerned about homework loads and others desiring more to accelerate reading and writing skills. My relationship with parents does not solely hinge on play-based learning unless the school addresses these methods explicitly” (Interview, April 1, 2024). This reflection suggests the limited involvement of parents in supporting the implementation of play pedagogies. It appears that informing parents about the activities the schools organize and collecting their feedback is the defining element of the existing relationships between parents and teachers. The following reflections are testimonials to the claims made. For instance, Respondent 3 stated the following:*

*To keep communication open and create a supportive community, we have set up a Telegram group to share updates about the children's daily activities. Parents generally appreciate this platform as it helps them stay informed and involved in their child's learning. However, sometimes some parents express concerns about the activities we organize. When this happens, we take the opportunity to explain the many benefits of these activities, such as promoting social skills, creativity, and physical health. Additionally, to add variety and enrich the learning experience, we celebrate a 'Color Day' every month. On this day, children wear specific colors and participate in activities related to that color, making learning more interactive and fun. Through these efforts, we aim to address concerns and show how our diverse activities positively impact the children's development. (Interview, March 28, 2024).*

Similarly, Respondent 5 elaborated the following:

*At the beginning of the school year, we hold an orientation session for parents to introduce them to our teaching methods. During this session, we explain how we incorporate play into our lessons to enhance learning. We also show parents the play materials we use, making it clear that each resource is carefully selected for its educational value. This open communication helps parents understand the purpose and effectiveness of our approach, ensuring they feel informed, satisfied, and supportive of our educational efforts. (Interview, March 22, 2024).*

Therefore, parents do not actively engage in supporting the implementation of play pedagogies. Their involvement is only limited to the information they receive about the nature of activities organized for their children. To this end, various communication approaches are used by teachers to keep parents updated about their children’s progress. It is also interesting to note differences in school types i.e., public, NGOs and private did not show differences in the level of parent’s involvement. Lack of knowledge, misconception about play and lack of deliberate engagement seem to hamper the active engagement of parents in supporting the implementation of play pedagogies. It is argued that play pedagogies provide a foundation for cognitive, social, and emotional growth. When coupled with

parental engagement, the benefits are amplified, creating a rich tapestry of learning experiences. As parents, embracing the importance of play and actively participating in these moments not only nurtures a child's development but also creates cherished memories that last a lifetime (All Hallows School, 2024).

### ***iii) Parents' view on the challenges they faced in supporting play pedagogy***

To gain insight into parents' role in supporting play-based learning and the challenges they faced, they were asked to reflect whether or not they faced any challenge in understanding or supporting play-based learning at school. It seems that the challenges posed differed depending on the type of schools the parents send their children. For instance, parents who enrolled their children in public 'O' classes discussed *"minimum instructional time, lack of emphasis on teaching children essential academic skills, lack of using diverse play pedagogies, poor quality of teaching material and safety concern as one of the major challenges facing the successful implementation of play pedagogies* (extracted from Respondent 1, Respondent 5 & Respondent 6 responses). On the other hand, parents who enrolled their children in private and NGO KGs indicated that *"they did not personally faced challenges in understanding or supporting play-based learning at school. Nevertheless, they stated challenges related to resource constraints, issues with assessment and accountability, resistance to change and parental expectations* (extracted from Respondent 7, Respondent 8 & Respondent 11 responses). From the summary of the discussion, most parents tended to externalize the challenges affecting the successful implementation of play pedagogies. They did not share teachers' view that most parents lack awareness and understanding about the importance of play pedagogies.

Based on their observation, all parents were asked to forward their suggestions on how the preschools can further enhance the effective implementation of play pedagogy. Reflecting on this Respondent 3 stated, *"to ensure the effectiveness of play pedagogy, it is imperative that every teacher possesses sufficient knowledge and skills in its implementation. Continuous professional development through training, workshops, and self-directed learning is essential for teachers to enhance their instructional abilities and stay updated with best practices"* (Interview, March 28, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 4 stated the following:

*I think play teaching work better when we use both inside and outside play, share what we know, and have good training for teachers. It's very important for preschool teachers to know where their students come from, what language they speak, and their culture to teach them in the best way. This will help all kids learn better from play.*

(Interview, March 28, 2024).

On the other hand, Respondent 1 argued, “*it would be more beneficial to concentrate on essential academic skills such as writing, reading, and science*” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Focusing on the need to balance between free play and academic development, Respondent 5 stated “*I am concerned that the focus on play might distract the children too much, potentially impacting their academic progress. I hope that any implemented strategies will balance play and learning effectively to ensure they do not hinder their educational achievements*” (Interview, March 20, 2024). Commenting on the overall practice of public ‘O’ classes, Respondent 6 stated the following:

*The government needs to focus on what children need in schools, especially making sure there are enough play materials for a good education that includes play. Teachers should see how important play is for kids' growth. As parents, we can help too. For example, as a carpenter, I could use my skills to fix or make play equipment, which would help make the learning space better and support kids' education. Working together like this can really improve how children learn and enjoy school* (Interview, March 19, 2024).

Similarly, focusing on private preschools, Respondent 7 offered the following suggestions, “*Preschools can make play-based learning more effective by creating an environment filled with play materials, offering training for teachers, involving parents and helping them understand the benefits of play, including play in the curriculum, assessing and documenting children’s progress, supervising activities regularly, supporting all types of learners, and continually researching and evaluating play-based methods*” (Interview, March 29, 2024). Apart from this, Respondent 9 discussed broader suggestions for improvement. The Respondent’s reflection is summarized as follows:

*First, there should be a widespread effort to educate the public about the benefits of play-based learning. This approach should be adopted in all schools as a standard practice. Schools should be evaluated based on how well they implement play-based learning. Teacher training and resource availability should also be improved to ensure that the learning environment supports this approach effectively.* (Interview, March 27, 2024).

Similar suggestions were also provided by other parents. From their reflection it can be observed that school, curriculum, teacher, parent and resource related suggestions and recommendations were made by parents. While some of the areas of improvement discussed by parents were also raised as challenges impeding the successful implementation of play pedagogies, the other areas discussed were not properly addressed as part of the challenge. Nevertheless, their recommendations need to be seriously considered.

#### **4.2.9 Proving equal opportunity for all children**

Teachers were asked to reflect on the challenges they faced in ensuring all children get equal opportunities in play pedagogy. In addressing this question, Respondent 1 admitted the challenge of ensuring the provision of equal opportunities for all children. The Respondent stated, “*though ensuring*

*equal participation for all is challenging, I invite students to come forward to read and write as a mechanism*” (Interview, March 20, 2024). For Respondent 2, differences in play types produces differences in children’s involvement in playful learning experiences. The Respondent was quoted, *“not all types of play can involve every student simultaneously. While songs and free outdoor play accommodate larger groups, activities like story time can only feature a few students at a time, limiting broader participation”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). On the other hand, Respondent 3 raised the value of training children with the rules of play and socialization in ensuring inclusion. The Respondent reflected, *“in my classroom, students are trained in various aspects of social interaction and play. They learn how to act in different situations, engage in play thoughtfully, interact with others respectfully, utilize materials properly, and take turns with their peers. This training is integral to their development, fostering a cooperative and respectful classroom culture”* (Interview, March 28, 2024). The role of taking turns and playing in groups in ensuring the inclusion of all children was also discussed by other respondents. It seems some Respondents mentioned shortage of materials in creating disputes among children and in challenging teachers in deciding who gets what. For others, however, shortage of instructional or play materials is not an issue. For instance, Respondent 8 stated the following:

*All our students are actively involved in the learning process. They simply need to select and take the material they wish to use. If the desired material is already in use by another student, they must wait and can use other materials in the meantime until it becomes available again. This ensures that all students have access to the materials they need* (Interview, April 4, 2024).

Similarly, Respondent 10 indicated the mechanisms used to ensure equal engagement of all children in their school as follows:

*If a student feel ignored or believes they aren't getting the same chances as others, it can hurt their feelings and motivation to play. I make sure to watch all my students closely and ask if anyone missed out on an activity. I believe it's important for every child to feel included and valued, so when materials are limited, I group the students to make sure everyone gets a chance to participate. This way, we create a sense of fairness and community, where students help and learn from each other, improving the whole learning experience* (Interview, April 12, 2024).

Therefore, even if shortage of resource seems pose a challenge for teachers, what count is the effort teachers are making to ensure all children’s engagement in playful learning experiences. This is also reflected in Respondent 7 reflection, *“our attempts to integrate playful learning within academic instruction, such as allowing students to write numbers on the board and incorporating songs and dances about numbers, demonstrate the potential for creative teaching methods despite limited resources”* (Interview, March 19, 2024).

#### 4.2.10 Transiting from structured learning activities to unstructured play activities

In preschool educational settings teachers are expected to create both structured and unstructured learning activities. While structured activities have clear directions and rules to complete the assignment, and unstructured learning activities allow the children more creative freedom to explore their understanding of a particular topic. They rely on the use of a child's imagination to engage with various learning materials. Transiting from the structured to unstructured play activities often poses challenges for teachers. Considering this, teachers were asked about the strategies they use to transit from structured learning activities to unstructured play activities. Most Respondents reflections seems to suggest the dominance of classroom oriented structured learning activity than the unstructured ones. When organized, the unstructured play activities were intended to relax children in the form of break. For instance, Respondent 5 stated, *“our daily routine includes scheduled times for both structured and unstructured play. Unstructured play is specifically allotted time in the morning before classes begin and after snack time, following our set schedule closely”* (Interview, March 22, 2024). Furthermore, Respondent 2 stated, *“following planned lessons, we allow children to engage in outdoor play as a form of break, facilitating relaxation and social interaction. We often use songs, stories, and poems to smoothly transition from one lesson to another, enriching the learning experience with diverse educational content”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Hence, the unstructured playful experience are only organized after the regular learning tasks were completed. On the other hand, Respondent 1 outlined, *“indoor play in the classroom is limited to activities that involve chairs, as these are the only materials available that don't pose a risk to the children. Outdoor play is less controlled, and the safety of available materials is a concern; we rely on vigilant supervision and frequent warnings to prevent accidents”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Other Respondents seems to claim the training they received and the readymade guideline at their disposal helped them in smoothly transiting from the structured to unstructured learning activities. For instance, Respondent 10 claimed,

*I haven't had many problems with using our teaching methods because I got good training and have a complete teacher's guide to help me. I carefully follow the instructions in the book and have the skills to make materials and create educational games and songs. These abilities help me apply our teaching strategies effectively without many challenges* (Interview, April 12, 2024).

In addition, Respondent 3 mentioned the role of training children with the routines of the indoor and outdoor educational activities in supporting the smooth transition from structured to unstructured learning activities. As discussed a priori, unstructured play is child led, without instruction from an adult while structured play involves instruction led activities by teachers and parents. In addition, structured play uses specific instructions and steps to achieve a clear learning objective. Nevertheless,

to promote children's learning and development, there needs to be an equal amount of both structured and unstructured play activities because both help a child's physical, social, and emotional development. Additionally, there is a need for a unified systemic approach that integrates both play types in early childhood educational settings. To this end, teachers need to be equipped with the competency that enables them to address the methodological challenges involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating both structured and unstructured play activities for children.

#### **4.2.11 Managing time for structured and unstructured learning**

Efficient time management allows teachers to realize curriculum objectives through creating an environment where children thrive both academically and developmentally. It also enables teachers to allocate sufficient time for a range of playful learning activities, fostering a rich and engaging educational experience for children. In order to gain insight into how teachers manage time, they were asked to reflect on how they navigate through the challenge of time management while implementing structured learning activities and unstructured play activities. In replying to this question, Respondent 3 stated the following:

*As I mentioned before, managing time is really tough, especially since each subject has its own time slot. Preparing for each subject within such short periods doesn't work well. The problem comes from how the schedule is divided, which makes it hard to meet the goals for each subject in the short time we have. Having ready-made materials could help solve this, but unfortunately, we don't have those resources (Interview, March, 28, 2024).*

Similarly, Respondent reiterated the emphasis placed on equipping children with literacy skills posed significant challenge for teachers to properly give time for unstructured learning activities. The Respondent's reflection is stated hereunder:

*According to the curriculum timetable, the total school day is 4 hours long. This includes 30 minutes for indoor activities, 60 minutes for outdoor activities, and a 15-minute break. The remaining 2 hours are used for storytelling, practice, music, and art. However, we have mainly focused on teaching Tigrigna, science, math, and art using traditional methods like chalk and talk, while also incorporating various songs into our music lessons. This is because students often struggle with reading and writing when they enter grade one. As a result, we sometimes face criticism for not properly preparing them in these basic skills. (Interview, March 19, 2024).*

On the other hand, Respondent 5 stated the proper allocation of time both for structured and unstructured play activities. The Respondent stated, "each play activity has a designated time slot within our schedule to accommodate it effectively. While the increasing number of students can pose challenges, we generally manage to maintain our timetable and ensure that each activity is conducted as planned" (Interview, March 22, 2024). Other Respondents focused on large class size, differences in children's ability and shortage of materials as the principal factor that is affecting the successful

implementation of structured or unstructured educational experiences. It appears that while for some Respondents the demand of the curriculum and set academic standards posed challenges to properly manage time, for others time management seems to be not an issue.

#### 4.2.12 Safety and security issues during free play activities

Teachers were asked to discuss on the strategies they use to address safety and security issues while implementing indoor and outdoor activities. The response obtained seem to suggest differences in maintaining the safety and security of children during playful learning experiences. While the situation seems better in private and NGO operated preprimary schools, it seems worse for public schools that were ravaged during the two-year war in Tigrai region. In detailing the situation Respondent 1 explained, *“Despite recognizing the importance of play and the children's eagerness to engage in it during breaks, our ability to provide a safe and enriching play experience is severely limited by the distraction of instructional resources due to war and the lack of attention given to improving the situation.”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Supporting this, Respondent 7 stated, *“safety concerns and inadequate facilities confine students to their classrooms for the majority of the school day, with limited opportunities for outdoor play or exploration. This restriction not only hampers the implementation of a diverse and engaging curriculum but also affects students' physical health and well-being”* (Interview, March 19, 2024). In contrast to this, Respondent 2 stated, *“all teachers supervise the children during playtime, ensuring safety and promoting respectful interactions among them. In the classroom, we focus on educational play, which is structured and safe, without room for unstructured free play”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Sharing this view Respondent 5 indicated, *“the school environment is designed with the safety and well-being of the children in mind. The layout of the playground and classrooms is intended to be both secure and conducive to the children's comfort and enjoyment”* (Interview, March 22, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 3 reiterated,

*Compared to other schools, our student population is small, allowing me and my assistant to manage the class effectively and attend to each student individually. We make sure that no student feels left out or disengaged during activities. Additionally, we place a strong emphasis on creating a safe and secure environment. All hazardous materials are carefully removed to ensure students can explore and learn without risk. Due to limited classroom space, we adapt many play activities so they can be conducted within students' sitting areas. This not only makes the most of the available space but also ensures students' safety while they engage in play. This approach helps create a secure learning environment where students can freely express themselves and develop important social and cognitive skills in a safe, controlled space.* (Interview, March 28, 2024).

Similar reflection was also obtained from Respondent 10 stating the following:

*In the classroom, children sit on mats during various play activities, which helps create a flexible and comfortable learning environment. For activities that require more stability, such as art and writing practice, we use tables and chairs. Our outdoor play area is separate from the main school building, providing a dedicated space for physical activities. We always supervise the children closely in this area to ensure they are safe while playing. Although the outdoor space is generally safe, it is not yet perfect. We recognize the need for further improvements, such as adding safety measures and more plants for shade. We are committed to continually enhancing the environment to make it as safe and welcoming as possible for the children. (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

Some Respondents also maintained that their classroom is spacious, allowing students the freedom to move around and select different learning materials at their will. They regard their outdoor toys secure and safe for use and ensured that there are no hazards in the play area. Therefore, while ensuring the safety and security of children during play activities takes precedence in some schools, lack of educational infrastructures and large class size seems to challenge some schools from creating a safe and secure learning environment for children. The research finding reported by Mwoma et al. (2018) found poor infrastructure, lack of play space and play equipment, congested classrooms and school compounds not fenced as the primary factor affecting the safety and security of preschool children.

#### **4.2.13 Materials and resource for play pedagogies**

According to the respondents, having a cooperative workforce that shares time and resources as well as having some tools accessible for playful learning were instrumental in making them use playful techniques. In addition, teachers viewed inadequate finance and resources as the biggest obstacles to integrating play into their lessons.

In this study, except few, most teachers cited lack of the necessary play materials in influencing the implementation of playful learning experiences. The problem seems to be pressing for public preprimary schools than private or NGO affiliated schools. Reflecting on this, Respondent 1 outlines, *“the scarcity of materials means our teaching often relies on songs related to the lesson topics. The absence of basic tools like scissors and paper, compounded by the aftermath of conflict affecting both teachers and students, signifies a dire need for support and resources”* (Interview, March 20, 2024). Similarly, Respondent 2, *“our ability to utilize a wide range of materials is constrained by the large number of students and the unavailability of certain resources, such as sensory and construction play materials, in our setting. This limitation impacts the variety and depth of play-based learning experiences we can offer”* (Interview, April 1, 2024). Respondent 3 also noted, *“typically, the number of students, the availability of materials, and the size of the classrooms are key factors in providing equal attention and support to all students within a school”* (Interview, March 28, 2024). On the other hand, Respondent 10 stated the dire situation they faced with regard to instructional resources.

However, since they received the Montessori materials from an NGO, they are in a better condition to apply play based educational experiences for children. The Respondent was quoted:

*Before we get Montessori materials, we use things like bottle caps, gravel, mud, and paper for teaching. Thanks to help from Plan International, we now have real Montessori materials. We sort them by the age of students and use them the right way. Also, we got new outdoor materials recently, and we plan to use them in our lessons. This makes sure we use all resources in the best way to help students learn (Interview, April 12, 2024).*

Therefore, shortage of instructional resources in general and of play materials in particular significantly affected the implementation of play pedagogies in the observed preschools. Another worth mentioning issue raised by some teachers was the importance of teacher's awareness about the types of materials that are suitable for different age groups of children. Understanding age-appropriate resources was considered to be essential in ensuring that each child is engaged with materials that are both challenging and suitable for their developmental stage. This was found to be instrumental in enhancing children's learning experiences and supports optimal educational outcomes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. Summary, Conclusion and Implications

This chapter discusses the summary of the major findings obtained from both quantitative and qualitative analysis and interpretation. In addition, it presents the conclusions drawn and the recommendation forwarded based on the discussions made on the findings of the study. The discussion was made in light of the major research questions posed and the objectives of the study.

#### 5.1 Summary of major findings

This study was based on the premise that play pedagogies play tremendous role in enhancing the holistic development of children. To examine the power of play pedagogies in preprimary schools, the study raised three fundamental research questions:

1. How do teachers and parents understand play pedagogies?
2. How do play pedagogies are integrated and practiced in preprimary schools?
3. What are the challenges affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in Mekelle and Wukro preprimary schools?

In order to address these questions, the study carefully examined and synthesized existing literatures on the conceptual and theoretical denominators of play and play pedagogies, models and methods of play pedagogies, empirical findings on playful pedagogies, national ECCE policy and strategic provisions and the factors that affect the successful implementation of playful learning in preprimary educational settings. In light of the research questions posed, the study employed a *convergent parallel/concurrent research design* to guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. Dictated by the choice of study design, quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected from teachers, parents and the school settings. Based on the objectives of the study, the major findings are summarized as follows.

#### *Teachers and parents' knowledge, perception and attitude about play and play pedagogies*

The finding obtained regarding the demographic characteristics of teachers and parents seems to indicate the possession of the minimum level of knowledge and experiences that would enable them to respond to the survey and interview questions by examining the power of play pedagogies in preschool educational settings. Though all discussants seem to be well versed with the concept of play, their understanding level about play pedagogies seems to be varied. Some preschool teachers and parents

with teaching professional background seems to provide an in-depth explanation about the concept of play pedagogies. Compared to others, their response seems to suggest a fair understanding of the concept of play pedagogies. Similarly, teachers and parents were aware of the importance of play in fostering children's holistic development. Play pedagogies were perceived to be instrumental in fostering children's learning and development, creativity and problem-solving skills. However, except few, most of them fall short in explaining what play pedagogy is. Their positive attitude towards play was not supplemented with appropriate conceptions of the mechanisms through which the play types are implemented in preschool educational settings. Despite these limitations, teachers' knowledge and perception was found to positively affect the implementation and use of various play pedagogies in preschool settings.

### *The integration and practice of play pedagogies in preprimary schools*

The finding of the study showed that irrespective of differences in school types, most teachers and parents reflected the importance of integrating play pedagogies in the daily instructional process. However, evidences obtained from multiple sources did not show the integration of various play pedagogies. Though schools allowed children to play within and out of the classrooms, the play activities were not carefully planned and integrated in the annual, weekly or daily plans. Similarly, the design and implementation of indoor and outdoor learning experiences did not reflect the careful integration of play pedagogies. Except in few preprimary schools, the setting of a learning outcome that centers on and around play were observed to be poor. Moreover, little has been said on the mechanisms used to incorporate play pedagogies. The dominance of the implementation of few play pedagogies in most of the schools seems to be related with the observed lack of understanding the mechanisms used to integrate diverse play pedagogies in designing and implementing instruction.

The finding of the study also showed that most teachers attempted to utilize various forms of play pedagogies in their day to day teaching. In addition, the nature of play activities that are widely practiced seems to be similar across all the schools observed. Play types such as free play, songs, storytelling and games were widely used to engage children in play-based learning activities. However, the general perceptions of teachers about the types of play pedagogies used in their school settings, its degree of effectiveness and alignment with teachers' guide showed variations. While the majority of teachers ranked 'free play', 'physical play', 'locomotor play', 'associative play', 'guided or directed play' and 'constructive play' as the most dominantly used play pedagogies, play types such as 'rough-and-tumble play', 'recapitulative play', and 'fantasy play' were ranked as the least frequently used

play pedagogies by teachers. This finding seems to indicate that play type that allows children to explore history and rituals and that allows them to participate in physical contact that doesn't result in someone being hurt (Hughes, 2002) were not practiced in the observed schools. This finding supports the finding that indicated the deliberate disregard for the use of rough and tumble play by teachers although it is pursued by children (Siklander, Ernst & Storli (2020). Nevertheless, apart from incorporating some forms of play-based pedagogies, teacher directed instruction seems to dominate, with free play only be used in the form of providing break.

Similarly, teachers' perception about the effectiveness of play types in supporting children's learning showed variation. The majority of teachers rated 'free play', 'associative play', 'locomotor play', 'guided or directed play', 'constructive play' and 'sensory play' as highly effective play pedagogies. On the other hand, play pedagogies such as 'rough-and-tumble play', 'recapitulative play', 'fantasy play', and 'deep play' were rated as slightly effective in promoting children's learning. There were clearly observed differences between and within the schools on the level of emphasis given to the integration and implementation of playful pedagogies. With better implementation state being observed in most NGO preprimary schools followed by few public 'O' classes supported by NGOs. Considering the roles played by teachers and children, the obtained reflections suggested the dominant role played by teachers as compared to the roles played by children in preschool educational settings. It was evident that children are considered the recipient of the instruction. When their active engagement is discussed, it was discussed only in relation to their involvement either in free play or in teacher guided learning activities. This seem to suggest the dominance of the implementation of traditional teacher centered pedagogical approaches. This finding corroborated the findings that suggested the dominance of direct pedagogies in preschool settings (e.g., Wood, 2010; Logan, 2022, Mostefa, 2023).

#### *Factors affecting the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preprimary schools*

The finding of the study indicated the role of various factors in influencing the integration and implementation of play pedagogies in preprimary schools. The regression analysis showed the effect of teacher related variables on the practice of play pedagogies. For instance, teachers' knowledge, perception and attitude about play and play pedagogies affected the use of various forms of play pedagogies in preschools. This finding seems to be consistence with others. For instance, Kekesi,

Donkor, Aburampah and Torkonyo (2019) found the effect of teachers' positive perception on the use of play as a teaching technique. Similarly, Mostafa (2023) also found the effect of teachers' positive perception about play pedagogy on the implementation of various play pedagogies in their lessons. In addition, Onditi, Otengah and Odongo (2018) found a varied level of perceptions among the pre-school teachers, some showing fairly strong positive perception and others revealing weak positive perception towards the implementation of play-based approaches.

Though the nature of the factors affecting the implementation of play pedagogies differed depending on the types of school children enrolled, teacher's competence, parental expectations, misconception about play, lack of resources and play materials, large class (for public 'O' classes), lack of time, impact of war and conflict seems to influence the successful implementation of play pedagogies. Similar findings were also obtained by Kekesi et al., (2019). They found the availability of play materials and the kind of motivation teachers received as the most important factor that influenced the use of play as a technique of teaching. Similarly, Mostefa (2023) also found various factors affecting the practice and implementation of play pedagogies. The factors identified included lack of space, time allocation, lack of materials and lack of training on play-based pedagogy. Apart from this, the emphasis given on teaching academic skills such as reading, writing and simple math in preprimary schools that are operated by NGOs and the private sector limited children's opportunity to engage in playful educational experiences. Moreover, the level of parent's involvement in public, NGOs and private preprimary schools was found to be low. Even if various communication approaches are used by teachers to keep parents updated about their children's progress, the majority of parents do not actively engage in supporting the implementation of play pedagogies. Their involvement is only limited to the information they receive about the nature of activities organized for their children.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

This study underscores the critical role of play pedagogies in fostering the holistic development of children in preprimary schools. Despite their recognized importance, the findings reveal gaps in understanding, integration, and practice of play-based approaches among teachers and parents. While both groups acknowledge the value of play in enhancing children's learning and development, their knowledge and perceptions about the mechanisms and applications of play pedagogies vary significantly.

Teachers' attempts to incorporate play pedagogies often result in limited practices dominated by teacher-centered methods, with free play largely confined to breaks rather than integrated into

structured learning. Although some forms of play, such as free play, guided play, and constructive play, are widely used, others like rough-and-tumble play and fantasy play remain underutilized. These findings highlight an imbalance between traditional instructional methods and child-centered approaches that actively engage children in their learning processes.

Moreover, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of play pedagogies. These include limited teacher training and competence, parental misconceptions about play, resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, time limitations, and external factors like the impact of war and conflict. The emphasis on academic skills in some settings and the low level of parental involvement further restrict opportunities for children to experience meaningful and varied play-based learning.

To address these challenges, it is essential to enhance teacher training, improve resource availability, and foster parental awareness and engagement. Schools should prioritize integrating play pedagogies into structured lesson plans and balance academic instruction with play-based approaches. By addressing these systemic and contextual barriers, the potential of play pedagogies to support children's creativity, problem-solving skills, and holistic development can be fully realized in preprimary educational settings.

### **5.3 Recommendations for improved ECCE policy and practice**

Based on the major findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are warranted.

The existing misconception about play and its role in promoting children's learning influenced the way play was integrated and implemented in most public 'O' classes, private KGs and few NGO preprimary schools. Teachers also lacked the necessary skills to incorporate diverse play pedagogies in the instructional process. Addressing such misconception and skill gaps requires the implementation of continuous professional development initiatives for preschool teachers and parents. The integration of play as a fundamental aspect of preprimary pedagogy requires the development of relevant pedagogical skills. The development of these skills can be facilitated by the implementation of effective training, experience sharing schemes and supervisory practices. To realize this, effective collaboration and networking should be established between preprimary schools, ECCE centers, Government and Non-Governmental Organizations.

The nature of play pedagogies that were widely practiced seems to be similar across all the schools. Besides, there were implementation differences between public 'O' class, NGOs and private preprimary schools. In most of the preprimary schools, the design and implementation of indoor and

outdoor learning experiences did not ensure the careful integration of diverse play pedagogies. This limited the provision of diverse educational experiences that fosters children's holistic development. Therefore, Regional and City Administration Education Bureaus should utilize robust quality assessment standards and procedures to ensure the proper integration and implementation of diverse playful experiences in the annual, weekly and daily instructional plans of preprimary schools. In addition, the supervisory practices undertaken should emphasize on supporting teachers and parents on the design, implementation, assessment and resourcing of play pedagogies.

The emphasis placed on academic achievements over promoting the holistic development of children in most private preprimary schools is concerning. This focus, driven by the need to prepare children for the rigors of first grade, overshadows the achievement of essential developmental milestones that are critical during early childhood period. It is crucial for educational leaders and practitioners to understand that while academic achievements are important, they should not come at the expense of developing well-rounded and capable children. Therefore, Regional and City Administration Education Bureaus should utilize robust quality assessment standards and procedures to ensure that private preprimary schools emphasize on the holistic development of children.

The observed lack of initiative among most public 'O' class teachers to create and enhance the learning environments is equally troubling. In most 'O' classes, children spend their time in free play, without receiving proper educational experiences that will help them become a lifelong learner. Besides, 'O' classes are overcrowded and facilitated by underpaid and less motivated teachers. Student well-being is compromised in certain schools due to unsafe environments. Many facilities fall far below acceptable standards, characterized by uncleanliness, inadequate indoor resources, deteriorated infrastructure and unsafe playground equipment. This reflects a broader issue within the public preprimary education system. If teachers are not encouraged, or feel empowered, to innovate and improve their teaching methods and resources, the quality of preschool education suffers. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, Regional and City Administration Education Bureaus should find ways to incentivize 'O' class teachers through improving their living condition and the educational infrastructures of 'O' classes.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

This study has limitations that call for cautious interpretation and generalization of the results to other contexts. To begin, some schools had strict policies regarding data collection. They also required permissions or approvals from the school management. This delayed the process of data collection. On

the other hand, most private and NGO kindergartens were hesitant to share sensitive information due to concerns related to confidentiality and privacy. This might have contributed for the socially desirable responses obtained during interviews. Moreover, the impact of war and conflict in Tigray affected the day to day activities of many public 'O' classes. Many public schools were used as a shelter for internally displaced people. This left the school compound and classrooms' materials severely damaged. Similarly, playground materials were broken, and the morale of the teachers was noticeably low. During interviews, participants often reminisced about the time before the onset of the war, highlighting a stark contrast to the current reality. This all factors might have influenced the result of the study.

On the other hand, measuring perception through interviews, observations, and questionnaires may be influenced by biases of the participants. Compared to public and NGO preprimary school teachers, the quantitative aspect of the study was dominated by private preschool teachers. Therefore, the perceptions measured might not equally reflect the perceptions hold by all sampled teachers. In addition, given the small number of samples involved in the quantitative aspect of the study, obtaining comprehensive, credible, and generalizable evidence that depicts the association or effect of teacher related variables on the practice of play pedagogies might be difficult. The higher the sample size, the more likely the sample will be representative of the population set (Feld, 2017; Creswell, 2014). Hence, a different result might be obtained if future studies were carried out on a larger sample of teachers teaching public, NGO and private preschools. Moreover, the contexts (e.g., parental expectations, the learning resources, educational infrastructures, teachers' qualification and motivation) in which preprimary schools operate can play a major role in determining the implementation of play pedagogies. Hence, future research should investigate other potential factors, antecedents, and mediators that can significantly affect the relationships between school and teacher related variables and the practice of play pedagogies.

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4	You allow limited involvement of children in activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Minimal peer to peer interaction exists during teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>III</b>	<b>Free play</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
1	You create opportunities for children to direct their play activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	You help all children initiate their play activities regardless of abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Children are engaged in initiating and directing their lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Time is allocated to practice for the free play in the schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	You keep an eye on children during free play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>IV</b>	<b>Teacher-directed play</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
1	You structure and organize play activities to achieve certain learning objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Play activities are identified for the teacher directed play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	All children participate in the teacher directed play regardless of their abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	You have the skills to practice teacher directed play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>V</b>	<b>Mutual or guided Play</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
1	You provide freedom in the learning process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	You have skills to practice guided play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Children's agency in guided play is limited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	You observe and analyze children's behavior, interest, interaction and level of engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>VI</b>	<b>Play responsive learning</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
1	You tailor teaching strategies to children's emerging needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	You interfere in play responsive learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	You have skills to utilize play responsive learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Part III:** Based on the number of times you used, rank the following types of play responsive pedagogies from the most frequently used up to least frequently used ones.

**Scales:** Yes= 3                      Minimum= 2                      Never= 1  
 Highly Effective= 3      Slightly Effective= 2      Not Effective= 1  
 Highly Aligned= 3      Minimum Alignment= 2      Not Aligned=1

Play Pedagogies	Play type practiced in preschool			Effectiveness of the Play type to support children's learning			Aligned with teacher's guide		
	Yes	Minimum	Never	Highly effective	Slightly Effective	Not effective	Highly aligned	Minimum alignment	Not aligned
Free play									
Guided or directed play									
Sensory play									
Parallel play									
Associative play									
Cooperative play									
Pretend play									
Symbolic play									
Constructive play									
Exploratory play									
Locomotor play									

Deep play									
Communication play									
Socio-dramatic play									
Role play									
Mastery play									
Recapitulative play									
Rough-and-tumble play									
Creative play									
Functional Play									
Fantasy play									
Physical play									
Games with rules									

**Thank you for your cooperation!**

**APPENDIX B**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Education and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**

**Teachers Interview Protocol**

**Dear Interviewees!**

This interview protocol is prepared as part of data collection tools. It is designed to assess the power of play responsive pedagogies in preprimary education of Mekelle and Wukro cities. Your in-depth reflections to all interview questions would play significant role in achieving the objectives of the study.

**Confidentiality**

Participation in this interview is voluntary and all information that you provide will be treated confidentially. research work has ethical clearance supported with a letter from Addis Ababa University. While results will be made public, you are guaranteed that neither you, school, nor any personnel will be identified in any report of the results of the study.

**About the Questionnaire**

- This interview session should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
- Some questions require detailed descriptive answers while others not.

**Background Information**

Sex	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age in years	20-25	<input type="checkbox"/>	35-40	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25-30	<input type="checkbox"/>	40-45	<input type="checkbox"/>
	30-35	<input type="checkbox"/>	Above 50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Qualification	KG certificate			
Job Title	Teacher			
Years of Work Experience	12 years			
School type	Government O class			

**Guiding interview questions**

**1. Assessment of knowledge, attitude and perception of play responsive pedagogies**

- i) What is play for you? Explain your:
  - Understanding/knowledge and definitions of play pedagogies
  - Types of play pedagogy
  - Relationship between play and children’s learning
- ii) State teacher’s attitude towards play pedagogy?
- iii) Can you describe what play responsive pedagogy means to you?

**2. Practices of play pedagogy**

- i) Do you use play as a pedagogy? How? Why?
- ii) Explain types of play pedagogy used in preschool education?
  - **Probe:** how/do you use (e.g., free play, guided play, teacher directed play, play responsive learning, pretend play, dramatic play, constructive play, cooperative play, stories, songs, puzzles, games, riddles, and others) as pedagogy in preschool education?
- iii) How do you balance structured type of activities with unstructured play activities?
- iv) Could you explain the daily/weekly routines in using play pedagogy?
- v) State the role of teachers and children in implementing play pedagogy?
- vi) How do you know play types are integrated with learning targets and activities?

- vii) How do you assess the effectiveness of play based learning in your preschool?
- viii) How will you support children facing some challenges with play based learning?
- ix) What materials are using to practice play pedagogy? List materials (you are using currently) that support you to effectively implement play pedagogy?
- x) Explain how parents are involved in supporting and practicing play pedagogy? How do you inform the value of play pedagogy for parents?
- xi) Explain the success of play pedagogy? Would you share the success stories of play pedagogy (in relation to improving children's learning and development)?

### **3. Benefits of play pedagogy**

- i) Based on your experiences, write the benefits of play for children's learning and development?
- ii) State in what ways play promotes children's creativity and problem-solving skills?
- iii) Explain in what ways play pedagogy enhances children's wellbeing, language and literacy, social, communication, emotional, and physical development?

### **4. Challenges to implement play pedagogy**

- i) What are the main factors encountered in the process of implementing play pedagogy?
- ii) How do you solve for those parents who do not value the role of play pedagogy for children's learning and development?
- iii) How do you manage time constraints for the structured learning activities with unstructured play activities?
- iv) What strategies use when you transit from structured learning activities to unstructured play activities?
- v) How do you address safety and security issues during free play (indoor and outdoor) activities?
- vi) Did you faces some challenges while you implement play pedagogy?
- vii) How do you check and ensure all children get equal opportunities in play pedagogy?
- viii) Would state some challenges related to use of materials for play pedagogy?

**APPENDIX C**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Education and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**

**Parents Interview Protocol**

**Dear Interviewees!**

This interview protocol is prepared as part of data collection tools. It is designed to assess the power of play responsive pedagogies in preprimary education of Mekelle and Wukro cities. Your in-depth reflections to all interview questions would play significant role in achieving the objectives of the study.

**Confidentiality**

Participation in this interview is voluntary and all information that you provide will be treated confidentially. research work has ethical clearance supported with a letter from Addis Ababa University. While results will be made public, you are guaranteed that neither you, school, nor any personnel will be identified in any report of the results of the study.

**About the Questionnaire**

- This interview session should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
- Some questions require detailed descriptive answers while others not.

**Background Information**

Sex	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age in years	20-25	<input type="checkbox"/>	35-40	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25-30	<input type="checkbox"/>	40-45	<input type="checkbox"/>
	30-35	<input type="checkbox"/>	Above 50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of children in the preschool	1			
Type of parent	Mother			
Gender of the child	Male			
Job Title	Business man			
Grade of the student	O class			
School type	Public			

**Guiding interview questions**

**1. Understanding and value of play in learning:**

- i) How do you define play and what importance do you place on play-based learning for your child's development?
- ii) Have you observed any changes in your child's learning and development since they've been involved in play-based activities at preschool?
- iii) In what ways have you been involved in supporting play-based learning at school?
- iv) Can you share any strategies or activities you've found particularly effective in complementing what your child experiences at preschool?

**2. Observations on play-based pedagogy implementation:**

- i) Based on what your child shares with you about their day and your own observations during preschool events, how do you feel play-based learning is being implemented?
- ii) Are there types of play you believe are more beneficial for your child's development?
- iii) Have you faced any challenges in understanding or supporting play-based learning at school?
- iv) Can you share any success stories or noticeable improvements in your child's learning, creativity, problem-solving abilities, or overall development that you attribute to play-based learning?
- v) How do you think the preschool can further enhance the effectiveness of play pedagogy?

**APPENDIX D**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Observation Data (Private KGs)**

No	Indicators	P		P		P		P		P	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Knowledge and Attitude</b>										
1	Teachers and parents demonstrated a sound understanding of play responsive pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X
2	Teachers and parents showed a positive attitude towards children's engagement in playful learning experiences.	X		X			X	X		X	
3	The emphasis given to the implementation of playful pedagogies is higher.		X	X			X	X			X
<b>II</b>	<b>The practice of Play Pedagogies</b>										
1	A variety of play pedagogies are integrated into daily routines and curriculum.		X		X		X		X		X
2	The play pedagogies used are appropriate to children's development.		X		X		X		X		X
3	Teachers engage with children during play.		X		X		X		X		X
4	Play is used for assessment purposes.		X		X		X		X		X
5	The school administration supports the implementation of play responsive pedagogies.	X		X			X		X		X
6	There is evidence of collaborative planning or discussion among teachers and parents.		X		X		X		X		X
7	Teachers and parents collaborate in implementing play-based learning.		X		X		X		X		X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Classroom Environment</b>										
1	The design and organization of the physical environment is suitable for play pedagogies.	X			X		X	X			X
2	The classroom is organized to provide ample space for children to move freely and engage in different play activities.	X			X	X			X		X
3	There are designated areas for different types of play (e.g., dramatic play corner, block area, sensory table, art easel, and reading nook).		X		X		X		X		X
4	There is enough open floor space for group activities (e.g., circle time or dance activities).	X			X				X		X
5	There are designated areas for sensory exploration (e.g., a sand table, water play station, or nature table).		X		X		X		X		X
6	There are comfortable seating options available for children to rest or engage in quiet activities.		X		X		X		X		X
7	There are clear pathways within the classroom to ensure safe movement between different play areas.		X		X		X		X		X
<b>IV</b>	<b>Indoor and Outdoor Play Spaces</b>										

No	Indicators	P		P		P		P		P	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	There is a balance between individual and group play spaces.		X		X		X		X		X
2	There are designated areas for messy play (e.g., a painting or clay station) with appropriate materials and cleaning supplies nearby.		X		X		X		X		X
3	There are clear boundaries or dividers between different play areas to help define spaces and reduce distractions.		X		X		X		X		X
4	Proper safety measures are in place (e.g., secure shelving, soft flooring in appropriate areas, and child-proofed furniture).		X		X		X		X		X
5	There are designated spaces for children to display their completed artwork or projects, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.		X		X		X		X		X
6	There are quiet or cozy areas available for children who may need a calm and soothing environment, equipped with soft seating or sensory tools.		X		X		X		X		X
7	There are spaces available for small-group activities or projects (e.g., a collaborative art table or science exploration corner).	X			X		X	X			X
8	There are opportunities for children to personalize their play spaces through artwork, photos, or personal belongings.		X		X		X		X		X
<b>V</b>	<b>Play Materials and Resources</b>										
1	There is ample and quality play materials and resources.				X		X		X		X
2	There is a variety of open-ended materials available (e.g., blocks, loose parts, and manipulatives) to encourage creativity and problem-solving.		X		X		X		X		X
3	The play materials and resources are easily accessible for children.		X		X	X			X		X
4	The play materials and resources are organized to encourage independent exploration and play.		X		X		X		X		X
5	The visual displays or charts promote children's sense of ownership and documentation of their learning.		X		X	X		X		X	
<b>VI</b>	<b>Play Activities</b>										
1	Children engage in solitary play.	X		X		X		X		X	
2	Children engage in social play.	X		X		X		X		X	
3	There are opportunities for children to engage in gross motor play (e.g., climbing, jumping, and balancing activities).	X			X	X			X		X
4	There are opportunities for children to engage in outdoor play and exploration (e.g., a playground or nature area).	X			X	X		X			X
5	There are opportunities for children to engage in pretend play and role-playing (e.g., a dress-up area or play kitchen).		X		X		X		X		X
6	There are opportunities for children to engage in collaborative play (e.g., group building projects or cooperative games).	X			X		X		X		X
7	There are opportunities for children to engage in nature-based play and exploration (e.g., a garden area or nature walks).		X		X		X	X			X
8	There are opportunities for children to engage in music and movement activities, with designated space for dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.	X			X		X		X	X	
9	There are opportunities for children to engage in imaginative play (e.g., a puppet theater or small world play area).	X			X		X		X		X
10	Teachers are stationed in the play areas to monitor the children's interests during playtime.	X			X		X		X		X
11	There are opportunities for children to engage in sensory integration activities (e.g., calming sensory bins or gross motor activities with tactile elements).	X			X		X		X		X

**APPENDIX E**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Observation Data (NGO KGs)**

No	Indicators	NGO		NGO		NGO	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Knowledge and Attitude</b>						
1	Teachers and parents demonstrated a sound understanding of play responsive pedagogies.		X		X		X
2	Teachers and parents showed a positive attitude towards children's engagement in playful learning experiences.	X		X		X	
3	The emphasis given to the implementation of playful pedagogies is higher.	X		X			
<b>II</b>	<b>The practice of Play Pedagogies</b>						
1	A variety of play pedagogies are integrated into daily routines and curriculum.	X		X		X	
2	The play responsive pedagogies used are appropriate to children's development.	X		X		X	
3	Teachers engage with children during play.		X	X			X
4	Play is used for assessment purposes.		X	X		X	
5	The school administration supports the implementation of play responsive pedagogies.	X		X		X	
6	There is evidence of collaborative planning or discussion among teachers and parents.		X		X		X
7	Teachers and parents collaborate in implementing play-based learning.		X		X		X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Classroom Environment</b>						
1	The design and organization of the physical environment is suitable for play pedagogies.	X		X		X	
2	The classroom is organized to provide ample space for children to move freely and engage in different play activities.	X		X		X	
3	There are designated areas for different types of play (e.g., dramatic play corner, block area, sensory table, art easel, and reading nook).	X		X		X	
4	There is enough open floor space for group activities (e.g., circle time or dance activities).	X		X		X	
5	There are designated areas for sensory exploration (e.g., a sand table, water play station, or nature table).	X		X		X	
6	There are comfortable seating options available for children to rest or engage in quiet activities.	X		X		X	
7	There are clear pathways within the classroom to ensure safe movement between different play areas.	X		X		X	
<b>IV</b>	<b>Indoor and Outdoor Play Spaces</b>						
1	There is a balance between individual and group play spaces.	X		X		X	
2	There are designated areas for messy play (e.g., a painting or clay station) with appropriate materials and cleaning supplies nearby.		X		X	X	
3	There are clear boundaries or dividers between different play areas to help define spaces and reduce distractions.	X		X			X
4	Proper safety measures are in place (e.g., secure shelving, soft flooring in appropriate areas, and child-proofed furniture).	X		X			X

No	Indicators	NGO		NGO		NGO	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
5	There are designated spaces for children to display their completed artwork or projects, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.		X		X		X
6	There are quiet or cozy areas available for children who may need a calm and soothing environment, equipped with soft seating or sensory tools.	X		X			X
7	There are spaces available for small-group activities or projects (e.g., a collaborative art table or science exploration corner).		X		X		X
8	There are opportunities for children to personalize their play spaces through artwork, photos, or personal belongings.		X		X		X
<b>V</b>	<b>Play Materials and Resources</b>						
1	There is ample and quality play materials and resources.	X		X			X
2	There is a variety of open-ended materials available (e.g., blocks, loose parts, and manipulatives) to encourage creativity and problem-solving.	X					X
3	The play materials and resources are easily accessible for children.	X		X			X
4	The play materials and resources are organized to encourage independent exploration and play.	X		X			X
5	The visual displays or charts promote children's sense of ownership and documentation of their learning.	X			X	X	
<b>VI</b>	<b>Play Activities</b>						
1	Children engage in solitary play.	X		X		X	
2	Children engage in social play.	X		X		X	
3	There are opportunities for children to engage in gross motor play (e.g., climbing, jumping, and balancing activities).	X		X		X	
4	There are opportunities for children to engage in outdoor play and exploration (e.g., a playground or nature area).	X		X		X	
5	There are opportunities for children to engage in pretend play and role-playing (e.g., a dress-up area or play kitchen).		X	X			X
6	There are opportunities for children to engage in collaborative play (e.g., group building projects or cooperative games).	X		X			X
7	There are opportunities for children to engage in nature-based play and exploration (e.g., a garden area or nature walks).	X		X			X
8	There are opportunities for children to engage in music and movement activities, with designated space for dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.	X			X		X
9	There are opportunities for children to engage in imaginative play (e.g., a puppet theater or small world play area).	X			X		X
10	Teachers are stationed in the play areas to monitor the children's interests during playtime.	X		X		X	
11	There are opportunities for children to engage in sensory integration activities (e.g., calming sensory bins or gross motor activities with tactile elements).	X		X			X

**APPENDIX F**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Observation Data (Public O class)**

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Knowledge and Attitude</b>																
1	Teachers and parents demonstrated a sound understanding of play responsive pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
2	Teachers and parents showed a positive attitude towards children's engagement in playful learning experiences.	X		X		X		X			X	X			X		X
3	The emphasis given to the implementation of playful pedagogies is higher.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
<b>II</b>	<b>The practice of Play Pedagogies</b>																
1	A variety of play pedagogies are integrated into daily routines and curriculum.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
2	The play pedagogies used are appropriate to children's development.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
3	Teachers engage with children during play.		X	X			X		X		X	X			X		X
4	Play is used for assessment purposes.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
5	The school administration supports the implementation of play responsive pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
6	There is evidence of collaborative planning or discussion among teachers and parents.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X
7	Teachers and parents collaborate in implementing play-based learning.		X		X		X		X		X		X	X			X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Classroom Environment</b>																
1	The design and organization of the physical environment is suitable for play pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
2	The classroom is organized to provide ample space for children to move freely and engage in different play activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
3	There are designated areas for different types of play (e.g., dramatic play corner, block area, sensory table, art easel, and reading nook).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X
4	There is enough open floor space for group activities (e.g., circle time or dance activities).		X	X			X		X		X		X		X	X		
5	There are designated areas for sensory exploration (e.g., a sand table, water play station, or nature table).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
6	There are comfortable seating options available for children to rest or engage in quiet activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
7	There are clear pathways within the classroom to ensure safe movement between different play areas.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
<b>IV</b>	<b>Indoor and Outdoor Play Spaces</b>																	
1	There is a balance between individual and group play spaces.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
2	There are designated areas for messy play (e.g., a painting or clay station) with appropriate materials and cleaning supplies nearby.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
3	There are clear boundaries or dividers between different play areas to help define spaces and reduce distractions.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
4	Proper safety measures are in place (e.g., secure shelving, soft flooring in appropriate areas, and child-proofed furniture).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
5	There are designated spaces for children to display their completed artwork or projects, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
6	There are quiet or cozy areas available for children who may need a calm and soothing environment, equipped with soft seating or sensory tools.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
7	There are spaces available for small-group activities or projects (e.g., a collaborative art table or science exploration corner).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		
8	There are opportunities for children to personalize their play spaces through artwork, photos, or personal belongings.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
<b>V</b>	<b>Play Materials and Resources</b>																	
1	There is ample and quality play materials and resources.		X		X		X		X		X				X	X		
2	There is a variety of open-ended materials available (e.g., blocks, loose parts, and manipulatives) to encourage creativity and problem-solving.		X		X		X		X		X				X	X		
3	The play materials and resources are easily accessible for children.		X		X		X		X		X				X	X		
4	The play materials and resources are organized to encourage independent exploration and play.		X		X		X		X		X				X	X		
5	The visual displays or charts promote children's sense of ownership and documentation of their learning.		X		X		X		X		X				X		X	
<b>VI</b>	<b>Play Activities</b>																	
1	Children engage in solitary play.		X		X		X		X	X					X	X		
2	Children engage in social play.		X	X		X		X		X		X		X		X		
3	There are opportunities for children to engage in gross motor play (e.g., climbing, jumping, and balancing activities).		X		X	X		X			X		X		X	X		
4	There are opportunities for children to engage in outdoor play and exploration (e.g., a playground or nature area).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
5	There are opportunities for children to engage in pretend play and role-playing (e.g., a dress-up area or play kitchen).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	
6	There are opportunities for children to engage in collaborative play (e.g., group building projects or cooperative games).		X		X		X		X		X		X	X				
7	There are opportunities for children to engage in nature-based play and exploration (e.g., a garden area or nature walks).		X		X		X		X		X		X	X				
8	There are opportunities for children to engage in music and movement activities, with designated space for dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X			
9	There are opportunities for children to engage in imaginative play (e.g., a puppet theater or small world play area).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X			
10	Teachers are stationed in the play areas to monitor the children's interests during playtime.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X			
11	There are opportunities for children to engage in sensory integration activities (e.g., calming sensory bins or gross motor activities with tactile elements).		X		X		X		X		X		X		X			

**APPENDIX G**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Document Review Data (Private KGs)**

No	Indicators	P		P		P		P		P	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Integration of Play Pedagogies</b>										
1	The curriculum considers children’s holistic development.		X		X		X		X		X
2	The curriculum and teaching plan consider how the student will experience learning as playful.		X		X		X		X		X
3	The curriculum and teaching plan reflect the characteristics of playful pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X
4	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated play responsive strategies that provide opportunities for student’s experience.		X		X		X		X		X
5	The curriculum and teaching plan stated the expected role of teachers and parents in the implementation of playful pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X
6	The curriculum and teaching plan integrate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided teaching and learning approaches.		X		X		X		X		X
7	The curriculum and teaching plan emphasize on children’s active engagement in playful learning.		X		X		X		X		X
8	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporate free play, guided play and mutually guided play activities.		X		X		X		X		X
<b>II</b>	<b>Play Centered Learning Outcomes</b>										
1	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated a range of learning outcomes that emphasizes on play-based learning.		X		X		X		X		X
2	The learning outcomes incorporated a variety of play-based learning approaches.		X	X			X		X		X
3	The learning outcomes emphasizes the integration of playful instructional processes.		X	X			X		X		X
4	The learning outcomes differentiate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided indoor and outdoor play activities.		X	X			X		X		X
5	The learning outcomes encourage teachers to integrate various types of playful pedagogies with in and out of the classroom.		X	X			X		X		X
6	The learning outcomes indicate children’s level of engagement in playful activities.		X	X			X		X		X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Design of the Instructional Process</b>										
1	The instructional plan emphasizes on creating opportunities for a range of playful activities.		X	X			X		X		X
2	The instructional plan incorporates a range of playful pedagogies in line with the learning outcomes.		X	X			X		X		X
3	The instructional plan differentiates direct, child-initiated and mutually guided playful pedagogical approaches.		X	X			X		X		X
4	The instructional plan balance direct instruction with a range of child-initiated playful activities.		X	X			X		X		X
5	The instructional plan supports the use of a range of formative assessment strategies to collect evidences.		X	X			X		X		X
6	The instructional plan encourages the use of the evidence gathered to improve children’s learning through playful pedagogical approaches.		X	X			X		X		X

No	Indicators	P		P		P		P		P	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>IV</b>	<b>The Design of Resources</b>										
<b>1</b>	The instructional plan incorporates various resources suitable to implement play responsive pedagogies.		X	X			X		X		X
<b>2</b>	The instructional plan mandates access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor learning resources that is conducive to playful learning.		X	X			X		X		X
<b>3</b>	The instructional plan ensures access to a physical learning environment that is conducive to playful learning.		X	X			X		X		X
<b>4</b>	The instructional plan encourages the establishment of supportive networks within the school and community to promote the implementation of playful pedagogies.		X	X			X		X		X

**APPENDIX H**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Document Review Data (NGO KGs)**

No	Indicators	NGO		NGO		NGO	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Integration of Play Pedagogies</b>						
1	The curriculum considers children's holistic development.	X		X			X
2	The curriculum and teaching plan consider how the student will experience learning as playful.	X		X			X
3	The curriculum and teaching plan reflect the characteristics of playful pedagogies.	X		X			X
4	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated play responsive strategies that provide opportunities for student's experience.		X		X		X
5	The curriculum and teaching plan stated the expected role of teachers and parents in the implementation of playful pedagogies.	X		X			X
6	The curriculum and teaching plan integrate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided teaching and learning approaches.	X		X			X
7	The curriculum and teaching plan emphasize on children's active engagement in playful learning.	X		X			X
8	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporate free play, guided play and mutually guided play activities.	X		X			X
<b>II</b>	<b>Play Centered Learning Outcomes</b>						
1	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated a range of learning outcomes that emphasizes on play-based learning.	X		X			X
2	The learning outcomes incorporated a variety of play-based learning approaches.	X		X			X
3	The learning outcomes emphasizes the integration of playful instructional processes.	X		X			X
4	The learning outcomes differentiate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided indoor and outdoor play activities.	X		X			X
5	The learning outcomes encourage teachers to integrate various types of playful pedagogies with in and out of the classroom.	X		X			X
6	The learning outcomes indicate children's level of engagement in playful activities.	X		X			X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Design of the Instructional Process</b>						
1	The instructional plan emphasizes on creating opportunities for a range of playful activities.	X		X			X
2	The instructional plan incorporates a range of playful pedagogies in line with the learning outcomes.	X		X			X
3	The instructional plan differentiates direct, child-initiated and mutually guided playful pedagogical approaches.	X		X			X
4	The instructional plan balance direct instruction with a range of child-initiated playful activities.	X		X			X
5	The instructional plan supports the use of a range of formative assessment strategies to collect evidences.	X		X			X
6	The instructional plan encourages the use of the evidence gathered to improve children's learning through playful pedagogical approaches.	X		X			X
<b>IV</b>	<b>The Design of Resources</b>						

No	Indicators	NGO		NGO		NGO	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	The instructional plan incorporates various resources suitable to implement play responsive pedagogies.	X		X			X
2	The instructional plan mandates access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor learning resources that is conducive to playful learning.	X		X			X
3	The instructional plan ensures access to a physical learning environment that is conducive to playful learning.	X		X			X
4	The instructional plan encourages the establishment of supportive networks within the school and community to promote the implementation of playful pedagogies.	X		X			X

**APPENDIX I**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Educational and Behavioral Studies**  
**Center of Early Childhood Care and Development**  
**Document Review Data (Public O class)**

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>I</b>	<b>Integration of Play Pedagogies</b>																
1	The curriculum considers children’s holistic development.		X	X		X			X		X		X		X	X	
2	The curriculum and teaching plan consider how the student will experience learning as playful.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
3	The curriculum and teaching plan reflect the characteristics of playful pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
4	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated play responsive strategies that provide opportunities for student’s experience.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
5	The curriculum and teaching plan stated the expected role of teachers and parents in the implementation of playful pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
6	The curriculum and teaching plan integrate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided teaching and learning approaches.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
7	The curriculum and teaching plan emphasize on children’s active engagement in playful learning.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
8	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporate free play, guided play and mutually guided play activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	
<b>II</b>	<b>Play Centered Learning Outcomes</b>																
1	The curriculum and teaching plan incorporated a range of learning outcomes that emphasizes on play-based learning.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X	

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
2	The learning outcomes incorporated a variety of play-based learning approaches.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
3	The learning outcomes emphasizes the integration of playful instructional processes.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
4	The learning outcomes differentiate direct, child-initiated and mutually guided indoor and outdoor play activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
5	The learning outcomes encourage teachers to integrate various types of playful pedagogies with in and out of the classroom.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
6	The learning outcomes indicate children's level of engagement in playful activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
<b>III</b>	<b>The Design of the Instructional Process</b>																	
1	The instructional plan emphasizes on creating opportunities for a range of playful activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
2	The instructional plan incorporates a range of playful pedagogies in line with the learning outcomes.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
3	The instructional plan differentiates direct, child-initiated and mutually guided playful pedagogical approaches.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
4	The instructional plan balance direct instruction with a range of child-initiated playful activities.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
5	The instructional plan supports the use of a range of formative assessment strategies to collect evidences.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
6	The instructional plan encourages the use of the evidence gathered to improve children's learning through playful pedagogical approaches.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
<b>IV</b>	<b>The Design of Resources</b>																	
1	The instructional plan incorporates various resources suitable to implement play responsive pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X

No	Indicators	O		O		O		O		O		O		O		O		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
2	The instructional plan mandates access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor learning resources that is conducive to playful learning.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
3	The instructional plan ensures access to a physical learning environment that is conducive to playful learning.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X
4	The instructional plan encourages the establishment of supportive networks within the school and community to promote the implementation of playful pedagogies.		X		X		X		X		X		X		X	X		X

