

Addis Ababa
University
(Since 1950)



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

Title: Play-based learning practices in Mekanisa Akababi and Mald
kindergartens, Addis Ababa

By: Sara Teklu

A Thesis Submitted to CENTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Master of Arts degree in early
childhood care and education

June, 2023

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOURAL STUDIES

Play-based learning practices in Mekanisa Akababi and Mald kindergartens, Addis
Ababa.

BY: SARA TEKLU

Center for Early Childhood Care and Education

Approval of Board of Examiners:

1. Advisor:

	Date	Signature

2. Internal Examiner:

	Date	Signature

3. External Examiner:

	Date	Signature

Declaration

I the under signed, declared that this thesis entitled “Play-based learning practices in Mekanisa Akababi and Mald kindergartens, Addis Ababa.” is my original work and has not been presented the award of the degree in any other university and that all sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Sara Teklu

Signature _____

Date _____

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Play-based learning practices in Mekanisa Akababi and Mald kindergartens, Addis Ababa.” is the original work of Sara Teklu, done under my close guidance.

Name: Dr. Abraha Asfaw

Signature _____

Date _____

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my advisor Dr. Abraha Asfaw, for all the guidance, support and feedback throughout my master's program. His expertise and encouragement helped me to write this thesis.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of the participants in my study. Their willingness to share their experiences and insights has been invaluable to my research and has helped to make this thesis a success. Thank you for your time and contribution.

I am deeply thankful to my friends and family for their love and support during this process. Without their encouragement and motivation, I would not have been able to complete this journey. Above all, I would like to thank God, for letting me through all the difficulties. I have experienced your guidance day by day. You are the one who let me finish my degree. I will keep on trusting you for my future.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter one: Introduction	1
1.1. Background of the study	1
1.1. Statement of the problem	4
1.2. Objective of the study	7
1.3. Significance of the study.....	7
1.4. Scope of the study.....	8
1.5. Operational definitions.....	8
Chapter two.....	10
2. Review of related literature.....	10
2.1. Play and Play- based learning conceptualizations	10
2.2. Theories of play	11
2.3. Characteristics of play-based learning	12
2.4. Categories of play-based learning.....	13
2.5. Benefits of play-based learning.....	16
2.6. Factors of implementing play-based learning.....	17
2.7. Play based learning in Ethiopia.....	20
2.8. Theoretical Framework.....	21
2.9. Conceptual framework.....	22
Chapter three.....	23
3. Research Methods.....	23
3.1. Research design	23
3.2. Study Site	23
3.3. Population	24
3.4. Sampling Technique	24
3.5. Data collection Instruments	24
3.6. Procedure for data collection	26
3.7. Method of data analysis	27
3.8. Ethical considerations	27
Chapter four	28
4. Results and Findings.....	28

4.1.	General background	28
4.1.1.	Background of the participants	28
4.1.2.	Background of Kindergartens	29
4.2.	The practice of play-based learning	29
4.2.1.	School Setting	29
4.2.2.	The classroom settings	30
4.2.3.	Daily routines of kindergartens	31
4.2.4.	The conception towards play	32
4.2.5.	How do teachers engage play in learning	33
4.2.5.1.	Types of children’s play.....	35
4.2.5.2.	Types of play-based activities in classroom instructions	37
4.2.6.	Challenges and opportunities of using play-based learning	40
4.2.6.1.	Teachers’ training	42
4.2.6.2.	The role of kindergarten teachers in managing play	42
4.6.2.3.	The school curriculum	44
Chapter five.....		46
5.	Discussions	46
Chapter Six.....		49
6.	Conclusion and Recommendation	49
Summary		49
Conclusion		49
Recommendations.....		50
References.....		52
Annex A: Observation guideline.....		60
Annex B: Interview questions for head teacher		61
Annex C: Interview question for classroom teachers		61

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ECCE - Early Childhood Care and Education

ESDP - Education Sector Development Plan

KG – Kindergarten

MA – Mald Kindergarten teacher

MK – Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten teacher

MOE – Ministry of Education

UN – United Nations

List of Figure

Fig. 1 Overview of Conceptual Frame work..... 23

List of Tables

Table 1 – Participants by sex and qualification 29

Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the practice of play-based learning in two kindergartens in Lideta sub-city, Addis Ababa, and endeavored to give answers to the following research questions: (1) How do teachers understand play-based learning? (2) For what purpose do KG teachers use play-based learning? (3) What type of play and play-based learning approach do kindergarten teachers use in the teaching and learning process? (4) What are the opportunities and challenges of Kindergarten teachers in using play-based learning? Using qualitative case study design, the study was conducted in two purposely selected kindergartens, one governmental and private, and obtained data from a total of six participants (two principals and four teachers) interview formats and observation of instructional processes. Thematic data analysis results showed that kindergarten teachers agree on using play-based learning as an instructional approach and generally, they use free play as a break from structured activities and use guided play to scaffold children's learning in a specific area. Outdoor and physical play is the most common types of play observed in both kindergartens. However, differences in types and use of play-based teaching were observed between the governmental and private kindergartens. Scarcity of indoor and outdoor play materials and equipment especially in the public kindergarten; capacity limitation in both public and private kindergartens stand out as critical implementation challenges of learning through play in the study kindergartens. Accordingly, integration of play-based activities into the curriculum, teacher training in play-based instruction, and further research in the area were suggested to address the challenges and institutionalize play-based learning in kindergartens.

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Play is important in children's early years. Early childhood philosophers acknowledge the importance of play-based learning as a method for facilitating children's learning. Friedrich Froebel, Johanna Heinrich Pestalozzi and Maria Montessori are known educators who developed systematic ways to utilize play for both child rearing and educational programs (Saracho & Spodek, 1995).

Play can be viewed from the perspective of exploratory and open-ended nature, from the perspective of the intrinsic, evolutionary, and synergistic nature and from the developmental aspect (Stegelin, 2005). Open-ended perspective put play as an activity that encourages exploration and gives children a chance to practice play patterns like physically active play, role-playing games, and fantasy activities that help them learn social skills like negotiation and problem-solving (Bekker, Hopma, & Sturm, 2010). From an evolutionary perspective, play teaches children how to build friendships, get along with their classmates, manage their impulses, maintain physically strong and healthy bones, learn and apply cultural skills and values, and control their emotions (LaFreniere, 2011). According to the developmental view on play, children play to advance all aspects of their development, including their physical, intellectual, social, and emotional selves (Macintyre, 2016).

Play is important for child's cognitive, social emotional and physical development. All types of play have a crucial role in children's development (Goldstein, 2012). Children may practice problem-solving and decision-making abilities via play, which helps with cognitive development, which includes critical thinking, memory, problem solving, and decision making (Ahmad et al, 2016). Children use pretend play as a learning opportunity to express their emotions, deal with their feelings, exhibit empathy for others' feelings, and build emotional wellness. Children's understanding of emotions is linked to pretend play. Children develop their social cognition through symbolic play and the expression of their feelings through their facial expressions, body language, and speech. (Kwon & Yawkey, 2000). Playing is beneficial for the growth of motor functioning, according to several studies, and most newborns and toddlers learn the basics of movement via play and unstructured physical exercise. When they become older and games get

more competitive, kids with poor motor skills frequently decide not to engage in physical activities (Gleave & Cole, 2012).

The world-wide community has long recognized the importance of play and recreation in a child's development. According to article 31 of the 1989 convention on the rights of the child "States parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts,". Schools play an important role in meeting the obligations under article 31 by facilitating physical settings, ensuring appropriate time during the day for children to rest and play, integrating play in their instructional process, in accordance with their age and developmental needs; allocating appropriate time and expertise within the school curriculum for children to learn, participate in, and generate cultural and artistic activities; and offering playful activities (UN, 2013).

Although play is a much broader concept, it can be used with academic and developmental approaches to fulfill vital roles in child development. When play incorporated in the learning process it has both development and academic benefits (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Play is an essential strategy for learning (UNICEF, 2018).

Play-based learning is characterized as learning while playing, and several countries encourage using it in early education curricula (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Play promotes child holistic development. Children who enjoy play are more attentive, good in problem solving skills and inhibition that nurtured their mathematics and reading (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008).

Learning and playing go hand in hand. Play is important for children's development; it is used as a device to the learning process, molds child's personality and to experience certain adult activities (Farné, 2005). Children are able to display their advanced skills through play and playful learning. Children also learn how to negotiate, take turns, work with others, and create friends through free play (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008).

One of the most universal aspects of childhood is play. Elders pass pre-existing indigenous knowledge, values and norms to the next generation through imitation and other informal means. Children learn those knowledge, values and norms through play (Witten & Carroll, 2015). Children who attend schools come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and play can be a means for kids to learn about the world and develop cultural values. Through play-based activities, early

childhood educators can use play as a tool to encourage cultural awareness and individual differences in early education classrooms (Rettig , 1995).

Several countries use play-based pedagogy in early year's education incorporating strategies and activities into their curriculum. Kindergartens in Ethiopia are designed to teach children 4-6 years old and the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's curriculum framework also encourages the use of a child-centered approach, in which children can learn through play guided as well as free, which encourages children to engage in learning activities, experiment personal issues, and make their own discoveries, either alone or with other children and adults (MOE, 2009).

Teachers play a crucial role in putting play-based learning into practice. By acting as a keen observer, preparing the physical environment and daily routine for play, and acknowledging the range of learning contexts in which children construct meaning and acquire knowledge, teachers can lead children's play and assist their play and learning (P.Perry, 2001).

Play based approach involves both child-initiated and teacher-supported learning. The term "guided play" describes educational activities that mix the child-directed nature of free play with an emphasis on learning objectives and adult supervision. And there are two types: In one, adults create the environment to emphasize a learning objective while ensuring that kids have freedom to explore it. The second type of guided play takes place when adults observe child-directed activities and offer observations, provoke inquiries from kids, or broaden kids' interest. (Weisberg et al., 2016).

Through playful learning that incorporates interactive experiences; child-directed initiatives, and teacher-guided activities, children can meet and exceed standards. The learning and application of skills and concepts are assessed in kindergarten using a range of evaluation instruments, including portfolios, running records, anecdotal notes and narratives, formal evaluations, and other methods. Using play-based learning and giving time for child-directed activities and combining play observation with skill-specific assessments yields well-rounded data. Including both free and guided play can help to develop activities that are appropriate and engaging. (McDonald, 2018)

Research around play-based learning in Ethiopia is scarce and the knowledge base of this pedagogical approach is thin. There is lack of published article regarding the practice of play-based learning within the Ethiopian context. Mengistu's study on the practice and challenges of implementing play-based pedagogy (Mengistu , 2021) and Ojilu's study on kindergarten teachers'

perceptions of play-based learning (Ojulu, 2021) are two recent studies on play-based pedagogy. And these studies tried to show that teachers' lack of pedagogical skills and adequate training on play-based pedagogy hinders the implementation of play-based learning in kindergartens and how play-based learning provide learning benefit for children development. Netsanet also conducted another study on the contribution of play-based learning methodology to students' academic performance, with primary school students as her target group (Netsanet, 2021).

Play in this research is conceived as child directed activities in classrooms and outside classrooms and child activities facilitated by teachers for learning. Researches show children learn best when they are actively engaged, participating, and co-constructing learning. Children can use play to experiment with new ideas, concepts, and relationships. The advantages of play depend on practical implementation of both guided play and free play in kindergartens. This study is therefore, to explore practices of play-based learning in kindergartens of Addis Ababa with the hope to identify lessons, challenges, and implications.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Play is essential to a child's early education, as it contributes to the holistic growth and development of kindergarten learners. When play is included into the learning process, it offers all the components necessary to keep kids' brains active and healthy during pre-primary school. More than 85% of a child's cumulative brain growth occurs before the age of six, according to National Education Policy 2020, which recognizes the importance of the early years for a child's overall development and advocates for stimulating children's brains throughout this time. Play activities of children during early childhood plays a crucial role in the overall development. It is a known truth that experiences of children through free and guided play activities can help in achieving best outcome in all areas of development (Subhash, 2022).

Play associated with increase in critical and creative thinking in the later years, increase in achievement in both social behavior and academic content. A comparative study done on the perspective of play in Japan, United States, and Sweden showed that early childhood educators have different perspectives regarding the meaning and use of play and agreed on the importance of play in children's learning, social development, in promoting child's creativity, and a source of enjoyment. Play is central to early childhood education in cultivating balanced body and mind development; in developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition and social

competence; and in stimulating the imagination, insight, communication, and in giving a child an opportunity to experience co-operating with others and problem-solving abilities (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). Another study conducted on play-based teaching practice of Turkish early childhood teachers revealed that much amount of time is devoted to academic skills drives teachers away from play and the implementation of play as a teaching tool lacks clarity (Aras & Merdin, 2020).

Play-based learning is becoming more and more required by policymakers around the world in kindergarten classrooms. This pedagogical approach is supported by research that highlights both the developmental appropriateness of play-based learning for young children and the advantages it has for students' academic achievement (Pyle et al, 2020). However, despite the fact that parents, educators, and governmental organizations in the western world value play and believe that it fosters a child's overall development, there are fewer play areas, fewer opportunities for children to roam outdoors, and less time during the school day for unstructured play (Goldstein, 2012).

The main goal of Play-based learning is for children to learn while they are playing. Through engaging and developmentally appropriate learning activities, Play-based learning focuses on children's intellectual, social, and emotional growth as well as their interests and talents (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). The findings of research conducted on the use of play-based learning in Western Australian schools pointed that more emphasis is given to academic accountability and pointed out to the need for curriculum standards in the early years of schooling to be less content focused and more process oriented, for a decreased emphasis on standardized testing, for Early childhood teachers to be consulted on policy related to pedagogical and curriculum development, and the need for professional learning to be provided to non-Early Childhood Care and Education trained teachers and leaders (O'Connor et al, 2019).

In different parts of African countries, children are engaged in indigenous play activities mainly through free play (Lungu & Matafwali, 2020). A number of studies revealed that structural and material barriers such as large class sizes, inadequate classroom infrastructure, inadequate space for play-based learning and rigid schedules limit teachers' abilities to implement play-based learning. In Nigeria, Moland (2017) found that teachers resist implementing play-based approach related to structural reasons like large class size and lack of knowledge and training regarding play-based learning. The study conducted in Ghana kindergarten on the implementation of play-based curriculum indicated that, kindergarten teachers are aware of that they are expected to employ

play-based pedagogy in the teaching and learning process but they couldn't employ because they lacked the necessary knowledge and skills (Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020)

In different settings of Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria, Salami, Oyaremi, and Malawi, play has a cultural foundation. Teachers strongly understand the roles of riddles, rhymes, folk-tales, games and local songs in children's development, whereas the transfer of play from community to classroom is minimum and used as a classroom management practice than a learning strategy (Mendenhall et al., 2021). Educators need to draw pedagogical approaches such as play-based approach that are culturally indigenous and developmentally appropriate and best suit in all sociocultural contexts (Moland , 2017).

Ethiopia is one of the known nations for culturally diverse population and cultural values communicate to young children through play and myths. Schools are expected to transmit the good practices and values that exist locally and cultivate children's intellectual and moral development by using play-based learning. The role of teachers would be great in teaching children those values through play. Lack of training for teachers and lack of pedagogical skills are the most common challenges faced regarding the practice of ECCE in Ethiopia (Diale & Sewagegn, 2021). Some schools could be environmentally inadequate for play-based learning due to lack of spaces, toys, children's books and other relevant materials for play and learning (Mulugeta, 2015).

The narrow definition given to play-based learning as a child-directed activity made teachers uncertainty in implementation of play-based learning approach in classrooms (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Between direct instruction and free play, guided play can be just as successful at delivering content. It presents a learning objective, scaffolds the environment, and gives kids a lot of influence over their education (Weisberg et al, 2013). In most cases teachers use direct instruction methods to deliver lessons and studies showed that teacher-directed learning is sometimes regarded as inherently passive and un-engage children in the learning process (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). Many kindergarten teachers support the use of play-based learning, but how this play is implemented lacks consistency and clarity (Fisseha & Pyle , 2016).

The national guidelines of Ethiopia's Early Childhood Care and Education promote play-based learning as a strategy in early learning programs, with the play activities being child-directed and led by teachers, as well as activities that are freely selected by the children (MoE, 2012). According to the Ethiopian ECCE policy, play should be given appropriate time and is regarded part of active

learning rather than learning in and of itself, which is one of the policy's limitations. The ECCE guideline states that, students are expected to spend eight hours of the day in school starting from 2 o'clock in the morning up to 10: 25 in the afternoon in school days. From the eight hours only one hour and forty minutes of the time is allocated for play.

Mahmud (2020), in his study stated that kindergarten teachers agreed that play has great benefit for childrens' learning but the implementation doesn't match with this understanding. The extent at which teachers consider play-based learning in their day to day practices lacks consistency and clarity. Scarcity of conclusive evidence regarding the practice of play-based learning in Ethiopia, and Local studies that examine the practice of play-based learning are very thin and there is no empirical evidence on the implementation of play-based learning. Therefore, the intention of the current study will be to evaluate the practice of play-based learning in kindergartens found in Lideta sindergarteub city woreda 8.

1.2. Objective of the study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the current practice of play-based learning in Lideta Sub-city, Addis Ababa. Specifically, the study was intended to answer the following basic questions:

1. How do teachers understand play-based learning?
2. For what purpose do KG teachers use play-based learning?
3. What type of play and play-based learning approach do kindergarten teachers use in the teaching and learning process?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges of kindergarten teachers in using play-based learning?

1.3. Significance of the study

In order to enhance the teaching and learning process in kindergartens, it is crucial to look into the implementation of play-based learning in early childhood education. In light of this, the study will have following significance.

- To Identify the knowledge gap with regards to teachers' understanding of children's play and assist teachers in understanding the value of play, how to use it in early childhood programs.
- Understanding the challenges towards play is important for educator, policy makers, and stakeholders to work together to address the challenges in order to promote effective and equitable play-based learning practice.
- It will help policy makers and practitioners to use it as an input in improvement of the early childhood education curriculum.
- It will help as a stepping stone for future researchers and educators for further research in the area.

1.4. Scope of the study

Addis Ababa administration is structured in to 11 sub-cities and this study was limited in scope to two purposely selected kindergartens (one public and another private) in Lideta sub-city. Since research in the implementation of play-based learning in Ethiopia is limited, the study was basically aimed at generating evidence to shape practice and initiate further investigation in the area. Thus, the study findings do not represent the whole situation of play-based instruction in Addis Ababa kindergartens but gives hint regarding current practices, and supports identification of implications and research agendas for the future endeavors.

1.5. Operational definitions

Play-based learning: refers to a teaching approach that integrates play and education, incorporates child-initiated and teacher-supported learning, and is founded on the notion that children learn best when they participate in activities that are enjoyable and meaningful to them.

Practice: refers to the way in which play-based learning is implemented in kindergartens

Kindergartens: refers to a classes or schools for young children, usually four to six years old that prepares children for formal education

Governmental (public) kindergartens: refers to kindergartens run by the government.

Private kindergartens: refers to kindergartens run by private organizations or individuals.

Chapter two

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Play and Play- based learning conceptualizations

Play is crucial in the early years of a child's life. Play is a child's work, and it helps a child make bonds with others, master a skill, learn rules, and learn how to behave in society. Play also aids in a child's overall growth by stimulating the brain through the production of nerve cell connections. Children should be given the opportunity to play with a variety of engaging materials in an environment that encourages discovery and learning (Jona & Sandra , 2010). Children gain from play in social, cognitive, emotional, creative, and physical ways. Problem solving, decision making, and creativity are all tied to cognitive development, and children can readily develop these skills as well as their imagination and memory through play. (Saghir Ahmad et al., 2016).

The value of play-based learning as a way for facilitating children's learning is recognized by early childhood philosophers. Friedrich Frobel, Johanna Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Maria Montessori are well-known educators who pioneered the use of play in both child rearing and educational programs. They took their method from children's natural play activities and abstracted and systematized it. Frobel used play as a medium for education in his kindergarten, and his curriculum includes manipulative objects, craft activities such as paper weaving and paper folding, as well as children's songs and games. Children, on the other hand, did not participate in free and expressive play. He used his material and activities to help children gain abstract ideas and spiritual meanings. While Montessori encourages children's free play and help children to sharpen their abilities to gather and organize their sensory impression in order to better absorb knowledge. And, according to Dewey, play can help youngsters reconstruct their experiences and derive meaning from them. Children's natural play became widely acknowledged after the introduction of modern nursery schools in the first quarter of the twentieth century. (Saracho & Spodek , 1995)

We can see how children learn at different stages and their growing capacity in Piaget's assessment, indicating that children have distinct cognitive abilities at different ages. Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" describes children's problem-solving abilities, and he believed that as children grow older, they gain more knowledge, and it is the social interactions that children have that have the greatest impact on their cognitive development, and (Daniel , 2008).

Play based learning is a developmentally appropriate practice that unifies play and educational pedagogy (Pyle & DeLuca, 2016). During play activities, students learn cognitive, social, and physical abilities. Tasks might be student-led play or teacher-led tasks with clear objectives. Students may be more engaged in play-based learning, have the chance to learn through experimentation and trial-and-error, which helps to form neural pathways, play with others to develop communication, teamwork, and negotiation skills, and play engages the fine and gross motor functions, which enhances physical abilities (Drew, 2022).

2.2. Theories of play

The classical and the contemporary theories of play are the two important theories that help to explain the behavior observed in children's play. The classical theory emphasized the biological and intrinsic features of play, using both physiological and evolutionary explanations (Feinberg, 2010). Surplus energy theory proposes that play is the opposite of work and supported by the idea that kids need to play outside in order to burn off any excess energy they may have accumulated by sitting still for so long in class (Evans & Pellegrini, 1997).

The relaxation theory proposes individual restores energy during play (Saracho, 2017). The recapitulation theory, which is based on the idea of instinct, contends that children can express their instincts via play, diminishing them in the process (Verenikina et al., 2003). Children become more prepared for adult life's challenges through play. And in pre-exercise theory, play is a natural approach for children to prepare for adult efforts since their play experiences are similar to those they would encounter as they grow older (Feinberg, 2010).

The psychological importance and significance of a child's social, cognitive, and emotional development are emphasized in contemporary play theories. The Froebel, Reggio Emilia, Forest schools, Steiner-Waldorf Schools, and Montessori are the five contemporary Early Childhood perspectives that encourage play. These approaches based their ideas of different theorists (Drew, 2022).

Piaget and Vygotsky, two cognitive learning theorists, thought that children's surroundings have a significant part in their learning process and both believed that play promotes both mental and social abilities in children (Daniel , 2008). The hypothesis of Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1967) cognitive development theory is about how mental processes and intellect are built. The cognitive theory of Piaget (1952) is divided into three stages of play: Sensorimotor play, also known as

functional play, symbolic play and rules-based games. As children progress through the stages, they learn new skills and move from one level of mastery to the next. According to Vygotsky (1962) a number of intellectual skills are increased during symbolic or dramatic play (Feinberg, 2010).

In the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud (1923-1973), play had a specific role in children's emotional development. Play has a therapeutic effect on children because it allows them to release unpleasant emotions and replace them with happy ones. Arousal modulation theory explains how play allows children to locate sources of stimulation that allow them to capture specific information in order to learn about the world around them. Children's play, according to Meta communicative theory, is described as when children interact with one another to create a make-believe activity (Feinberg, 2010).

2.3. Characteristics of play-based learning

Quality play involves the whole child: gross motor, fine motor, senses, emotion, intellect, individual growth and social interaction (Randy & Vicki, 2014). Play is one of the most important ways for young children to gain important knowledge and skills. Play is difficult to define, yet the key characteristics of play are agreed upon by researchers and theorists. In research from LEGO foundation (2018), activities that are pleasurable, meaningful, iterative, actively engaging and socially interactive put as the five characteristics that embody educational play experiences. Children should be allowed to take an active role in and ownership of their experiences through play, and adults should respect and trust children as capable, independent, and agents of their own fun learning journeys. Play promotes intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development in children, and it can take many forms, including object play, imaginative play, play with peers and adults, lonely play, cooperative play, associative play, and physical play (UNICEF, 2018).

As Sheridan stated in her book titled play in Early Childhood, there are four important things for children's play: playthings, play space, playtime and playmates. Children's play things are objects that can be used flexibly in variety of ways. Children should be provided with playing materials that are appropriate for the child's age and stage of growth and development. Children also need time and space where they can play with others and for their solitary activity both in the indoor and outdoor places. Playmates have a great contribution in increasing children's social skill, an awareness of self and an awareness of norms and values. Play gives children the opportunity to

strengthen their body, mind and social competency. And the educational value of play focused on exploration, discovery and development of skills (Mary, 2017).

Most of the time play is associated with only fun activities. Although it comes naturally, play must also be supported by the environment in order to be productive. Children are given the flexibility to direct their own activities on one end of the spectrum, while their play is guided by adults on the other. Learning can take place at any point along the spectrum, but some degree of freedom is necessary for children to be engaged and effective learners (The LEGO Foundation, 2019).

Including traditional games in teaching activities help children to gain the social rules and ethics more easily, to get to know their national identity, culture and values. The content feature of traditional games have features of improving the kids motor, social, emotional, cognitive and language development and it also meets the goal in the kindergarten curriculum (Yucel & Elcin, 2015).

2.4. Categories of play-based learning

Play-based learning is an effective teaching approach and it supposed to integrate child-directed, teacher-guided and teacher led-learning (Parker et al, 2022). We can better understand the true nature of play and how it relates to learning in the spectrum of play-based learning reflecting different level of child autonomy relative to adult control. At one end is free play where children decide what to do without the guidance and support of adults and on the other end is direct instruction: formal, traditional teaching in which teachers present information to children or tell them what to do (Zosh et al, 2018). Between these two extremes is guided play, which is defined as engaging activities that are scaffold around a learning objective yet give children the freedom to explore on their own (Byrne, 2022). Play and playful learning helps children to demonstrate their advanced skills. Guided play creates a learning situation that encourages children to become active and engaged partners in the learning process. And in free play children learn how to manage to work with others, to negotiate, to take turn and make friends (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008).

Children develop their social and self-control abilities while engaging in child-directed and child-initiated activities during free play. The children themselves choose what games to play and how to play them (Weisberg et.al., 2015). Free play gives kids the chance to express themselves, be creative, and be motivated without adult intervention (Wasik & Jacobi, 2016).

A combination of adult-initiated and child-directed activities make up guided play. The best way to include play in early curricula without sacrificing educational objectives and while enabling kids to enjoy school, according to researchers, is through guided play (Weisberg et.al., 2015). Guided play has three characteristics: children have some freedom or choice with in a playful educational task; an adult has a learning goal in mind, the adult scaffolds the activity using subtle techniques, like hints or suggestions, open-ended questions, co-play, and modeling. This enables them to guide children toward the learning objective while also allowing them the freedom to get there their own way (Byrne, 2022).

Play promotes children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional growth. To ensure that kids receive the advantages of play, educators should try to give children a variety of varied play experiences (Drew, 2022). Drew, describe 17 different types of play based on the variances in play preferences and styles, taking into account risk tolerance, level of adult interaction, level of peer interaction, amount of freedom and control the child has, play objectives, and developmental ability.

1. Unstructured play – the child, not the adult, is in charge of the play. There are no definite goals in this type of play, and the child will be in command throughout the activity. Children can express their creativity, self-assurance, and innovation through unstructured play, but on the other hand, it may not achieve curriculum goals or developmental outcomes.
2. Structured play – it is related to adult led play and it involves play that has clear rules. Play scenarios have clear objectives and adheres to curriculum requirements. Children's creativity may stifled by the need to stay in the guidelines.
3. Guided play – It was created to serve as a mediator between structured and unstructured play and is favored by many student-centered educators. Play can be facilitated by adults by posing probing questions, exhibiting developmentally appropriate language, introducing things new materials to stretch children's thinking, and fostering communication between children.
4. Unoccupied play – During the first six months of a child's life, they go through this stage of play. While there is no specific play goal, children gain sensory experiences by reaching

out for and grabbing nearby objects. When children have developed self-control and are comfortable in their environment, they will advance to the stage of solitary play.

5. Solitary play – it can be seen at any age, but between the ages of six months and two years, it occurs frequently. In solitary play, the child engages in simple play with the objects and surroundings. Children can learn at a pace that gives them more control over thinking time.
6. Onlooker play – Children engage in onlooker play, a brief stage of play during which they express interest in the play behaviors of other children without engaging in their own play. When a child is in an unfamiliar situation, they might prefer to explore the surroundings first before slowly interacting.
7. Parallel play – it usually occurs between 18 months and 4 years of age. Without really interacting with any other children, children observe and imitate their peers. Children share a play area when playing, but they do not share play experiences.
8. Associative play – Children play together and interact while doing this. It involves negotiating how to use resources and space, asking questions of one another, and looking for assistance from others but doesn't share play objectives.
9. Cooperative play- It is distinguished by collaboration in play and play objectives in addition to resource sharing. Children are not just playing near one another when they engage in this form of play; they are actually playing together. Children assigning roles to one another during the games, compromise and sacrifice are necessary for the games to function well and to achieve their objectives.
10. Symbolic play – it is also known as pretend play and it involves the use of inanimate objects to represent other objects, people or things.
11. Imaginative play – It involves using imaginative fancies and storylines to build fictitious worlds during play, and it gives children the freedom and chance to try on different identities.
12. Domestic role play - It is a type of play when children imitate their parents' domestic routines by pretending to undertake chores like housekeeping, cooking, yard work, and having a profession. Play like this seems to include enculturation into cultural norms. It can be a representation of early society and gender expectations. During this type of play, many parents may unintentionally encourage gender norms.

13. Digital play - Play that takes place on or with the aid of use of computers, smartphones, or other digital devices in or as part of play. Complex real-time gaming can test children's multitasking and time management abilities while providing an opportunity for the teamwork and problem-solving skills they need to advance through challenging games. In the correct situations, digital play is rapidly being recognized as having the capacity to challenge children's social and cognitive abilities.
14. Risky play – It involves exposure to risk and the possibility of failure, as well as chances to overcome mental, physical, and psychological obstacles. Children benefit from risky play by identifying their areas of strength and weakness, improving their abilities in new and challenging situations, developing self-confidence and self-belief, and learning self-regulation skills.
15. Outdoor play – outdoor play exposes children to unknown environment, raw materials, and a changing natural environment. It is best when it occurs where children are exposed to the weather and nature. Additionally, it enables children to stretch out their gross motor abilities, which cannot be completely developed in smaller enclosed settings like suburban homes.
16. Sensory play - play that intentionally engages all five senses by incorporating sensory materials into the play environment. Play scenarios created expressly for children to practice using their five senses touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing come under the heading of sensory play. Typically, a sensory play experience will involve a resource-rich setting where the adult has purposefully placed objects that excite the senses.
17. Oral language play - Language is important to all social play, and social play underpins children's language development. Oral language play involves the deliberate use of new language in real-world situations to increase children's communication skills.

2.5. Benefits of play-based learning

Play-based learning in early education has both developmental and academic learning benefits for children (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Play has multiple benefits. It is useful for development of motor skills, sharpening of senses, expression of emotions, to exercise sharing and turn taking, for vocabulary growth, to increase concentration, and for expansion of imagination and creativity (Feinberg, 2010). Play-based learning enables educators to interact with kids and concentrate on

their interests, skills, academic, social, and emotional development (Taylor & Boyer, 2019) and it also provides a joyful experience for children (Feinberg, 2010).

Through play-based learning children can develop their social skill. Children may have the chance to practice using language to express, communicate, and share their thoughts and feelings with their peers throughout these interactions. Children are explicitly taught through these play experiences the social norms and regulations of play, including sharing, taking turns, transitions, taking charge, and cleaning up after play (Taylor & Boyer, 2019).

Learning should encompass the interconnected areas of physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and creative skills that children develop as they play and grow. According to studies, various learning domains are more interconnected than previously believed and playful learning activities can be particularly effective in facilitating deeper learning, developing a wide range of abilities, and establishing an understanding of academic concepts (The LEGO Foundation, 2019). When children are active in their play, learning becomes easier (Feinberg, 2010). Play can be considered as a technique of increasing academic competencies like literacy and numeracy. It is a common misconception that learning occurs only during direct instruction and considering play only for enjoyment. By allowing students to build on their existing knowledge, experiences, and abilities through interactions with classmates and their environment, play offers experiences that can help enhance academic learning. (Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

According to Hart, Burts, and Charles worth's evaluation of the research (as cited in Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009) children who participated in programs that used direct instructional approaches had higher levels of stress, less success academically, and worse behavioral and motivational outcomes.

2.6. Factors of implementing play-based learning

Despite the fact that play-based learning is an important technique for increasing learning and education outcomes, there are several factors that contribute to play based learning are not well-integrated into early childhood education programs. Lack of understanding of the value of play as a foundation for academic concepts; Parental or caregiver misconceptions about play; Curriculum and early learning standards that do not address play; Lack of teacher professional development

that focuses on learning through play are some of the factors contribute for learning through play not deeply integrated in early childhood education programs (UNICEF, 2018).

2.6.1. Parental or caregiver misconceptions

Parents' knowledge gap towards the importance of play can affect the implementation of play-based learning. Teachers and parents frequently hold the view that, play is not the same as learning and contrasts with the seriousness of work and school (Dowd & Thomsen, 2021). School-home collaboration is very important for the continuity of the learning process. Parents who support play-based learning facilitate play-based learning in home setting (Stella & Beatrice Matafwali, 2020).

2.6.2. Definition towards play

The definition given for play can also affect the implementation of play-based approach. A restricted definition of play-based learning as a child-directed practice, resulting in teacher uncertainty about the implementation of play-based approach. Because, play and learning were seen as separate constructs, play-based learning was seen to be difficult to meet academic standards and, in this case, students primarily engage in free play. In contrary, teachers who believe that play could support the academic, their students engaged along a continuum from child directed to more teacher directed play (Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

2.6.3. Teachers' professional development

Integrating academic standards with play-based pedagogy is one of the challenges of educators' face in implementing play-based learning. Because play is less structured and difficult to plan, educators face challenge of balancing academic learning, using developmentally appropriate implementation practice, and decide how and when to incorporate play into the daily kindergarten program (Danniels & Pyle, 2018).

Support from school leadership and teachers' education and qualification is a key issue in implementing play-based learning. Principals influence teachers' instructional practices by encouraging collaboration and communication among teachers about instructional practices and the inability of teachers to perceive play and learning is a challenge in implementing play-based learning (Ogolo, 2021).

2.6.4. The environment

Supportive and developmentally appropriate environment is important for implementing play-based learning. A study conducted at Early Childhood Education Centers in Zambia revealed that some of the challenges identified by teachers in implementing play-based learning were lack of age appropriate playing materials, limited indoor and outdoor space, limited toys, lack of teaching and learning materials, and lack of clear implementation guideline on play in the curriculum (Stella & Beatrice, 2020). Other obstacles to the implementation of play-based learning include assessment and accountability, absence of recognized instruments and reliable methods to measure the benefit associated with play-based learning condition (DeLuca & Hughes, 2014)

2.6.5. The role of teachers

It is important that educators are being thoughtful and intentional in implementing play-based learning. In the way they integrate play in the classroom environment, they need to determine how and to what extent they involve themselves in playful context (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). In playful learning it is the duty of the teacher to plan, facilitate, guide and provide an opportunity for hands-on learning. The educator has a very significant role to play in actively watching, assessing, and taking action on opportunities to further students' learning while they are engaged in play-based learning activities (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Classroom instructors are in a unique position to provide educational opportunities that will promote all children's academic success and cultural integrity since they are closest to the children (Phuntsog, 1999).

The role of teachers in promoting play-based learning can include participation, observation, planning, guiding, selecting materials and resources, setting up learning corners and working in partner with parents (PENG, 2011). In order to achieve their learning objectives through playful interactions, Peng showed how teachers used a variety of strategies, such as direct instruction, questioning, providing cues, listening, making suggestions, and extending the experiences by offering new ideas or new materials. He also emphasized the importance of teachers' roles as observers, planners, and evaluators in playful learning.

- Observer - All teachers who participated in the observation process saw how the children interacted with one another and with the tools and resources. Additionally, they watched how kids maintained their play experiences and searched for children who had trouble playing or joining play groups.

- Planner - Planning is specifically related to the curriculum that was relevant to each student's situation. For the term, teachers prepare and organize themes and subjects. This would involve organizing learning spaces with designated learning corners to promote the learning experiences related to each subject, as well as managing the materials and resources.
- Evaluator - Teachers functioned as evaluators, observing how various play situations met the requirements of certain children and what lessons were being learned while they engaged in the activity. They maintained track of the growth of the kids and utilized that data to organize the program as well as provide parents with that information. As part of the documentary proof and to monitor students' progress, teachers gather children's artifacts like their written work, drawings, and photos of them at work. Parents want to see their kids in action, and frequently these kinds of evaluations include information on how much learning is achieved through play.

2.7. Play based learning in Ethiopia

In Ethiopian context, as it is stated on the Ethiopian kindergarten education program standard, the kindergarten years start at the age of four goes up to the age six (MoE, 2016). And the major challenges of Ethiopian Early Childhood Education are the physical space, curriculum content and pedagogy, qualification of early childhood educators and caregivers, and partnership with families and communities (Fantahun, 2016). Despite the fact that many schools are limited on resources, teachers' qualifications are even more critical to kids' performance. Qualified teachers have effective ways of keeping students engaged in learning mostly in urban areas of the country (Fadila Adam, 2020). The government of Ethiopia has shown a grown interest in improving the quality of ECCE and work to improve teacher educators' knowledge, skills and experience for ECCE instruction across all colleges of teacher education. The Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP V) has been directing national planning and execution in the education sector, with the goal of "providing all children with access to pre-primary education for school readiness." (MOE, 2015).

The national framework for Early Childhood Care and Education of Ethiopia ensure a big step forward in giving children in Ethiopia a healthy start in life, an enabling and stimulating environment for developing their talents and stimulate and help them to become caring and

productive citizens (MOE, 2010). Several countries use play-based pedagogy as a pedagogical approach to teach kindergarten children, and they incorporate it into their curriculum. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education's curriculum framework also encourages the use of a child-centered approach, in which children can learn through play in an informal environment at their own pace, as well as free play, which encourages children to engage in learning voluntarily, experimenting, and making their own discoveries, either alone or with other children and adults (MOE, 2009).

2.8. Theoretical Framework

Various useful theories can be used to explain and understand the dynamics of play and play behavior in young children. The study adopts the Developmental-Interaction Approach as a theoretical framework to investigate the practice of play-based learning in kindergartens. This framework emphasizes the dynamic interplay between children's development and their interactions with the environment, including peers, teachers, materials, and play opportunities. It recognizes the progressive nature of children's development and the role of interactions in shaping their learning experiences.

The developmental perspective within the framework is based on the work of theorists such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. It acknowledges that children's learning and development occur in a sequential manner, with each stage building upon previous experiences (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective underscores the importance of aligning play-based learning experiences with children's developmental abilities and interests.

It emphasizes the critical role of interactions between children and their environment in shaping their learning experiences. According to Rogoff (1990) children's cognitive and social development is influenced by their active engagement with the physical and social world. This perspective highlights the significance of the kindergarten environment, including the availability of play materials, the design of play spaces, and the quality of teacher-child interactions, in facilitating children's engagement and learning (Smith & Pellegrini, 2019).

The sociocultural perspective, drawing upon the work of Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that learning is situated within a social and cultural context. It recognizes that children's play-based learning experiences are influenced by cultural values, norms, and social interactions within the

kindergarten setting (Rogoff, 2003). This perspective sheds light on the role of cultural factors in shaping the implementation and outcomes of play-based learning in kindergartens.

Teachers have a crucial role as facilitators of play-based learning. Drawing on the work of Bruner (1986), it recognizes that teachers serve as guides and mediators, providing support and scaffolding to enhance children's learning experiences during play. The quality of teacher-child interactions, the provision of open-ended questions, and the use of scaffolding techniques influence children's engagement and cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 2017).

The active engagement of children in play-based learning experiences results in a learning outcome. Research by Bergen (2012) and Pellegrini (2009) demonstrates that play offers opportunities for children to develop cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. Engaging in play-based learning fosters creativity, problem-solving abilities, collaboration, and self-regulation among children (Smith & Pellegrini, 2019).

Contextual factors, such as cultural and policy influences, shape the practice of play-based learning. Cultural beliefs about the role of play, parental expectations, and societal norms can influence the implementation of play-based learning in kindergartens (Gaskins, 2013). Additionally, policy frameworks and administrative support impact the availability of resources and the integration of play-based learning within the curriculum (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

By employing the Developmental-Interaction Approach as the theoretical framework, this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the practice of play-based learning in kindergartens.

2.9. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the practice of play-based learning and factors that contribute to its implementation in kindergarten settings. Information from the literature study was used to construct conceptual framework. For this study the contributing factors for the implementation of play-based learning has been overviewed in the figure below

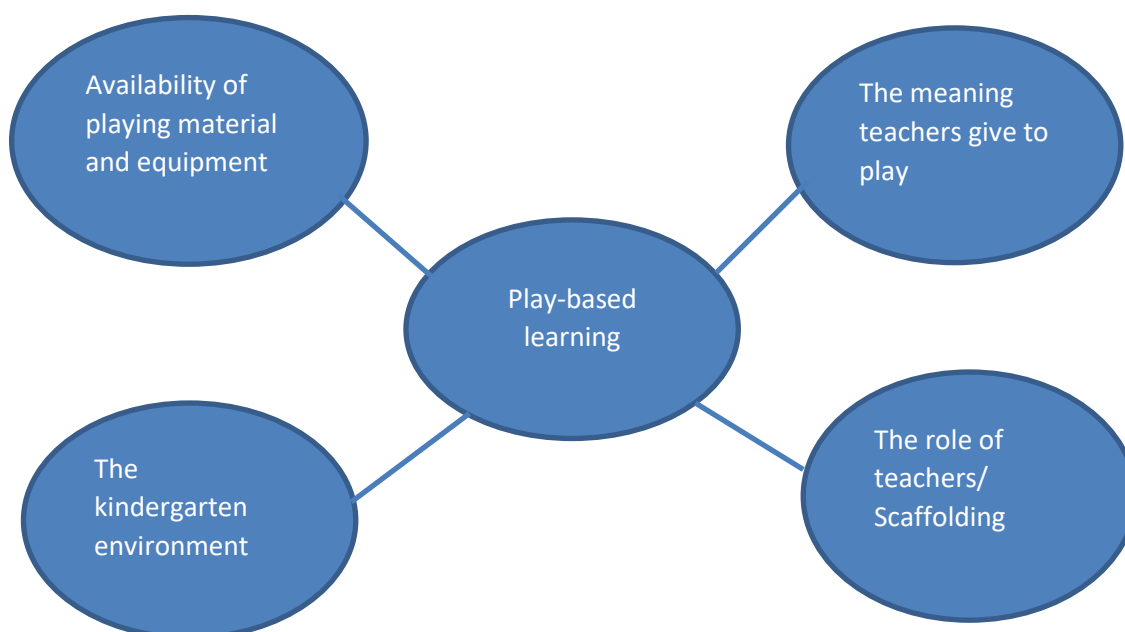


Fig. 1 Overview of Conceptual Frame work

Chapter three

3. Research Methods

This chapter presents the research method used. It contains the research design, instruments for the data collection, data collection procedure, method of data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1. Research design

This study tried to investigate the practices of play-based learning in selected kindergartens found Lideta sub-city, Addis Ababa. The researcher used a qualitative case study research design for collecting and analyzing the understanding of play-based learning and to identify challenges for its proper implementation. Qualitative case study design was used because it is more holistic and it helps to gain a deeper understanding of individual participants, including their opinion, perspectives, and attitudes (Nassaji, 2015). Studying the practice of play-based learning using qualitative case study design allows the researcher to deeply explore and understand the implementation of play-based learning within government and private kindergarten settings.

3.2. Study Site

The study aimed to explore Play-based learning practices of kindergartens in woreda 8 Lideta sub-city. Therefore, the study was conducted in two kindergartens found in the sub-city, Addis Ababa.

3.3. Population

Based on Lideta sub-city education bureau, in woreda 8 there are 11 kindergartens and from this Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten and Mald kindergarten were purposefully selected. The reason behind selecting these kindergartens is, studying kindergarten in diverse contexts in this case in government and private kindergartens gives broaden understanding on the implementation of play-based learning. In addition, it helped the researcher to explore how play-based practices are adapted and implemented in different settings and examine the potential impact of contextual factors on play-based learning. Accordingly, the study included government and private kindergartens to get deeper understanding of the topic.

3.4. Sampling Technique

The researcher used purposive sampling technique to decide participants. Purposive sampling helped the researcher to select study kindergarten and participants based on the objective of the study. The purpose of purposefully selecting kindergartens in studying practice of play-based learning is to ensure that the chosen setting aligns with the specific research objectives and provide rich and in-depth insight into the current practice of play-based learning. Therefore, the researcher purposefully selected six participant teachers for the interview from both kindergartens. The selection comprised of four main teachers and two kindergarten directors. The participants for the interview were selected by considering the factors such as having the kindergartens administration support, teacher's willingness to participate in the study, teachers teaching experience and familiarity with play-based learning approaches, and taking in to account teachers schedules and workloads. This deliberate selection enhances the depth and relevance of the research findings and contributes to the overall understanding and improvement of play-based learning in early childhood education.

3.5. Data collection Instruments

To gather a comprehensive how play-based learning is practiced in the kindergartens the researcher used observation guideline, semi-structured interviews, and documents such as lesson plan used as a data collection instrument.

The researcher then developed a semi-structured interview form and an observation guideline for data gathering. Based on the research objectives and literature review key themes were identified

to explore the study and both the observation and the interview guides were prepared. The interview guide was prepared by creating open-ended questions that allow participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights in their own words. An academic advisor reviews the prepared interview questions and observation guide to see whether they are adequate for the topic, and depending on the feedback received, the questions are revised and rearranged.

Observation

The observation guide used to gather data in a more organized manner. Observation offers the researcher first-hand information and observed phenomena as it occurs in the natural setting regarding the practice of play-based learning in kindergartens. It also enables the researcher to really see what teachers do rather than what they claim they do. As a result, observation was the main instrument of data collection in this study. The researcher used self-developed observation checklist to observe the classroom environment, the learning process, the classroom management, and the classroom size, play materials available in the classroom, the students' participation, and the time allowed for play.

The researcher gathered field notes while observing the physical school's environment, available outdoor play equipment, outdoor play spaces, and teacher to student interaction and in addition pictures were taken to aid in the recalling things that the researcher observed at later time

The observation concentrated on KG-2 and KG-3 classes because KG-2 and KG-3 children are more physically developed and able to move and play independently than KG-1 children, who require more extensive care and the observation was done in each one twice on separate days while the instructor was teaching different lessons. In each classroom, between 6- and 7-hour observational data were recorded of the classroom environment and learning activities.

Interview

The interview was conducted after the observation. This helps the researcher to cross check what the participants said aligned with the data gathered from the observation and raise questions in the interview if a gap is observed. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide as a second tool to collect data and face to face interviews were conducted. The researcher constructs open-ended questions for the interview to dig more information. In the interview the researcher used mobile phone recorder and note-taking were used to record the data. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and school directors were between 20 and 25 minutes in length.

Document analysis

Document analysis is useful in providing context and background information. The researcher used relevant documents such as curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and assessment materials to gain insights into the implementation and evaluation of play-based learning practices. The documents provide information on the goals and objectives of the activity, materials and the resources used, on how teachers plan to evaluate children's progress, and information on age gender and background of children. The researcher observed what is written on the lesson plan and what actually happens in the classroom and evaluate teachers whether they deviate from the plan or not based on children's interests or needs.

3.6. Procedure for data collection

When the researcher studies the practice of play-based learning using observation and interviews, the researcher employed certain procedures. The researcher gathered in-depth and multi-faceted data on the practice of play-based learning by capturing both the observed behavior, interactions as well as perspectives and experiences of teachers by combining observation and interviews.

After the objectives of the observation clearly defined, such as understanding the types of play observed, teacher-child interaction, and the use of materials and resourced used, the researcher identified classroom settings and outdoor play areas with in the kindergarten where play-based learning activities occurred. After that the researcher used the observation guide to actively observe and document the play-based learning activities. During the observation field notes were taken to capture relevant information.

The interviews were done after the observation is done. The kindergarten teachers and principals were identified to participate in the study. The researcher prepared a set of open-ended interview questions that align with the research objectives to explore the topics related to the practice of play-based learning. Before conducting interviews, the researcher obtained an informed consent from participants to participate in the study and ensure that they understand the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of their participation. Then the researcher schedule and conduct the interview with selected participants. With the participant's permission, audio recorded the interviews for accurate data transcription and analysis. While conducting the interview, the researcher made some notes and the interview data was transcribed and analyzed.

3.7. Method of data analysis

The qualitative data that was gathered was examined qualitatively. Thematic analysis was used to qualitatively assess the data from observations and interviews. First, the researcher heard all the recorded data from the participant responses and read the all notes taken during the interview and observations. The researcher used the transcriptions from the interview and the notes from the observation and categorized into different themes based on the research questions of the study. The thematic analysis involves steps involving becoming familiar with data by reading and rereading transcripts and field notes from the observation, initial coding by identifying and labeling themes present in the data, group related codes together to form broader themes, review and refine the identified themes that emerge from the data, and finally the narrative of the themes was written. Finally, findings, conclusions, and possible recommendations are presented based on the data-analysis and interpretations.

3.8. Ethical considerations

The researcher tried to clearly inform to respondents about the purpose of the study and the participant's consent to participate in the research was voluntary. In doing so, first the researcher went with the official letter written from Addis Ababa University Early Childhood Care and Education Department to selected kindergartens. Then the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the school principals to get permission to accomplish the work. Finally, to start collect the data, the researcher introduced the objective of the study to the participants and informed participants that the information they provided would be used only for the study purpose. Besides, to maintain the confidence of the respondents the researcher promised them that their responses would be kept confidential. Moreover, the study complied with the ethical guidelines of the kindergartens.

Chapter four

4. Results and Findings

This chapter presents the result and findings of the practice of play-based learning in kindergartens based on the data gathered through observation and interview. Data analysis and identification of findings followed the essence of research objectives stated. This section presents background of participants (data sources) followed by data analysis and identification of findings with regard to the practices of play-based learning and its challenges in the study kindergartens.

4.1. General background

4.1.1. Background of the participants

The data presented in this study is gathered from one governmental kindergarten (Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten and one from private kindergarten (MALD Kindergarten). The data sources are totally six, all females working in the sampled kindergartens. Table 1 presents the background profile of the key informants and their respective roles in the kindergartens.

Table 1 – Participants by sex and qualification

Kindergartens	Kindergarten type	Number of participants	Sex	Code	Educational Background	Years of teaching experience	Role of the informant
Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten	Governmental	3	F	MK1	Diploma	10	KG2 classroom main teacher
			F	MK2	Diploma	7	KG3 classroom main teacher
			F	MK3	Degree	5	School director
Mald Kindergarten	Private	3	F	MA1	Degree	7	KG2 classroom main teacher
			F	MA2	Masters	6	KG3 classroom main teacher
			F	MA3	Masters	15	School director

4.1.2. Background of Kindergartens

A) Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten (SC-1)

Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten (SC-1) is one of the governmental kindergartens found in Addis Ababa, situated in woreda 08 of Lideta sub-city. The kindergarten is under the administration of the primary school. The majority of the children are four to six-year-old students and most of them came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Around 405 students were enrolled in total for the 2022/2023 academic year. Classes are divided into three groups: Nursery, Lower KG and Upper KG. On average there were about 60 kids enrolled in each classroom and there were one or two teachers in one classroom. One school director (MK1), eleven female teachers, one male teacher, six child care providers, and two cleaners make up the kindergarten's 21 staff members. The kindergarten's official languages of teaching are Amharic and Afan Oromo. And it is one of the selected kindergartens for the pilot implementation of the new kindergarten curriculum.

B) Mald Kindergarten (SC-2)

Mald kindergten (SC-2) is a privately owned kindergarten located in woreda 08 of Lideta sub-city. In this kindergarten there were around 246 students and 22 children were students with a special need. The classes were categorized in to Nursery, KG and preparatory according to their age and level of education. The kindergarten constitutes a total of 66 staff members. One school director, one finance and administration, one special need coordinator, one speech therapist, 11 main teachers, 11 assistant teachers, 22 special need teachers, 9 child care providers and lunch time monitors, 4 cleaners, 2 guards, one store keeper, one campus police who monitor over all things, one maintenance crew and one messenger. Amharic and English languages were the instruction languages of the kindergarten.

4.2. The practice of play-based learning

This section addresses the discussion on play-based learning practice based on the information obtained through observation and interview.

4.2.1. School Setting

Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten is found in the primary school compound located on one side corner of the school. There are paintings on the walls of the classrooms but it is not that much attractive. When we see the physical environment, the classrooms are built near to the fences and

there was a space in the middle where the children can play. There is inadequate space for the children to move, play and explore their environment. There are some equipment made of metal such as seesaw, slide, and a swing that the children can play with but, they still require proper maintenances. The playground was covered with thin asphalt and there were also big rocks everywhere that can cause harm if children fell on to it. The hand wash stations are not portable for the children to use it and there are only two toilets that are not clean and lack ventilation.

On the other hand, MALD Kindergarten school environment seems conducive for learning. The classroom and the playground are in different sides of the compound. Half part of the playground is covered with grass and the half part covered with terrazzo and there are paintings on the floor that stimulates learning for children like numbers, shapes, letters and basic colors. There is enough space for children to move and play. The outdoor had different age and developmentally appropriate playing equipment such as swings, seesaws, trampoline, climbers, monkey bar, slide, sand pit, and used tires that children can play with. The hand wash stations and toilets were clean and age appropriate for children and there were also trash boxes in different corners.

4.2.2. The classroom settings

A classroom environment plays a significant role in influencing the mood and behavior of students. The first few days in school will set the tone for the whole academic year. A kindergarten needs to make the setup more creative to ensure that the classroom promotes a positive learning environment. The classroom settings incorporate classroom space, number of students and teachers in one classroom and the sitting arrangements.

Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten classroom setting

From the classroom observation, the researcher observed the classroom size, the classroom space, the number of students and teachers in one classroom, and the sitting arrangement of the classroom for both kindergartens. The students in the class should be comfortable and have proper space. The observation results of Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten revealed that classrooms are average in size and that class sizes are large. The number of students enrolled in one classroom is around 60. The classroom space is fully occupied with tables and chairs, and there is no free space that allows children to move around. The walls of the classrooms had few posters, and there were not enough windows, so the classrooms were dark and poorly ventilated. The sitting arrangement doesn't

allow teachers to interact with children. The teacher stands in front of the students and uses the chalkboard to teach the children; it is more of a teacher-centered class.

Mald Kindergarten classroom setting

The observational findings at MALD Kindergarten revealed that the classes are spacious, with an average of 20–25 children each classroom. The classrooms were well bright and well-ventilated. The sitting arrangement encourages interaction between students and between students and teachers. Children may sit in the designated area during circle time. Each child will have their own mattress to sit on during circle time. The tables and chairs were set up in a circular pattern. A calendar wall with days, months, weather, and school days, a word wall, and posters for the alphabet, colors, shapes, and numbers are just a few of the displays on the walls in the classroom. Open shelves in the classroom make it simple to keep books organized and hold a variety of books appropriate for children's ages.

4.2.3. Daily routines of kindergartens

The daily routines and activities at Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten

There is a feeding program arranged by the government and the children don't need to bring lunch boxes. When the children come to school in the morning, they first eat their breakfast before getting in to class. After they finish their breakfast, they are allowed to play freely in the school compound until the flag ceremony started. On the flag ceremony, the entire children lineup in accordance with their classes and one teacher assigned for that day greet all the children and lead the children to sing a song and do some simple physical activities. After that, the children will go to class and class started at 3:00 am in the morning. The teacher took the attendance of children and went in to the day's lesson, and the children get out for a break at 4:00 am. During the break time children play with their friends and with the available equipment in the compound for an hour and there were only two teachers assigned to look after the children while they are playing. After the break time is over, they get back to class and learn the next lesson until the lunch break time. The lunch break will take an hour, after they get back from lunch they will have a 45-minute nap, and they will be ready for home time.

Even though students have positive interactions with teachers, due to many students in one classroom, it became challenging for teachers to address the needs of every student. Due to a lack

of space and lack of equipment that supports the teaching and learning process such as Television and speakers, it is only once a week children scheduled to watch stories from 'Thehay memar tewedalech' for each class.

The daily routines and activities at MALD kindergarten

The school door opens for children starting from 1:30 in the morning. Parents drop off their children and the children went directly to their classroom; put their lunch box and water bottle on the place allocated for it; they take out their book and give it to the teacher; turn over his/her attendance; and engaged in different activities found in the classroom until the flag ceremony. Before the flag ceremony there is a mass sport lead by a sport teacher. And every classroom will be scheduled for the mass sport three days a week. From the classroom schedule, physical exercise took twice in a week for 20 to 30 minutes of duration. The types of exercises were different based on children's ages. And some teachers stand in front of children and lead them to sing songs that had actions together. In addition to that, children's song opened using speakers and children sing and dance with it. Finally, the sing Ethiopian national anthem song and raise the flag and they back to class. When they arrive at class, it will be circle time, during which the children will sit in a circle on a mat, and the teacher will sit with them and do activities such as naming the months of the year, the days of the week, the weather of the day, and the number of days the students have attended class with the children. After that, it will be time for read-aloud, and the teacher will read the story for the students and ask them what the story is about. After story time, the teacher delivers the day's lesson and shows the kids what activities they did and how they are going to do them, and then the children sit on their chairs around the table. On one table, there could be four to five children. The time that children will go to the bathroom, go out for snack and lunch break, go out to play on the playground, and do different activities is scheduled in a way that doesn't overlap with other classes.

4.2.4. The conception towards play

Kindergarten teachers of Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten and Mald kindergarten were asked how they define and understand play. In response to this question, almost all agreed up on play is part of children's life and the majority of teachers defined play in terms of social and physical activities like running, jumping, climbing, playing with toys, singing, and dancing that produce happiness and enjoyment.

MK1 from Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten teachers explained play as:

“Prior to receiving trainings related to child development and instructional methods, I saw play as something to be enjoyed. But now that is not the case. Play can be defined as a way for children learn things, interact with one another, learn social life, and develop physically and emotionally. I may generalize by saying that play is a child's life”

And from the same school another teacher MK2 said *“For me, play is the daily lesson's spinal cord. It is a wonderful teaching tool, and it is difficult to imagine educating children without play and imparting knowledge that they ought to know. Furthermore, play is a child's life; it allows them to envision their future and has the potential to shape it.”*

According to MA1, *“Before I started teaching, I only thought of play as a child's activity. When I started teaching, I gained a deeper understanding of the concept, its benefits, and its meaning. Play is important for a child's holistic development. It could focus on their social interaction development as well as their physical, emotional, and spiritual growth. It facilitates in the development of many abilities. For instance, while children are playing group games and deciding who will start to play first, second, or third, they may practice negotiating and turn-taking abilities and it also helps to identify child's interest and talents”*

MA 2- *“play is a foundation for children development. Every day to day activity is a play for them and whether they know it or not there is something they learn from it. The type of play children engage could have both positive and negative impact on the children's life. Therefore, play is a means that shapes children's future”*

How do teachers use play in their classrooms depends on, the conception they had towards play. On the interview, teachers were asked: in what ways do you use play-based learning? Those who define play as an enjoyment use play as an energizer to get the attentions of student and as a reward for those students have good classroom participation. And those who defined play as a tool for learning use play for different curricular areas, for teaching environment, literacy, numeracy, relating with others, taking care of self and physical skills.

4.2.5. How do teachers engage play in learning

Insufficient knowledge and skills on the concept of play-based learning can make difference to apply play-based learning in practical context. In the interview, teachers were asked the question:

How do you evaluate yourself regarding the use of play-based learning? And from their answers the researcher was able to identify how kindergarten teachers from the selected kindergartens use play-based approach in classrooms and recognized there was a mixed understanding towards play-based learning among different teachers. Most of the teachers believe and understand the importance of play-based learning as a mechanism to teach children. From the teachers' response play-based learning is allowing children to play use materials to explore; it is involving play or different fun activities in between classes; it is a best approach to teach children

(MK1) from Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten said that

"I try to use and engage play in the teaching and learning process. From the trainings I took I learned and believed that children learn when they are free from stress and learning should be an enjoyment for them. When they didn't learn through play they can't follow what is being thought and the class will become disruptive. If children didn't learn through play they get bored and you could saw them spontaneously yawn. I strongly believe that kindergarten teaching should engage play whatever they are learning. Should include facial expressions, body movements, changing voices will make the teaching interesting and it catches children's attention."

Another teacher from the same school said *"I use 'play' as a control mechanism for classroom management. I encourage children who participate in the classroom by giving them a clap with different rhythms and to punish those who disturb, I make them to sit in the class while other children go out to play"*

MA 1-

"Students wouldn't find class dull if you use a play-based learning strategy, and children would like going to school. It makes children love going to school. Play-based learning is a method that involves interaction. Every time kids congregate in a classroom, they're either reading, collaborating, or learning something new. As a consequence, the children have enthusiasm with all of the activities that are done in the classroom."

MA 2-

"Play-based learning makes the teaching and learning process student-centered, and it is fruitful, it gives children the opportunity to learn from each other. It is not only one way, the teacher could

also learn from the students. It is also beneficial to observe the children's emotions; during play, some children may be bored while others enjoy it. The activities children engage in are also used as a mechanism for continuous assessment."

4.2.5.1. Types of children's play

From the data obtained from observation, children play freely in the playground. The common types of play they experience during free play are mostly running, jumping, sliding, swinging, climbing, and chasing. Understanding the different types of play that children engage in can help teachers design a learning activity that incorporates a child's specific interests. The researcher observed that in Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten, physical play is the most common type of play in which children are engaged. In the case of Mald Kindergarten, children engaged in different outdoor activities, and the available playing equipment such as blocks, play dough, and different cards allowed them to choose different types of games that piqued their interest. The researcher could observe that children were engaged in physical play that included both gross and fine motor activities.

The teachers were also asked to compare the current practice of play and their childhood play experience. Majority of them had the same playing experience and the teachers tried to put it this way.

(MK1) stated that

"As a child, I spent much of my time playing in the fields. When I compare play from my childhood experience with today's practice, I could say children are not playing. In my childhood, I had the experience of playing with friends. There were large fields that we could run through, and we even freely moved from one village to another to play with our friends. We used to climb on trees too. I played a variety of games, including "jumping rope," "leklekicho," in which a line is drawn on the floor and through a flat stone, and then the stone is dragged on one leg to pass the drawn line; "tibatibe," which is a number of leaves tied together with a rope and put on one leg and played with by kicking up and down; and "abarosh," in which one child runs and follows other children to catch them; When I see what today children do in the neighborhood is, I notice that they place a lot of emphasis on electronic playthings and that they prefer to play while sitting still. Children

nowadays have better access to a variety of toys and games in terms of quality and quantity, but there are less open spaces for them to play where they may play and move around freely. Therefore, their playing experience is very limited.”

In Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten, twice a week, there is a schedule for children to play, and it is mostly guided by the teacher, such as a football match.

MA 1

“When I saw my childhood experience, it was more of a mass game, and the majority of the children played the same kind of games. And we were expected to play what the majority of children played. When I compare children’s play today, they have more freedom to choose different kinds of games than those we had as children. “

MA 2

“Children can play by themselves and develop their creativity and problem-solving abilities through activities like building with blocks. Children today have access to a variety of toys that are beneficial for fostering mental development. When I think about how children play today versus how I played as a child, I realize that the games I played as a child helped us develop our communication skills, and the playing materials were also created by children using mud, materials like old socks to make a ball, wires to make a car, and bottle caps to play demo. But the number of games like this and others that are passed down from generation to generation is dwindling.”

The types of play children engage in can have a significant impact on their learning and development. In government kindergarten, the common types of play materials observed include the seesaw, swing, and slide. The types of play experienced by children were physical play (jumping, running, sliding), free play, musical play, and social play. It is observed the lack of playing materials and equipment restricts children's areas of learning and can affect their overall development. On the other hand, private schools have a more diverse range of play materials, such as the monkey bar, trampoline, sand pit, blocks, and puzzles. These materials allow for more varied types of play, and children can develop both their gross and fine motor skills. Private kindergarten environment provides children a more diverse range of play experiences, including sensory play,

dramatic play, guided play, music, and art play, and social play. Private kindergarten teachers give variety of materials and resources to support play-based learning, including books, flashcards, blocks that are appropriate for children with different learning needs and preferences. These types of play allow children to develop their creativity, imagination, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills.

Comparing teacher's childhood experience and today's children play, it is evident that today's materials are better in quality and quantity. However, these playing materials may not be affordable for all children, limiting the benefits of these materials to only those who can afford them. Additionally, earlier play experiences involved creating playing materials, which encouraged children to use their imagination and creativity. Today's children prefer mobile and digital games, which may limit their social and physical development. Teacher's own experience could also affect the extent to which they engage play in their teachings. When teachers thought they are benefited from their childhood play experience, they may allow their students to explore their environment and let them to play freely.

4.2.5.2. Types of play-based activities in classroom instructions

The researcher did a classroom observation while teachers instruct and from the interviews the researcher had with the teachers came up with the following findings. The teachers were asked: in what ways do you use play-based learning in your classroom? For this question teacher from the two kindergartens: Mekanisa Akababi and Mald responded in different ways

(MK 1) stated that

“In my classroom I use variety of games from my childhood, from the trainings I received and from different sources such as media, neighborhood to teach the lessons. Such as songs that I acquire during trainings and childhood tales I am familiar with”

(MK 2) said

“To make the lesson interesting and engaging, I used different songs related to the topic of the day and games to teach and identify children who needed assistance. For example, I usually use flashcards to teach numbers. There will be mixed number flashcards on the table. And children were made to find one number from the flashcards containing different numbers. The classroom

space doesn't allow all children to play the game simultaneously. Therefore, we selected a few students for one activity and tried to address many children turn by turn. Some games helped us identify children's capacity while they were learning. To mention one, we blindfolded a child and made some voice from one corner of the class and the child will be instructed to follow the direction of the voice. From the child's reaction it would be possible to recognize whether the child hears clearly or not and if he/ she can't respond accordingly it would become an eye opener to come up with intervention ideas.

When necessary, we use the learning corners in the classroom to teach children while they are playing. For example, a shop is used to explain social interaction to teach numbers, and at the same time, it is a game for the children; a child will be given a coin to go and purchase something from the shop. In that case, the child needs to buy whatever he wants from the shop and receive change."

MA 1

"In the first place when the activities were prepared it takes in to consideration how children grasp lessons easily and it needs to categorize students as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic students accordingly before delivering the lesson. The observation can be done when children engage in during both classroom and outdoor activities. The outdoor play helps as to identify those children who loves fine motor or gross motor activities, who loves physical activities, and those who have leadership and many other skills. For example, we use flash cards to teach visual children, we gave them a number of flash cards written different words on it and tell them to scan and identify the flash card that contained one word from collection different flash cards holding different words. This is one way children learn while they are playing. "

MA 2

"I find that play-based learning accounts for 70% of the teaching in my class. When some students in the classroom are working on writing, others are learning through other games or activities, and when they are finished, they switch. Children learn while playing without even realizing it. It implies that children are learning while playing games. When there are times when there will not be group work or instruction, we schedule the time for free play in the classroom, and once every week or two there is an activity we call "show and tell." In this session, first the teacher brings

anything from her home, and she describes the material she brings. Then the children will do the same thing as the teacher does. Bringing material from home and giving explanations about it may be considered a game for the children. But, through this activity, children could develop their confidence and their languages easily.”

The way teachers use play-based learning is different among the government and private kindergartens had differences. The government kindergarten teachers put their effort and knowledge to make the lesson interesting as much as possible by using play-based learning approach with the available resources. But, the limitation of the resources, the unavailability of space and stimulating environment, the large number of class size hinder the practice of play-based learning and limited teacher's creativity to address each child interest. Only few children participate in the classroom activities. Government kindergarten teachers use play-based teaching strategies by setting up learning centers in the classroom that allow children to engage in play-based learning activities and as a means of managing classroom behavior and promoting positive social interactions among children.

Whereas, in private kindergarten teachers use play-based learning approach purposefully. By observing children while they are doing indoor and outdoor activities, teachers recognize what a child is capable and his/her interest area and plan activities accordingly. teachers may use blocks or puzzles to teach math concepts, or use storytelling or dramatic play to teach language and literacy skills, use a checklist to track a child's ability to solve problems or work collaboratively with others during a group activity, differentiate instruction for diverse learners, including those with different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. This may involve providing different levels of support or challenge for individual children during play-based activities, and as a means of assessing and evaluating children's learning and development, and to help children develop skills in a variety of areas.

The available playing materials, the class size, the physical space as well as teachers' own play experience determines the extent to which a teacher use play-based learning in classrooms. The study result revealed that teachers use play activities to help children apply the real-world concepts that can lead to learning opportunities for children. Teachers incorporate play-based learning into

their practice to observe children's behavior and to assess children's needs, strengths and their progress.

4.2.6. Challenges and opportunities of using play-based learning

The research question, "What are the opportunity and challenge for teachers in using play-based learning in the selected kindergartens?" is aimed at identifying the challenges teachers face in integrating a play-based learning approach in teaching children. Teachers encounter a variety of difficulties that limit the use of play-based learning in the classroom. The issues could be process-oriented or structure-oriented. The implementation of play-based learning is impeded by a shortage of resources, space restrictions inside schools, uncertainty regarding the teacher's role in the play-based setting, the curriculum and related teaching materials, and a lack of skills and knowledge in the subject. According to the key informants from Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten, insufficient play materials, a high student-to-teacher ratio, a lack of enough space, a lack of outdoor equipment, and the lack of any resource center are just a few of the problems that restrict the use of play-based learning. From the classroom observation, the researcher could also observe the problems mentioned by the teachers. One teacher from Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten stated that

“Before forcing a child to write, I think they should be allowed to manipulate objects and engage in activities that might improve their fine motor skills. They could improve their skills if you let them play in the sand, gave crayons and paper, and let them choose whatever colors they wanted to use. They effectively practiced holding the pencil while doing this. However, obtaining those materials is complex, and even essential resources like paper are scarce.”

The fact that the curriculum encourages play-based learning could be an opportunity to implement play-based learning. However, if it is not properly implemented, it will be impossible to see improvements in children's learning. In the time of Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten's observation, the researcher could observe the names of different learning corners on the walls of the classrooms, and some of them had models made from locally available resources such as science corners, math corners, language corners, and music corners, but it didn't have enough objects and materials related to the learning corners that the children could touch, manipulate, and explore different things. And from the interviews, the researcher could recognize a lack of resources and resource

room. As a result of this, teachers would not be encouraged to be creative and prepare materials that facilitate children's learning.

In the case of Mald Kindergarten, structural and material issues do not pose as many challenges for teachers as they do for government kindergarten teachers. From the observation, the researcher could see the availability of resources and materials appropriate for the ages of the children; the kindergarten has a convenient and stimulating environment for the children's learning. Searching for a way to extend the children's learning through play is physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding. Teachers were asked to specify the challenges faced in implementing play-based learning, and one of the teachers (MA 1) from this school put it this way:

"Play-based learning is beneficial for children, but the challenge will be for teachers. First of all, the teacher designs every activity. Since every year's students are different, as a teacher, I won't do the same things I did last year for this year's classes. As a result, the activities ought to vary depending on the children's interests. The teacher's job would be to prepare each activity and worksheet and come up with new ideas for engaging the students. Therefore, implementing play-based learning presents a number of challenges for teachers. Therefore, the bigger challenge for a teacher in adopting play-based learning would be the need for creativity every time, the time and effort required to prepare, and the possibility of getting bored while doing so. Additionally, every activity is carried out according to differentiation at our school. We do have grade-level students, high performers, and late learners at the KG level. Therefore, it would be difficult to simultaneously meet the interests of each child. There may have been occasions when I spent more time working with a particular child who needed extra help and provided additional activities based on his or her level."

Another challenge for teachers in the implementation of play-based learning in the context of MALD Kindergarten was parents' perception. From the interview, the researcher could come up with the following: When school begins and classes begin, the first four to five weeks are an assessment week in which teachers observe a child's skill and interest areas by engaging them in various activities. During this time, no worksheets or assignments will be given to the children, and parents who are new to the system will wonder what the children are learning, believing that

their children simply come to school, play, and go home. However, when they noticed observable changes in their children, their parents had an "aha" moment.

4.2.6.1. Teachers' training

Teacher's training is very important because we cannot teach students of today with methods of yesterday. For enhancing the classroom experience it is important that teachers know how children learn. Teachers were asked what kind of training they took toward play-based learning. In Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten, all teachers were trained to teach children about implementing the new syllabus. The teachers who participated in the interview had five to seven years of teaching experience in this kindergarten. Those with a better experience shared their knowledge with other teachers during material preparation. One teacher had prior experience in using Montessori for teaching children, and she said "*Before I started working at this kindergarten, an NGO provided me training in Montessori, and I learned a lot from it about how to educate kids using various methods. I also attended further trainings given by the kindergarten in the areas of child development and classroom management.*" But, all teachers took short term trainings related to children's learning in general.

In the case of Mald Kindergarten, all teachers, especially the main teachers, took training related to children, how to care for them, methods of teaching, and also related to special needs students. The school follows an activity-based curriculum, so the teachers work together to develop an annual and daily lesson plan and make sure they engage in different activities related to the lesson. And in the process, the teachers share their skills and knowledge with one another. Different trainings taken by teachers can be seen as a great opportunity for enhancing the implementation of play-based learning.

4.2.6.2. The role of kindergarten teachers in managing play

Teachers have a critical role in implementing play-based learning. It is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding in order for searching for a way to extend the children's discoveries and their learning. And, having skilled and creative teachers in kindergartens is a great opportunity in managing play and using it in the teaching and learning process. To mention some of the roles of teachers in using play-based learning are understand the needs and interests of children, selecting playing materials, produce playing using locally available materials and utilizing it. Even if, the

implementation of play-based learning demands teacher's skills and energy and it is challenging, the process creates a great opportunity for teachers to expand their creativity while preparing lessons for their students. And also it is also an opportunity for students to have an interactive and enjoyable classroom and learning.

As a planner teacher provide materials and equipment necessary for meaningful play activities, set up the classroom and outdoor areas in a way child find it stimulating, interesting and challenging things to do in the atmosphere and has a sense of purpose. As a facilitator it will be the role of teachers to make sure that every child has the opportunity to experience success and learn according to individual needs, styles, and levels of ability. Move about the classroom and outdoor area while the children are playing. Watch, listen, and talk with the children during their play. Ask open-ended questions to help children extend their thinking and stretch their vocabulary. As observer teachers carefully observe children's playtime and see which skills they have mastered and skills need additional reinforcement.

The findings from observation and interviews showed that the roles of teachers in kindergartens vary and it is different in different contexts. In Mekanisa Akababi kindergarten, it is observed that the role of teachers was limited in managing play. Mention some of their roles, it is preparing teaching aids with locally available resources, decorating the classroom, teaching the lesson using games, preparing a schedule for children to play outside as well as facilitating movie-watching time once a week.

In the case of Mald Kindergarten, almost all activity preparations were done by the teachers. The roles of the teachers in managing play provided a conducive environment for purposeful play, provide children with materials and equipment needed for play, move about the classroom and outdoor door area while children are playing and observe the interests of children, who mastered skills and who need additional support, and plan activities accordingly to enhance their learning, prepare and use supportive materials like pictures, child play films and videos, show different kinds of games and give children the chance to choose, prepare story books for reading in classrooms as well as for children took to their homes to read with their parents and follow up each children's progress, enter into children's play when it is important to help them get started new or unfamiliar materials.

4.6.2.3. The school curriculum

Ethiopian pre-primary education programs include a range of organized activities within a deliberately created setting that encourage children to learn via interaction, play, exploration, manipulation, and self-discovery. The kindergarten's curriculum structure is built on five key areas. **Relating to others:** This means that children must comprehend the feelings of others by relating them to their own; **taking care of myself:** which means children need to explore their body parts, their self-concept, confidence, and self-esteem, and express themselves freely and independently; **My environment:** this learning area encourages children to understand themselves and their immediate natural and social environment; **Developing literacy:** Through a variety of learning styles and teaching methods, children will be learning letters, key words, sounds, and listening to and responding to stories and oral communications; **Developing numeracy:** Children will be learning to sort and classify objects, identify common objects around them, and to describe their geometric features and positions.

The kindergarten curriculum of Mekanisa Akababi School was entirely based on the Federal Ministry of Education's national curriculum, or kindergarten education syllabus. Additionally, it takes into account a child's whole development and places a strong emphasis on a number of learning domains, including socio-emotional, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, physical development, health, and fine arts. Additionally, it encourages educators to use play-based learning as a useful and successful teaching strategy. For the question: Does the school's curriculum or policy support play-based learning? Teachers said that play-based learning is supported by the curriculum. Compared to the previous curriculum, the new curriculum has a strong focus on play and learning through play. The school director checks the lesson plans teachers develop to see if it is well planned.

The curriculum at MALD Kindergarten School was an activity-based curriculum that aimed to be paperless and focused on hands-on exercises. The curriculum gives freedom and flexibility for teachers to implement it and encourages children to participate in all activities appropriate for their age, while also believing that children learn a lot while doing those activities. The activities are simple and seem like day-to-day routines, and they are well planned to address the overall development of a child. At the KG level, for example, children are taught to clean their tables after eating, to clean up their classrooms, and to properly store their playing materials after they have used them. In addition to the curriculum, the contribution of the school director would be great in facilitating the overall teaching and learning process. If school directors don't have a good

understanding, they would just check the normal routine of the school was accomplished and if they don't have teaching experience it wouldn't be possible for them to understand the challenges faced by the teachers, identify the gap between what is written in the curriculum and the real practice of play-based learning to make the necessary interventions.

In the case of Mekanisa Akababi Kindergarten, the director of the kindergarten had limited authority regarding budgetary support for the necessary equipment and materials for the kindergarten, since it is administered by the primary school. Directors with teaching experience may also have a better understanding of what skills and knowledge they need to provide their staff. But, from the interview, the researcher could recognize that the school director had no prior experience as a teacher or an assistant teacher, which may make it harder to understand the teacher's point of view regarding the curriculum and facilitating the overall teaching and learning process.

In the case of Mald Kindergarten, the school director is responsible for the overall management and operation of the kindergarten, including curriculum development, staff supervision and training, budgeting, and compliance with state regulations. She is responsible for developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and guardians. The director had prior experience in teaching as well as a Master's degree in educational studies. She gives training, and supervises teaching staff and support personnel, developing curriculum and lesson plans in alignment with state early learning standards and this has a great contribution in the implementation of play-based learning.

It will be difficult to work with a curriculum and leadership that don't support play approach and expect teachers and students to practice play-based learning. In contrast, a curriculum that supports play-based learning and a school leadership that encourages its implementation could be great opportunities for the practice of play-based learning.

Chapter five

5. Discussions

In this chapter, the researcher has interpreted and draw meaning from major findings of the study in the light of the main themes of the research question.

A study that investigate teachers' perspectives on play-based learning revealed that their uncertainties about implementing a child-directed approach due to lack of clarity in the guidelines and concerns about meeting academic standards (Lekwa & McDonald, 2018). This finding is consistent with the results of the study which found that teachers perspective and understanding in Lideta sub-city woreda 08 kindergartens regarding play greatly influence the implementation of play-based learning. Teachers who recognize the value of play as a crucial learning tool are more likely to create play-rich environments and allow for both free and guided play experiences. Teachers who understand the significance of play are more likely to integrate it with academic content and curriculum goals. They see play as an opportunity for children to apply and reinforce what they learned in other subject areas. Teachers who understand the significance of play are more likely to integrate it with the academic content and curriculum goals. They see play as an opportunity for children to apply and reinforce what they are learned in other subject areas. The way teachers give meaning to play define in what ways they use play in their classroom and understand their roles in children's play. Those who define play as an enjoyment use play as an energizer to get the attentions of student and as a reward for those students have good classroom participation. And those who defined play as a tool for learning use play for different curricular areas, for teaching environment, literacy, numeracy, relating with others, taking care of self and physical skills.

Teachers need training on how to use play-based learning and integrate it into the curriculum. Professional development programs can equip educators with the knowledge and skills to design engaging play-based activities that promote specific learning goals. They can learn how to scaffold children's learning during play, provide appropriate materials and resources, and guide meaningful interaction among children.

Different studies conducted in African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana showed that kindergarten teachers are aware of that they are expected to apply play-based learning but couldn't employ because they lack the necessary knowledge and skill and due to structural reasons like

large class size, inadequate space and infrastructure (Moland , 2017; Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020). The finding of this study also show similar result. The kindergarten teachers in this study were aware of the play-based learning and they agreed on its importance in children's learning. But, there is a gap in the implementation especially, in the government kindergartens. The major reasons for the lack of implementation are a space restriction inside schools, uncertainty regarding the teacher's role in the play-based setting, the curriculum and related teaching materials, and a lack of skills and knowledge in the subject. insufficient play materials, a high student-to-teacher ratio, a lack of enough space, a lack of outdoor playing equipment.

The curriculum, teaching style, the space, playing materials, the classroom size, and the classroom setup should be in harmony to help children engage actively in the teaching and learning process. What is stated in the standard guideline regarding the kindergarten physical environment and what is observed in the kindergartens especially in the government kindergarten are totally different and did not meet the requirements. And with this it would be impossible to use a play-based approach to enhance the children's knowledge. The learning environment should be carefully planned in order for children learn school is a happy, safe, and interesting place in which they can explore, discover, and learn about themselves and the world around them.

Play-based learning activities require careful planning and integration into the overall curriculum and teachers need to have training on how to use play-based learning and integrate it into the curriculum and use it as an assessment and evaluation tool to measure children's learning and development during play-based activities. The study found out that the types of play experienced and play-based learning methods used in kindergartens had some differences among the government and private kindergartens. Children who attend governmental kindergarten engaged in unstructured free play during designated play times or as a break from classroom instructions and they practiced outdoor games such as jumping, sliding, running and hide and seek. In the government kindergarten, teachers used play-based learning activities mainly as a means of managing classroom behavior. In private kindergartens, children engaged in sensory play such as playing with sand, water and play-dough; outdoor play to connect with nature, develop gross motor skills, and engage in physical activities; teachers use imaginative play to encourage children use their creativity and imagination to help children act out stories or scenarios. In private kindergarten, teachers may use play-based activities to help children develop skills in a variety of

areas such as to teaching numbers, language and literacy skills; as a means of assessing and evaluating children's learning and development.

Unfortunately, many practitioners are unsure how to create environments that support their children's learning across different age groups (e.g., infants, toddlers, kindergarteners) and developmental domains. Concerning freedom, the earlier days childhood playing experience is better than what children had today but in terms of modernity today's playing materials and equipment are more advanced. Therefore, there should be some mechanism to balance between the two.

Chapter Six

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Summary

The general objective of this study was to investigate the current practice of play-based learning in the private and government owned kindergartens in Addis Abeba, Lideta sub-city. The study was basically intended to achieve the general objective through responding the following research questions:

1. How do teachers understand play-based learning?
2. For what purpose do KG teachers use play-learning?
3. What type of play and play-based learning approach do kindergarten teachers use in the teaching and learning process?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges of kindergarten teachers in using play-based learning?

Qualitative research method was utilized to answer the basic question; the data needed for the study was collected by using observation and interviews. The qualitative data obtained from the interview and observation was analyzed using thematic method of analysis.

Conclusion

- Kindergarten teachers agreed on the importance of play-based learning for teaching and make their learning enjoyable
- Play is a natural activity for children, and it provides them with opportunities to explore, discover, interact, and make sense of the world around them. Teachers can incorporate play into the curriculum to meet developmental and educational purposes.
- Play-based learning approach allows teachers to assess and document children's progress in the natural and authentic context. By integrating play-based learning into their teaching practices, teachers can not only facilitate meaningful learning experiences but also gain valuable information about individual children's strengths, challenges, and areas for further support or improvement.
- In government kindergartens, the commonly observed type of play is unstructured free play. This type of play allows children to explore, create, and engage in activities of their

own choosing without specific guidance or direction from teachers. It promotes independence, imagination and self-expression. On the other hand, in private kindergartens, it is observed that children engaged in both free and guided types of play. Free play still allows children to have autonomy and make their own choices, but there may be some level of structure or guidance provided by teachers to scaffold learning experiences. This approach aims to strike a balance between child-led exploration and intentional teaching practices.

- The most commonly observed challenges in the implementation of play-based learning in kindergartens are teacher's understanding regarding the approach, the meaning teachers give to play, the physical environment and the lack of the necessary materials and resources.
- To effectively implement play-based learning activities, careful planning and integration into the overall curriculum are essential. Teachers should consider how to align play experiences with learning objectives and desired outcomes. This requires a deep understanding of child development, content knowledge, and effective instructional method.
- The implementation of play-based learning is indeed demanding physically, mentally, and emotionally for teachers. To support them in extending children's discoveries and learning, it is essential to provide encouragement in various ways. This encouragement should be focused on empowering teachers to effectively implement and facilitate play-based learning experiences.

Recommendations

1. Children need to move in order to learn. Many children have little contact with nature in their daily lives. Children want space at all ages, and the kindergartens should have enough space to run, to move, and to play. This could be an excellent way to broaden one's knowledge of the world. Therefore, the kindergarten environments must be physically safe, socially enhancing, emotionally nurturing, and intellectually stimulating, and should be equipped with a variety of materials to arouse and maintain the child's curiosity and interest and promote learning and academic readiness.

2. The necessary work should be done from both the government and the kindergartens to facilitate the environment. such as making some changes in the classroom environmental arrangement, such as minimizing the classroom size, rearranging furniture, making the classroom attractive, implementing activity schedules, using different stimulating learning materials, allowing children to interact, and altering ways of providing instructions around routines, to increase the probability of appropriate behaviors, effectively decrease the probability of challenging behaviors, bring a great learning outcome, and address each child's interest perfectly.
3. Professional development programs for teachers can enhance their understanding and skills related to play-based learning. Creating a shared understanding among educators about the importance and purpose of play can also support its integration into the curriculum. Additionally, providing teachers with appropriate physical environments, as well as necessary materials and resources, can further enhance the implementation of play-based learning in kindergartens.
4. It is good to adopt some of the experiences of private kindergartens, and the government should allocate enough resources and teaching aids to support the teaching and learning process. If there will be experience sharing among the government and private kindergartens, it could help to minimize the gap between them.
5. Research should be done to develop appropriate assessment methods that align with play-based learning and alternative assessment strategies that capture children's learning.

References

- Dowd, A. J. & Thomsen, B.S. (2021). *Learning through play: Increasing impact, Reducing inequality*. The LEGO Foundation.
- Lungu, S. & Matafwali, B. (2020). Parents' Views on Play Based Learning for Children Aged 3-6. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*.
- Ogolo, C. (2021). Exploring Play-Based Learning in Full-Day Kindergarten in St. John's,.
- Pyle, A. & Danniels, E. (2016). A Continuum of Play-Based Learning: The Role of the Teacher in Play-Based Pedagogy and the Fear of Hijacking Play. *Early Education and Development*.
- The LEGO Foundation. (2018). *Learning through play: strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes*. New York: UNICEF.
- White R. & L.Stoecklin V. (2014). Children's Outdoor Play & Learning Environments: Returning to Nature. *ResearchGate*.
- Ahmad, S., Ch, A. H., Batool, A., Sittar, K., & Malik, M. (2016). Play and Cognitive Development: Formal Operational Perspective of Piaget's Theory . *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(28), 72-79.
- Ahmed, A. . (2022, August 5). *What You Need To Know*. *PlanStreet*. Retrieved from Foster Care Service 101: <https://www.planstreetinc.com/foster-care-service-101-what-you-need-to-know/>
- Aras, S., & Merdin, E. (2020). Play-based teaching practices of Turkish early childhood teachers. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(2),420-430.
- Artin Göncü, Michelle B. Patt, and Emily Kouba. (2002). Understanding Young Children's Pretend play in context. In P. K. Hart, *Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Social development* (pp. 418 - 437). UK: BLACKWELL PUBLISHERS.
- B.C. Handbook. (2019). *Play Today*. Ministry of Education.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (n.d.). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report* .
- Bekker, Hopma, & Sturm. (2010). Creating opportunities for play: the influence of multimodal feedback on open-ended play. *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, 325-340.
- Benchmarkfam. (2022, April 29). *Foster Care, Kinship Care, And Adoption- What's The Difference?* Retrieved from Benchmark Family Services Therapeutic Foster Care: <https://benchmarkfamilyservices.org/foster-care-kinship-care-and-adoption-whats-the-difference/>
- Bergen, D. (2012). Play as a Medium for Learning and Development: A Handbook of Theory and Practice. *Routledge*.
- Bethlehem. (2020). The Ban on Inter-country Child Adoption in Ethiopia and its Impact on the Child's Life.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2017). Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education (3rd ed.). *Pearson*.
- Bruner, J. S. (1986). Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. . *Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press*.

- Byrne, E. (2022, January 31). *Can guided play enhance younger children's learning?* Retrieved from Early Education. Early Education: The British Association for Early Childhood Education. : <https://early-education.org.uk/can-guided-play-enhance-younger-childrens-learning/>
- Canan Aydoğın, Dale C. Farran & Gülseren Sağsöz. (2015). The relationship between kindergarten classroom environment and children's engagement. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*.
- Caulfield, J. (2019, Sep 6). *How to Do Thematic Analysis | A Step-by-Step Guide & Examples*. Retrieved from Scribbr: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child text. (n.d.). Retrieved from UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>
- Dagnachew. (2021, March 15). *Major Aspects of the New Foster Family Law: the Case of Ethiopia*. Retrieved from DMLO: <https://dmethiolawyers.com/foster-care-directive/>
- Daniel B. (2008). The Theories of Jean Piaget vs. The Theories of Lev Vygotsky. In *Masters of science early childhood education Greeds 1-6* (pp. 6-12).
- Danniels & Pyle. (2018). Defining Play-based Learning. *Encyclopedia on early childhood development*.
- Danniels, E., & Pyle, A. . (2018). Defining play-based learning. *Encyclopedia on early childhood development*, 1-5.
- Debebe. (2019). THE CONDITION OF CHILDREN UNDER DOMESTIC ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF HOSANNA TOWN, SNNPR.
- DeLuca & Hughes. (2014). Assessment in Early Primary Education: An Empirical Study of Five School Contexts. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 441-460.
- Demissew, B. (2022). *Ethiopia Humanitarian Situation Report*. UNICEF Ethiopia.
- Diale, B. M., & Sewagegn, A. A. . (2021). Early childhood care and education in Ethiopia: A quest for quality. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(4), 516–529.
- Drew, C., PhD. (2022 , July 5). *17 Types of Play Based Learning in Early Childhood*. . Retrieved from Helpful Professor: <https://helpfulprofessor.com/types-of-play/>
- Dzamesi, F. E., & van Heerden, J. (2020). A professional development programme for implementing indigenous play-based pedagogy in kindergarten schools in Ghana. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(3).
- Elena Bodrova & Deborah J.Leong. (2015). Vygotskian and Post-Vygotskian Views on Children's Play. *American Journal of play*, 371- 388.
- Evans, J., & Pellegrini, A. (1997). Surplus Energy Theory: an enduring but inadequate justification for school break-time. *Educational review.*, 229-236.
- Fadila Adam. (2020). Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: A Case Study with Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: A Case Study with. *School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations*.

- Family Foster Care*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Child Welfare Information Gateway:
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/foster-care/fam-foster/>
- Fantahun Admas. (2016). Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Present Practices and Future Directions. *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*.
- Farné, R. (2005). Pedagogy of play. *Topoi*, 24(2), 169-181.
- FDRE MoE. (2009). *Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education (KG - Grade 12)*. Addis Ababa: MoE.
- Feinberg. (2010). Designing Space for Children and Teens in laboratories and public places. In S. Feinberg, *Chapter 10: Play and Learning Environment* (pp. 256-285). SAGE Publications Inc.
- FHI. (2010). Improving Care Options for Children in Ethiopia through Understanding Institutional Child Care and Factors Dividing Institutionalization.
- Fisseha E. & Pyle A. (2016). Conceptualising play-based learning from kindergarten teachers' perspectives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 361-377.
- Gaskins, S. (2013). *Cultural Perspectives on Play: From Sociology to Anthropology*. Routledge.
- Gleave, J., & Cole-Hamilton, I. (2012). *A literature review on the effects of a lack of play on children's lives*. England: Play England.
- Goffin, S. G. (2000). The Role of Curriculum Models in Early Childhood Education. *ERIC Digest*.
- Goldstein, J. (2012). *Play in children's development, health and well-being*. Brussels: Toy Industries of Europe.
- Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff. (2008). Why play=learning. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*.
- Hiwot. (2017). Exploring the Practice of Domestic Adoption: the Case of Selected Organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and Maj Asplund Carlsson. (2008). The Playing Learning Child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 623-641.
- Izumi-Taylor, S., Samuelsson, I. P., & Rogers, C. S. . (2010). Perspectives of Play in Three Nations: A Comparative Study in Japan, the United States, and Sweden. *Early childhood research & practice*, 12(1), n1.
- Jona K. & Sandra . (2010). The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Development. *A Self learning Resource from MSU Extension*.
- K. Hirsh-Pasek and R. Michnuck Golinkoff. (2008). Why play=learning. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*.
- Keung, C.P.C. & Cheung, A.C.K. (2019). Towards Holistic Supporting of Play-Based Learning Implementation in Kindergartens: A Mixed Method Study method. *Early Childhood Education*.
- Kwon, J. Y., & Yawkey, T. D. (2000). Principles of emotional development and children's pretend play. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(1), 9-13.

- LaFreniere. (2011). Evolutionary Functions of Social Play: Life Histories, Sex Differences, and Emotion Regulation. *American Journal of Play*, 464-488.
- Lungu, S., & Matafwali, B. . (2020). Play based learning in early childhood education (ECE) centres in Zambia: A teacher perspective. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7(12).
- Macintyre. (2016). *Enhancing Learning through Play: A developmental perspective for early years settings*. London: Routledge.
- Mahmud. (2020). A Comparative Study of the Practices of Early Childhood Care and Education across Private, Government, International and Missionary Preschools in Addis Ababa.
- Manal O. Alharbi & Mona M. Alzahrani. (2020). The Importance of Learning Through Play in Early Childhood Education: Reflection on The Bold Beginnings Report. *International Journal of the Whole Child*.
- Margaret Kernan. (2007). *Play as a context for Early Learning and Development*. Merrion Square, Dublin 2: NCCA.
- Martin King-Sheard & Marianne Mannello. (2017). Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis. *International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play*.
- Mary D. Sheridan, Justine Howard, Dawn Alderson. (2017). Providing for play. In *Play in Early Childhood: From birth to six years* (pp. 68-85). London and New York: Routledge.
- McDonald, P. (2018). Observing, Planning, Guiding: How an Intentional Teacher Meets Standards through Play. *YC Young Children*, 31-35.
- Meghan Lynch. (2015). The Perspective of Kindergarten Teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play*.
- Mendenhall, M., Chopra, V., Falk, D., Henderson, C. (2021). *Teacher Professional Development & Play-based Learning in East Africa: Strengthening Research, Policy, and Practice in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Mengistu . (2021). Play-Based Pedagogy in Preschools of Kirkos Sub-city, Addis Ababa City Administration: Practice and Challenges. *MA Thesis*.
- Meskerem. (2015). The Role of Childcare Institutions in Seeking Other Childcare Alternatives to the Best Interest of the Child.
- Meskerem. (2015). The Role of Childcare Institutions in Seeking Other Childcare Alternatives to the Best Interest of the Child.
- MOE. (2009). *Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education (KG – Grade 12)*. Addis Ababa: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education.
- MOE. (2009). *Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education (KG - Grade 12)*. FDRE MOE.
- MOE. (2010). A.A: Government of Ethiopia.
- MoE. (2012). *Pre-Primary Education program Standard (Revised)*. Addis Ababa: A.A Education Bureau.
- MOE. (2015). Ethiopia: Federal Ministry of Education.

- Moland, N. A. . (2017). Localizing Play-Based Pedagogy: Nigerian Educators' Appropriation of Sesame Classroom Materials. *Global Education Review*, 4(3).
- MoWA. (2009). *Alternative Childcare Guidelines on community-based childcare, Reunification and Reintegration program, Foster Care, Adoption and Institutional Care Service*. Addis Ababa: FDRE.
- MOWCD. (2016). *MODEL GUIDELINES FOR FOSTER CARE*. India: Government of India Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- Mulugeta, T. . (2015). Early child care and education attainment in Ethiopia: Current status and challenges. *African Educational Research Journal*, 3(2): 136-142.
- Mulugeta, T. (2015). Early child care and education attainment in Ethiopia: Current status and challenges. *African Educational Research Journal*, 3(2), 136-142.
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129–132.
- Nease, W. . (2020, November 13). *Ethiopia's Abandoned Baby Crisis*. . Retrieved from Streams of Mercy: <https://streamsofmercy.org/ethiopias-abandoned-baby-crisis/>
- Negeri, D. (2006). GUDDIFACHAA PRACTICE AS CHILD PROBLEM INTERVENTION IN OROMO SOCIETY: THE CASE OF ADA'A LIBAN DISTRICT.
- Netsanet. (2021). Assessment of the contribution of play based learning methodology for students' academic performance in five right to play project target primary schools in Gulele sub-city. *MA Thesis*.
- O'Connor et al. (2019). Play-based learning in Western Australian schools: Contributing to the process from policy to practice.
- Ojulu. (2021). Preschool teachers' perception toward play-based learning and its implication to child development in Gambella regional State Ethiopia. *MA Thesis*.
- P.D., Subhash. (2022). Early Childhood Play: A Medium for Holistic Development. *RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 107–110.
- P.Perry, J. (2001). *Outdoor Play: Teaching Strategies with Young Children*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Parker, R. & Thomsen. (2019). *Playful integrated pedagogies that foster children's holistic skills development inLEGO*. LEGO Foundation.
- Parker, R., Thomsen, B. S., & Berry, A. (2022). Learning Through Play at School: A Framework for Policy and Practice. *Frontiers in Education*.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). The Role of Play in Human Development. *Oxford University Press*.
- PENG. (2011). CHILDREN LEARNING THROUGH PLAY:PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORSIN SINGAPORE PRESCHOOLS SERVING CHILDRENAGED FOUR TO SIX YEARS.

- Phuntsog, N. (1999). The Magic of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: In Search of the Genie's Lamp in Multicultural Education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 97-111.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2018). *Play and Learning in the Early Years: From Research to Practice*. SAGE
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2016). A Continuum of Play-Based Learning: The Role of the Teacher in Play-Based Pedagogy and the Fear of Hijacking Play. *Early Education and Development*, 274-289.
- Pyle, A., & DeLuca, C. (2016). Assessment in play-based kindergarten classrooms: An empirical study of teacher perspectives and practices. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 457-466.
- Pyle, A., Bigelow, A. (2015). Play in Kindergarten: An Interview and Observational Study in Three Canadian Classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 385-393.
- Pyle, A., Pyle, M. A., Prioletta, J., & Alaca, B. (2020). Portrayals of Play-Based Learning: Misalignments among Public Discourse, Classroom Realities, and Research. *American Journal of Play*, 53-86.
- Randy White & Vicki L. Stoecklin. (2014). *Children's Outdoor Play & Learning Environments: Returning to Nature*. ResearchGate.
- Rettig, M. (1995). Play and Cultural Diversity. *The Journal of Educational Issue of Language Minority Students*.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saghir Ahmad et al. (2016). Play and Cognitive Development: Formal Operational Perspective of Piaget's Theory. *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.7.
- Saghir Ahmad et al. (2016). Play and Cognitive Development: Formal Operational Perspective of Piaget's Theory. *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.7.
- Saghir Ahmad et al. (2016). Play and Cognitive Development: Formal Operational Perspective of Piaget's Theory. *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.7.
- Saracho, O. N. (2014). *Handbook of Research Methods in Early Childhood Education: Research Methodologies, Volume I Contemporary Perspectives in Early Childhood Education*. Information Age Publishing.
- Saracho, O. N. (2017). Theoretical framework of developmental theories of play. *The SAGE handbook of outdoor play and learning*, 25-39.
- Saracho, O. N., & Spodek, B. (1995). Children's play and Early childhood education: Insights from history and theory. *Journal of Education*, 129-148.
- Sheridan, M., Howard, J. & Alderson, D. (2017). Providing for play. In *Play in Early Childhood: From birth to six years* (pp. 68-85). London and New York: Routledge.

- Smith, P. K., & Pellegrini, A. D. (2019). *The Oxford Handbook of the Development of Play*. Oxford University Press.
- Sophia & Tatek . (2014). Qenja: child fostering and relocation practices in the Amhara region, Ethiopia. *Children's Geographies*.
- Stegelin. (2005). Making the Case for Play Policy: Research-based Reasons to Support Play-Based Environment. *Scholarly Journal*.
- Stella & Beatrice. (2020). PLAY BASED LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION(ECE) CENTRES IN ZAMBIA: A TEACHER PERSPECTIVE. *European Journal of Education Studies*.
- Stella Lungu & Beatrice Matafwali. (2020). Parents' Views on Play Based Learning for Children Aged 3-6. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*.
- Taylor & Boyer. (2019). Play-Based Learning: Evidence-Based Research to Improve Children's Learning Experiences in the Kindergarten Classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 127–133.
- Taylor, M. E., & Boyer, W. (2019). Play-Based Learning: Evidence-Based Research to Improve Children's Learning Experiences in the Kindergarten Classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 127-133.
- Tefera, B & Hagos, B. (2016). Indigenization of Early Childhood Education (ECCE) in Ethiopia: "A goiter on mumps" in ECCE provisions. *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*.
- The LEGO Foundation. (2019). *Learning through play A review of the evidence*. LEGO group.
- The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Development*. (2010, March 16). Retrieved from slidelegend.com: https://slidelegend.com/the-importance-of-play-in-early-childhood-development_5acd73557f8b9ab58e8b4573.html
- Tigabu, T. (2016). *Traditional outdoor games in decline*. Retrieved from The Reporter Ethiopia - #1 Best and Reliable News Source in Ethiopia: <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/3680/>
- Triseliotis, J. (1989). Foster care outcomes: A review of key research findings. *Adoption & Fostering*, 13(3), 5-17.
- UN. (2013). General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- UNICEF. (2018). *Learning through play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes*. New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2022). *Supporting Foster Care in Eastern and Southern Africa*. UNICEF ESARO .
- Verenikina, I., Harris, P., & Lysaght, P. (2003). Child's play: computer games, theories of play and children's development. In *Proceedings of the international federation for information processing working group 3.5 open conference on Young children and learning technologies*, 99-106.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Wasik, B. A., & Jacobi-Vessels, J. L. (2016). Word Play: Scaffolding Language Development Through Child-Directed Play. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 769–776.
- Weisberg et al. (2016). Guided play: Principles and practices. *Current directions in psychological science*, 177-182.
- Weisberg et al. (2016). Guided play: Principles and practices. *Current directions in psychological science*, 177-182.
- Weisberg et.al. (2015). Making play work for education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 8-13.
- Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Guided Play: Where Curricular Goals Meet a Playful Pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 104-112.
- White, R. (2004). Young children's relationship with nature: Its importance to children's development & the earth's future. *White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group*, 215-219.
- Witten, K., & Carroll, P. (2015). Children's Neighborhoods: Places of Play or Spaces of Fear? *Space, Place and Environment*.
- World Bank. (2005). *A Toolkit on how to support Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children(OVC) in Sub-Saharan Africa(SSA)*. The World Bank's Africa Region & The World Bank Institute.
- Yin, H., Keung, C.P.C. & Tam, W.W.Y. (2021). What Facilitates Kindergarten Teachers' Intentions to Implement Play-Based Learning? *Early Childhood Education Journal*.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (6th ed.)*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Yucel Gelisli & Elcin Yazicib. (2015). A Study into Traditional Child Games Played In Konya Region In Terms Of Development Fields of Children. *ScienceDirect*.
- Zosh, J. M.,et al. (2018). Accessing the Inaccessible: Redefining Play as a Spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9.

Annex A: Observation guideline

Date _____

Name of school _____

Classroom and section _____

Subject _____

Lesson title _____

Content of the day _____

Number of children: _____ Boys _____ Girls _____

General observation about topic, student role, teacher activities, classroom management

1. How does the teacher present the lesson?
2. The classroom arrangement
3. Classroom size and available free space
4. What looks like children's participation? What are the children doing?
5. Available indoor play materials
6. Available outdoor play equipment
7. Does the environment stimulates children to play and explore
8. How children engage in play activities
9. Time allocated for free play
10. Teacher to child interaction
11. Child-to-child interaction?
12. Are children allowed to touch and use play materials in the classroom?
13. Are children allowed to run in open spaces and practice gross motor activities?

Annex B: Interview questions for head teacher

1. What are your childhood play experiences?
2. What is play for you?
3. In what ways do teachers use play-based learning?
4. What are the common types of play among children in your KG? Why?
5. In what ways do you believe playing is contributing to children's development?
6. Do teachers use play-based learning in classrooms?
7. Is there any training given to teachers regarding play-based learning?
8. What should be the role of teachers in implementing play-based learning?
9. What could be the possible challenges in implementing play-based learning?
10. Is there specific period of time for children to play?
11. Does the school curriculum or policy support for play-based learning? In what ways?
12. What is the perception of parents in play-based learning? In what ways?
13. Do you have any suggestions for how play-based learning could be better supported or implemented in your school?

Annex C: Interview question for classroom teachers

1. What is your childhood play experience?
2. In what ways do you use play-based learning?
3. What are the common types of play among children in your classroom? Why?
4. What kind of training do you take concerning play-based learning?
5. How do you evaluate yourself regarding the use of play-based learning?
6. Is there specific period of time for children to play?
7. Does the school curriculum or policy support play-based learning? In what ways?
8. What is the perception of parents in play-based learning?
9. Do you have any concerns about incorporating play-based learning into your classroom?
If so, what are they?
10. Do you have any suggestions for how play-based learning could be better supported or implemented in your school?