

Play Activities and Social Development of Kindergarten Children in the Nanton District, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Play is very paramount in the growth and development of children as it promotes the holistic development of children. The purpose of the study was to explore the contribution of play activities to the social development of kindergarten children in the Nanton District. The specific objectives that guided the study were; to explore how the use of play materials contribute to kindergarten children's social development, to explore how time allocation for play in kindergarten schools promotes social development of children. The study employed the qualitative research approach using the interpretivist paradigm. The researcher adopted the case study design of qualitative research. The target population of the study was Two Thousand, Three Hundred and Fifty (2350) pupils. The accessible population was Two Hundred (200) pupils. The sample size was Thirty (30) pupils and twenty (20) teachers. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the subjects for the study. Semi-structured interview was used to gather information from respondents. Also, observational checklist was used to gather information to triangulate with the interview data. The data was manually analysed thematically. The results were interpreted using inductive reasoning to draw meanings from the data collected. The findings were that; play materials contribute to kindergarten children's social development. It was also established that adequate time allocated for play activities promote kindergarten children social development. The study concludes that, play activities contribute significantly to the social development of kindergarten children. The researcher recommends that the District Education Directorate of Nanton, Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders should provide kindergarten schools with enough, varieties, and developmentally appropriate play materials to facilitate the social development of kindergarten pupils. Also, the Ministry of Education with Ghana Education Service and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment should allocate more time for play activities on the kindergarten timetable to give the pupils more chance to engage in play activities regularly.

Keywords: Play activities, social development, kindergarten teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education serves as the basis for all subsequent educational levels. It offers a healthy foundation for instilling in children the required skills, attitudes, and competencies for individual and national growth. Most nations have formalised early childhood care and education, allowing private and governmental intervention to help children maximise their full potentials to supplement family care capacity via complete social, physical, intellectual, and emotional child development (Bar-On, 2004). A study conducted by the World Bank (2001) in Brazil that early childhood education serves as a social and economic policy intervention especially for improving the condition of the poor. It is a preparatory stage of making children ready with basic skills, competencies and dispositions that ensure higher school **enrolment**, less class repetition, fewer dropouts and an increased participation of females in the work force of countries.

In 2007, the Government of Ghana has made a great effort in enhancing early childhood education by initiating two years of pre-primary education (kindergarten) as part of its education reforms and became part of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) scheme. Indeed, Ghana is considered a pioneer in Africa in terms of its early childhood education policy and access. One of the ways of providing quality early childhood education at the pre-school level to facilitate the social development of children and also to improve on play activities at the kindergarten school environment. The engagement of kindergarten children on play activities contribute to quality early childhood education programme as the play activities nourishes all the developmental domains of children. Play being a concept has always been difficult to define or explain but simple to recognise. Many scholars, including Erik Erikson, Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky, and others, have attempted to define play.

Vygotsky gave greater insight into childhood play. According to Vygotsky, creative play is the most important aspect of a child's whole development. He advocated that we push the kid to a higher level of functioning, which he described as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Playing allows the youngster to develop in a zone of proximal development. Play, like the magnifying glass, combines all developmental features in a reduced form and is a key source of growth in and of itself. According to Piaget (1962), play is the fundamental means through which kids interact and discover their immediate environment. Piaget goes further to say that play is a natural method for kids to learn about their surroundings and the world in which they live. Christie and Wardle (1992), argues that play can help children develop self-confidence and good attitudes that will assist their lifetime learning. Play, according to Fromberg and Gullo (1992), is an activity that fosters language acquisition, social awareness, and creative thinking in kids.

Factors that prevent poor and working-class children from fully benefiting from play necessitate quick and complete attention. Through play, kids grow physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Children's social skills are developed through play activities. They enjoy playing because it allows them to discover and explore on their own. They even learn the social skills of a certain play in such a way that they can handle problems affecting them when they play (Ottogan, 1999; Mahindu, 2011; Fisher, 1992). They also acquire social skills in a specific play, allowing them to address difficulties that arise while they play (Ottogan, 1999; Mahindu, 2011; Fisher, 1992). As they build strong relationships with their playmates, youngsters create friends and learn how to deal with diverse behaviours in their playmates. Children learn about diverse feelings via play, and when they play with other children, they exchange ideas and broaden each other's experience. They rehearse parts that they will perform in the future during play. Young children are naturally curious and giving them of developmentally appropriate materials are essential for the learning process. Toys that are inspiring allow children to realise that the environment is a complex and beautiful place.

Despite the various advantages of play for both children and parents, time for play has been significantly decreased for some youngsters (Shonkoff & Philipps, 2000). This tendency has also impacted preschool kids, who have had their free play time restricted in order to create way for more academics. Today, a lot of school kids are being given less free time and fewer physical outlets at school. In order to focus on reading and mathematics, many schools have cut recess, creative arts, and even physical education time. Because children's intellectual ability is increased by a clear and dramatic shift in activity, this change may have consequences for their ability to store new knowledge. A shift in academic lessons or class subject does not provide a noticeable shift in intellectual and social exertion, and it surely does not provide a physical relaxation (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005).

There have been reports that, many children in Africa are deprived of play activities and this practice has great repercussions on their growth and development. Ghana as an African country is not exceptional when it comes to deprivation of children from engaging in play activities. Reports from non-governmental organizations like Right-To- Play, UNICEF and Lively Minds indicate that a great number of Ghanaian school children are deprived of play activities and this poses a threat to their optimum development. In the northern region of Ghana, specifically, Nanton district, kindergarten pupils are facing many challenges that are linked to play activities. The issue of inadequate play materials, insufficient time for play, and lack of teachers' supervision of play activities are prevalent. Most kindergarten schools in Nanton district have inadequate play resources for pupils and these children spent their time indoors. It is against this background that this study sought to

explore the contribution of play activities on the social development of kindergarten pupils in the Nanton district.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of pre-primary programmes in Ghana are unable to engage pre-schoolers in playactivities due to a lack of play facilities (Sabbi et al., 2010). Most pre-primary schools in Ghana lack recreational facilities, play materials, and adequate physical infrastructure (Boakye, 2021). Play has been neglected in pre-primary schools in modern culture because the aims of learning in these settings have been strictly defined in terms of achieving a set of fundamental academic abilities (Bergen, 1998; Frost & Norquist, 2007; Ofosu-Appiah, 2008).

During the researcher's monitoring and supervision exercises in the 2019/2020 academic year as an early childhood education coordinator in Nanton district, the researcher observed that about 75% of the kindergarten schools do not have well developed recreational centres or play grounds. Majority of these play grounds are just open spaces. Also, these kindergarten centres do not have adequate play materials for children. Furthermore, it is clear that much time has not been given in the kindergarten time table purposely for play. Children mostly engage in play during break time. The researcher is concerned in whether these issues have any impact on the social development of these young children.

In addition, recent reports in 2020 from kindergarten teachers and circuit supervisors (now SISO'S; School Improvement Support Officers) in the Nanton district indicate that kindergarten pupils have been showing increased learning difficulties, unable to solve simple socialisation problems, many cases of aggressiveness, and a total lack of interest in learning. These children exhibit socially unacceptable behaviours, as there are instances where pupils are unable to share materials, take-turns and work as a group. This has the potency of negatively affecting the academic performances of pupils. Teachers usually complain about these unwholesome behaviours of the children; as one teacher said "Something must be done".

Further, a baseline survey report of Right To Play (2014) in the Savelugu-Nanton district indicates that, a greater number of kindergarten pupils in the district are not engaged in play-based activities. The report further indicates that, about 70% of the schools do not have appropriate playgrounds and play materials. It reveals that, the absence of play-based activities, appropriate recreational centres and materials in the schools in Savelugu-Nanton area have negative effects on the holistic development of the kindergarten children. Right To Play provided series of interventions like building teachers' capacities through in-service trainings on play-based activities and also provisions of play materials to some schools. However, these interventions did not yield the full results of curbing the problem. Hence, the problem still exists, but in a reduced state.

Mwangi and Shigali (2009) postulate that; children create their own knowledge through individual manipulation with play materials. The children need to socially interact or manipulate with play materials. The National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE, 2000) states that, children's exposure to varieties of play materials in the classroom and outdoor activities facilitate their social skills development.

Many researchers have conducted various studies on play activities in certain parts of the world. For example, studies undertaken by Njoki (2007) in Kenya and Zins (2004) in Zambia indicate that, play activities contribute to children's cognitive and physical development. However, these studies of Njoki (2007) and Zins (2004) focused on children's' cognitive and physical development, and not that of the social development. Therefore, this current study intends to bridge the gap in knowledge by exploring the contribution of play activities to the social development of kindergarten children in the Nanton District.

Purpose of the Study

The study was to explore the contribution of play activities to social development of kindergarten children in the Nanton District. Specifically, the objectives of the study include:

1. Explore how the use of play materials contributes to kindergarten children's social development.
2. Explore how time allocation for play in kindergarten schools promotes social development of children.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How does the use of play materials contribute to kindergarten children's social development?
2. In which way does time allocation for play activities in a kindergarten school promote children's social development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Play Materials in Promoting Social Development of Children

According to Kamen (2005), when preschool children use play materials in play, it promotes their social development, which includes social skills, behavioural patterns, self-control, discipline, independence, and self-awareness in relation to other positive relationships can be improved by understanding the needs and rights of others. The moral concept of children in decision-making based on individual maturity is improved. Play materials, according to Gichuba et al., (2009), during play, when pre-schoolers share materials such as slides or swings, they learn to take turns. Pre-schoolers learn to work together with other classmates. In using materials during play activities, children learn the rules that must be followed in using the materials. Self-esteem improves when preschool children use appropriate play materials and are applauded by others. They are the ones who when they win a puzzle game, it raises their self-esteem. According to Gichuba et al, (2009), preschool children will overcome problems on their own when they get trapped.

Play materials, according to the Kenya Institute of Education (2008), improve social skills of preschool children as well as their leadership skills, making play more fun and lasting, preschool children's attention is sustained, and self-esteem is increased. The research recommends, the provision of play materials should be consistent and the different varieties should be changed on a regular basis to control boredom. The play materials inspire learners because they arouse, steer, and sustain a child's behaviour against a target. Young children by nature are interested and giving them good quality (which may not be expensive) materials are essential for the learning process. Toys that inspire kid's creativity allow them to realise that the environment is a complex and beautiful place. Although children can complain about the "toy of the moment" do not let the hype shift the decisions taken. Skipping ropes, jacks, sand bags, bean bags, balls, blocks, swings, slides, and Mary-go-round all continue to be children's favourites anywhere (Elis & Arnold, 2000). From the experiences of play activities, kids learn about themselves, the society, and people in their lives, try various approaches to find solutions to problems they encounter in their dealings; develop body control and balance; learning coping skills; and thereby express their creativity hence they build confidence by selecting toys and materials that are of special interest to them. A setting that allows kids to make their own selections helps them feel safe, important, adventurous, capable, and confident in taking the initiative (Elis & Arnold, 2000). These two add to the argument that children's play materials enhance the worth and beauty of play. Children's play should be enriched by providing them with play resources. Teachers, carers, and parents must offer children with play materials in order to involve them in meaningful play tasks that affect the development of their social skills.

Studies conducted by Kamen (2005) and Gichuba et al. (2009) connote that, the use of play materials by kindergarten children during play activities go a long way to contribute to their social development. In the Ghanaian context, specifically Nanton district, the provision of play materials to kindergarten children during play activities facilitates their social skills development. In using play materials, the children share the materials, take turns in the usage of the materials as well as being chosen to be in-charge of the materials. Children also learn to follow basic rules in the usage of play materials. All these combine to improve the social skills such as leadership, sharing, turn-taking and teamwork of the kindergarten children in the Nanton district. Therefore, there is the need to equip kindergarten centres in the Nanton district with sufficient, varieties and developmental appropriate materials to aid in children's social skills development.

Play materials facilitate the development of social skills among children. Children develop sharing skills as a result of sharing the little play materials that are available. If the bean bag, sand bag, hopping rope, slides, toys

and swings are inadequate, children will definitely have to share these materials with their friends. The continuous sharing of these materials will instil in the children sharing skills. Also, at the recreational ground, most at the time, the number of children outweighs that of the play equipment. In situation like this, the children will have to practice what is called turn-taking. They will need to patiently wait for their colleagues to finish playing with the equipment before they take over. This instils in children turn-taking skills, which is one of the social skills children need to function well. Children working as group or team during play activities help them to develop cooperative skills. During this group work, children collaborate and cooperate with each other. Finally, leaders of groups begin to develop leadership skills at this tender age, hence, helping them in becoming great leaders in later life.

Time Allocation for Play Activities in Kindergarten Schools

Early childhood practitioners have long believed that play contributes significantly to kids' growth and, as such, must contribute a pivotal role in the pre-school programme. These educators were also conscious that play is a rich, diverse, and dynamic activity that necessitates a considerable amount of time, materials, and resources. However, these educators are confronted with increasing pressure from families and administrators to provide organised, formal guidance on the "basics" as a result, the amount of time allotted to play has been drastically shortened in most preschool services (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Inadequate time for play has an effect on children's growth because it prevents two of the most advanced modes of play classes (dramatic play and constructive play), all of which require a significant amount of time. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) echoes that, children should have at least one hour daily to partake in play and projects (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009). Many children can, of course, engage in several activities, while others will devote all of their attention to a single activity.

Substantial periods of time (45-60 minutes) must also be set aside in the daily routine for play so that children can create play situations, organise themselves, and then carry out their strategy (Early Childhood Education Syllabus, 2008). Daily routines in preschool classrooms that rely on academics and kindergarten readiness often do not allow for discovery of meaningful and important events (Well & Drew, 2013). When children are constantly instructed to "select another centre" or "go on to something else," they are not given enough time to engage with the resources long enough to build problem-solving strategies that require perseverance and commitment.

According to the preschool curriculum, play practice is recognized as a critical activity, and therefore it is given a lot of time on the schedule (NACECE, 1993). According to the guidelines, play is the most natural teaching method that should be correctly used and mastered to ensure a crisis-free transition from the home setting. The general objectives of Early Childhood Education emphasizes that, allocating time to play allows children to enjoy living and learning by play because it helps them grow their self-awareness and esteem (Mahindu, 2011). In the early childhood education curriculum (2008), play and outdoor activities are given more time than other activities. Again, play practice is integrated into nearly every single subject learned in Early Childhood Education (Mahindu, 2011).

Mahindu (2011), Copple and Bredekemp (2009) and NACECE (1993) studies suggest that a substantial amount of time (45-60 minutes) daily should be given to pre-school children to engage in play activities. Their studies further explained that, play activities like drama and constructive play need enough time to be able to execute well. When enough time is allocated to pupils play activities, it allows children to enjoy living and learning by play because it helps them grow their self-awareness and esteem as well as building problem-solving strategies that require perseverance and commitment. In the Ghanaian preschool curriculum (NaCCA, 2019), specific time has not been allocated for play activities in the Kindergarten time table. The time table indicates periods for circle time, group activity 1 (indoor/outdoor), break, group activity 2 (indoor or outdoor), phonics time, learning centres, and story sharing. Specific time allocated for play activities is conspicuously missing in the standard based curriculum time table for kindergarten. Kindergarten pupils normally engage in play activities during break time. This time they use for play is inadequate for them to realize the full benefits of play. Therefore, there is the need to allocate a sufficient time of 45-60 minutes daily purposely for play-based activities on the kindergarten time-table.

Figure 2.2: Time table for kindergarten schools in Ghana

		30	1 30m	2 1hr		3 1hr	4 30m			
	M	A S S E M	Circle Time	Group Activity 1 (Indoor/Outdoor)	B	Group Activity 2 (Indoor/Outdoor)	Phonics Time	B	Learning Centres	Story Sharing
	T	B L Y &	Circle Time	Group Activity 1 (Indoor/Outdoor)	R	Group Activity 2 (Indoor/Outdoor)	Phonics Time	R	Learning Centres	Story Sharing
	W	R E G I	Worship	Circle Time 1	E	Group Activity 1 (Indoor/Outdoor)	Phonics Time	E	Learning Centres	Story Sharing
	T	S T R A	Circle Time	Group Activity 1 (Indoor/Outdoor)	A	Group Activity 2 (Indoor/Outdoor)	Phonics Time	A	Learning Centres	Story Sharing
	F	T I O N	Outdoor	Outdoor	K	Group Activity 2 (Indoor)	Phonics Time	K	Learning Centres	Story Sharing

Source: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA)

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Design

The philosophy that underpinned the study is the interpretivism paradigm. A philosophical stance or research paradigm is a community of researchers' worldview or perspective on research that is founded on a set of common assumptions, concepts, values, and procedures. In this study, the researchers explained the phenomenon by interpreting the responses (findings) given by the participants. The researchers believe that knowledge is socially produced by people and, in most situations, depends on one's interpretation. In this case, the researchers focused on analytically revealing the meaning of the results and demonstrated how these findings assembled to produce observable consequences.

The researcher used qualitative data in finding the right solutions to the research problem. In achieving this, two research instruments were designed to collect data about the problem in order to come out with findings that will best find solutions to the problem under study. The researcher interviewed teachers to collect data about the phenomenon. Also, pupils were interviewed and observed at the same time. Play materials, as well as play grounds were observed to collect data about the situation at hand.

The researcher employed the case study design of the qualitative research. Case study is a type of research design used in many disciplines, including assessment, in which the researcher conducts an in-depth examination of a case, which is typically a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more persons (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2012). Case study research is useful for understanding complex issues in their real-life contexts, and it is frequently used to understand the perspectives of those participants. In this study, the researcher relied on the perceptions of the participants, participants (pupils) were also observed several times in their natural settings (schools), the researcher had limited influences over occurrences, the researcher formulated 'how' type of questions, the study was in-depth, and finally, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence. These made the researcher to adopt the case study design. As a result, the study provides a case study of play activities and social development of kindergarten children in the Nanton District.

Population

The population of the study comprised all public kindergarten schools made up of kindergarten teachers and pupils in the Nanton district. The total population for the study was Two Thousand, Four Hundred and Seventy (2470) from Thirty- Two (32) kindergarten schools. This comprised One Hundred and Twenty (120) kindergarten teachers and Two Thousand, Three Hundred and Fifty (2350) pupils. The accessible population was Two Hundred (200) pupils.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In this study, the purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the participants for the study. Purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2010) was a non-probability sampling technique where subjects selected for the sample were chosen based on the judgment of the researcher. This entailed locating and choosing individuals or groups of persons who were in the midst of the phenomenon of play (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This sampling technique was adopted because the researcher needed to interact with participants with some predefined characteristics.

The researcher did the sampling by identifying the participants and handpicked them based on certain criteria or characteristics. For the pupils, the researcher with the help of teachers identified those who could express themselves verbally. For the teachers, the researcher identified and selected those who were knowledgeable and information-rich about the topic and also willing to partake in the study. The availability of play ground or recreational centre and play materials were used as characteristics for selecting the schools.

The district had a pre-existing five (5) circuits. Two (2) schools were purposively selected from each of the five (5) circuits making a total of ten (10) schools. The researcher selected from all the circuits because, the researcher wanted every circuit to have a representation in the study. These schools were chosen based on the availability of play ground or recreational centre and play materials in the schools. The researcher used this criterion in selecting these schools because the researcher needed to observe the pupils use of play materials in order to see how the use of play materials contribute to their social development. Also, three (3) pupils were purposively selected from each of the ten (10) selected schools making a total of thirty (30) pupils. The pupils were selected based on the characteristics of their abilities to verbally express themselves. Finally, two (2) teachers were also purposively selected from each of the ten (10) schools making a total of twenty (20) teachers. These teachers were carefully selected because of their in-depth knowledge about the topic and also their willingness to partake in the study.

According to Sandelowski (1995), sample sizes in qualitative research should not be so small that data saturation, theoretical saturation, or informational redundancy is difficult to attain. At the same time, the sample size should not be so high that doing a thorough, case-based analysis becomes impossible. Creswell (1998) suggested that, a sample size that range between twenty (20) and thirty (30) interviews is enough for a qualitative study. It was based on these arguments or justifications that the researcher selected the thirty (30) pupils and twenty (20) teachers as sample size for the study.

Data Collection Instruments

Being a qualitative based research, the researcher used interview and observation to collect data from the selected participants. The interview was a semi-structured and open ended type of questions. They were ten (10) items for pupils and nine (9) items for teachers. The items were constructed in relation to the research objectives and questions covering; availability and use of play materials, time allocation for play, teachers' role or supervision of play and play types pupils engaged in. Interviews were conducted on teachers using a semi-structured interview guide to seek their perspectives on the contribution of play activities to social development of kindergarten pupils. Pupils were also interviewed to seek their opinions in relation to their play activities in the schools. The pupils were interviewed in the local language. The pupils' interview questions were translated into Dagbani. An observational checklist was developed and used to observe pupils perform different play activities, pupils' interaction with one another, teacher's role in play, and also pupils' use of play materials. The observation checklist had fourteen (14) items. The observation was carried out in order to obtain

supporting evidences for the interview responses of the teachers and pupils. Furthermore, the researcher utilised this observation to collect data to support the four areas of this study's focus: availability of play materials, time allocation for play, teachers' role in children play and play types children engaged in.

Data Collection Methods

A letter of introduction was sought from the Early Childhood Education Department at the University of Education, Winneba to help the researcher obtain a permission letter from the District Education Directorate to be allowed to collect data from the sampled teachers and pupils. The researcher carried out preliminary visits to the sampled schools, created rapport and also made appointments with the respondents on when to re-visit for the data collection. On the appointed days, the researcher visited the selected respondents, interviewed them and also carried out the observation.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. According to Morse and Field (1996), thematic analysis entails the check for and finding of recurring themes that run across a whole interview or series of interviews. Thematic analysis is a good approach to research where the researcher is trying to find out something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, or experiences from a set of qualitative data – for example, interview transcripts, social media profiles, or survey responses (Caulfield, 2022). The researcher did manual descriptive thematic analysis to derive meaning from the data gathered.

The researcher translated and transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim, then read and re-read them in their entirety, reflecting on the interviews as a whole. The pupils' interview was translated and transcribed because it was conducted in Dagbani. The researcher then described the interviews, bearing in mind that many themes may occur in a set of interviews. Once recognised, the themes that looked to be significant, as well as notions that appeared to link key chunks of the interviews, were written down. During the research questions analysis, all items concentrating on a specific research question were analysed together and conclusions were drawn. The results were interpreted using inductive reasoning to draw meanings from the data collected and to establish links between the collected data (findings) with the relevant concepts reviewed under the subject matter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Use of play materials and children's social development

The first research question sought to explore how the use of play materials contributes to kindergarten children's social development. To achieve this, responses were sought from both teachers and pupils sampled for the study. A number of issues were brought to light from the views of the pupils. Firstly, it was found out that, the play materials available in the schools included see-saw (swing), swing, tyres, merry-go-round, rope, sandbags and football. Secondly, the findings also indicated that, the play materials available in the schools are inadequate. Thirdly, the study findings showed that the use of play materials promote the development of social skills like sharing, communication and turn-taking. Finally, almost all the pupils interviewed indicated that play materials and equipment make their play interesting and fun. A pupil remarked:

The play materials we have in our school include; see-saw, slide, merry-go-round, tyres, rope and football. These materials are not many. The materials make our play interesting and fun. We share the materials during play and also communicate among ourselves when we are interacting with the materials. When we are to play, some of us will use the materials first, after which another set will take-over (Pupil 1).

Another pupil remarked:

The materials we used in playing are football, sandbags, see-saw, slide and lorry tyres. The play materials and equipment are not many. We normally share the little materials during play activities. Without the see-saw

(material), we cannot do the activity (see-saw play). We also wait for our friends to play first, before we also play (Pupil 4).

The quotations from the pupils suggest that the schools have play materials like see-saw, slide, merry-go-round, rope, sand bags, lorry tyres and football. However, these materials are not adequate as compare to their large numbers. The use of play materials makes their play activities lovely, lively and joyful. The materials facilitate their play activities. Without play materials, some play activities are not just possible. That is, certain play activities cannot be performed in the absence of play materials. This implies that, play materials really serve as vehicles on which play activities strive. During play activities, they communicate a lot among themselves and also share the little play materials available. So, the sharing of the little materials available during play activities help instil in pupils sharing skills. The communication or interactions they have among themselves go a long way in building their communication skills. Also, at the recreational ground, the number of children outweighs that of the play equipment and materials. In situation like this, the children will have to practice what is called turn-taking. They will need to patiently wait for their colleagues to finish playing with the materials before they take-over. This instils in children turn-taking skills, which is also one of the key and valuable social skills children need to function well.

Interview with the teachers revealed information which complemented the pupils' views. From the view point of teachers, the schools have play materials like skipping rope, football, tyres, slide, swing, merry-go-round, sand bags, clay, crayons, empty cans and empty boxes. In addition, almost all the teachers interviewed indicated that, the play materials and equipment found in the schools were inadequate. The teachers also responded that play materials have a lot of impact on the social development of children. It was established that pupils share play materials during play activities and this aid in their acquisition of sharing skills. Again, it was revealed that, pupils' take-turns in using play materials and this facilitates their development of turn-taking skills.

Furthermore, the interview exposed that, pupils are put into groups because of limited play materials and this group activity helped pupils to learn cooperation and collaboration skills (team work). Pupils who are chosen as group leaders to be in-charge of play materials turn to learn leadership skills; this was also revealed in the study. This was the view of a teacher;

The issue of play materials is a challenge in this school. We have very limited number of play materials. Play materials have an impact on the social development of children. Firstly, because the materials are inadequate, pupils practice turn-taking and this facilitates their acquisition of turn-taking skills. Secondly, children playing in groups using play materials develop cooperation, collaboration and team work skills (Teacher 1).

Another teacher stated;

In this school, we have inadequate play materials. To me, play materials have an impact on children social development. The use of play materials helps children in learning how to respect and obey rules. During group work, pupils who are chosen as leaders to be in-charge of the play materials acquire leadership skills. Again, children share play materials among themselves during play activities and this results in their acquisition of sharing skills (Teacher 2).

The quotations from the teachers suggest that, in the schools, there are the availability of play materials like football, slide, swing, skipping rope, tyres, clay, sand bags, merry-go-round, empty cans and empty boxes. However, these materials are not enough as compare to the huge number of pupils in the schools. Due to the inadequacy nature of the play materials, pupils practice turn-taking in the use of the materials and this helps them to learn turn-taking skills. Pupils also share the little materials available and this builds their sharing skills. The involvement of pupils in group work because of the limited nature of the materials helps the pupils develop cooperation, collaboration and team work skills. In addition, pupils who are chosen as group leaders to be in-charge of play materials learn leadership skills.

Findings from the observation in relation to availability and use of play materials and their impacts on children social development established that most of the schools do not have appropriate playgrounds. Some of the

playgrounds were just open spaces. Also, it was revealed that the schools do not have adequate play materials. Few play materials were seen in the schools and some of these play materials were not properly fixed on the ground, hence, posed danger to the pupils. Again, it was revealed that pupils cooperate with each other, take-turns, and share play materials during play. However, some few pupils resisted in sharing play materials and also taking- turns. The findings from the observation in terms of availability of play materials and its impact on children social development reflected in the responses given by both teachers and pupils during the interview sessions. The table shown below indicates the availability of play materials in the schools. From the table, it clearly indicates that, there are inadequate numbers of play materials in the schools. This was obtained from the observation conducted in the schools.

Table 4.1: Availability of play materials in schools

School	Swing	Slide	Merry-go-round	Football	Tyre
Balshie KG	1	2	1	1	0
Sahakpaligu KG	1	2	1	1	3
Janjori KG	1	0	0	1	0
Zieng KG	1	1	0	1	0
Nanton KG	1	1	0	1	4
Tampion KG	0	1	0	1	0
Zoggu KG	0	1	0	1	0
Dingoni KG	1	0	0	1	2
Janna KG	1	1	0	1	0
Gumo KG	1	0	0	1	0
Total	8	9	2	10	9

The picture shown below depicts how the use of play materials contributes to the social development of kindergarten children. From the observation exercise, it was established that kindergarten children take-turns and share play materials during play activities. This results in their acquisition of sharing and turn-taking skills. In the picture, a group of pupils were taking their turn in the usage of the 'Merry-go-round', while another set were patiently waiting for their turn. This contributed to their social development (turn-taking skills).

Figure 4.1: A group of pupils on 'Merry-go-round' while their colleagues wait for their turn



The findings of this current study congruence with Kamen (2005), who asserts that; when preschool children use play materials in play, it promotes their social development, which includes social skills, behavioural patterns, self-control, discipline, independence, and self-awareness in relation to other positive relationships

can be improved by understanding the needs and rights of others. It can therefore be said that, per the findings of this study; play materials and equipment and their use promotes the development of social skills like turn-taking skills, sharing skills, cooperation skills, leadership skills, communication skills, respect for rules, understanding and team work skills.

It is also supported by Gichuba et al., (2009), view that; during play, when pre-schoolers share materials such as slides or swings, they learn to take-turns. Pre-schoolers learn to work together with other classmates. In using materials during play activities, children learn the rules that must be followed in using the materials. Self-esteem improves when preschool children use appropriate play materials and are applauded by others. The assertion from Gichuba et al. (2009), agrees with this current study finding in relation to the impact of play materials on the social development of children. The findings revealed that; pupils develop, learn and acquire social skills like sharing, turn-taking, cooperation, team work, and leadership skills when using play materials and equipment during play activities.

Play materials, according to the Kenya Institute of Education (2008), improve social skills of preschool children as well as their leadership skills, making play more fun and lasting, preschool children's attention is sustain, and self-esteem is increased. Play materials inspire learners because they arouse, steer, and sustain a child's behaviour against a target. The Kenya Institute of Education (2008) statement resonates with the findings of this study, which showed that; play materials have an impact on the social development of children. Play materials promote the development of leadership skills, sharing skills, communication skills and turn-taking skills. The research question sought to explore how availability and use of play materials contributes to kindergarten children's social development.

Time allocation for play activities and children social development

The second research question sought to explore how time allocation for play activities in the kindergarten schools promotes children social development. In achieving this, information was sought from both teachers and pupils sampled for the study. A number of issues were brought to light from the views of the pupils. Firstly, almost all the pupils interviewed indicated that the time allotted for play activities in the kindergarten schools is not adequate or sufficient. Secondly, it was revealed that, much time is been given to academic work in the classroom. Thirdly, from the study, it emerged that no specific time has been earmarked purposely for play activities on the kindergarten time table. Finally, it was revealed that enough play time promotes social development of kindergarten children. A pupil remarked:

The time we used for playing is not enough. We play during break time. We will eat first, after which we will play. Sometimes, we play before we eat. If we are not given the chance to play, we cannot be friendly with one another. We become friends through playing (Pupil 10).

Another pupil remarked:

We do not have much time to play. We do not normally get satisfy during play. We normally play when we are on break. We eat and play at the same time. When we play, we learn how to work together. We also feel happy when we play (Pupil 6).

The quotations from the pupils suggest that; the time children use to play is not enough. When you take a look at the kindergarten time table, time is not specifically assigned for children to use for play activities. These children mostly engage in play activities during break time. The break time is only 30 minutes. This time is normally divided into two parts; one part for eating and another part for playing. It means that, children will have divided minds during break time. They will be thinking about playing and at the same time about eating. This situation affects their eating and also their fully participation in the play activities. Children mostly do not get fully satisfied in playing before they are stopped half way to go back to the class. The time given for them to engage in play activities promotes their social development as they learn about cooperation, friendship, and teamwork. When children are given enough time to play, they continuously interact with each other and this facilitates their social development. The children also feel happy when engage in play activities.

Interview with the teachers revealed information which complemented the pupils' views. From the view point of teachers, pupils mostly engage in play activities during break time. Almost all the teachers interviewed indicated that the time pupils' use for play activities is not sufficient. Also, it was revealed that, time allotted for play activities promotes children social development as they learn sharing skills, turn-taking skills, cooperation skills, leadership skills and team work through engagement in play activities. This was the view of one teacher:

Frankly speaking, the time given to pupils to engage in play activities is not enough. Much time need to be given to pupils to engage in play activities. When pupils are given enough time to play, they learn and acquire a lot of social skills like; turn-taking skills, sharing skills, cooperation, and teamwork (Teacher 4).

Another teacher responded:

To me, looking at the time provided for children to play, it is not enough. I will have wished that, much time is provided for children to engage in play activities. These children mostly used the break time to play and it is not enough. When enough time is allocated to children to play, it will promote their social skill development. Through the play activities, they learn leadership skills, sharing skills and cooperation skills. Children also learn how to establish friendship and self-awareness through play activities (Teacher 8).

The quotations from the teachers suggest that; the time pupils used for play activities is not enough. Specific time is not given on the kindergarten time table for children to use for play activities. The pupils mostly engaged in play activities during break time. This break time is only thirty minutes (30 minutes). The pupils normally used one part of the 30 minutes to eat and the remaining one to engage in play activities. When pupils are given enough time of 45-60 minutes to engage in play activities, it helps in their social development. Through the engagement in the play activities, the pupils learn about sharing, turn-taking, cooperation, leadership, and team work. In addition, pupils learn how to establish and sustain friendship, and also self-awareness when offered the opportunity to engage in play activities frequently. Much time given to pupils to frequently engage in play activities promote their social skills development.

From the observation, it was revealed that time has not been allocated on the KG time table purposely for play activities. Also, it was observed that pupils usually play during the break time which is not adequate. Part of the break time is used for eating and another part for playing. From the observation, it was again established that children learn social skills like cooperation, leadership, sharing, turn-taking and communication by constantly engaging in play activities. The responses given by the teachers and pupils during the interview sessions relating to time allocation for play activities reflected in what was observed relating to time allocation for play.

The findings of this study are in agreement with Mahindu (2011), who posited that; the main aims of preschool education emphasize that, allocating enough time to play allows kids to enjoy life and knowledge acquisition by play because it helps them grow their self-awareness and esteem. Mahindu (2011) further reiterated that, play is the most vital and natural teaching method that should be correctly used and mastered to enable a crisis-free transfer from the family setting, and thus, it should be allocated much time on the kindergarten time table. The research findings revealed that, enough time is not given to children to participate in play activities. Allocating enough time to children to constantly engage in play activities promote their social development.

In addition, it is also supported by Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) recommendation that; children should be provided one hour daily to partake in play and projects (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009). Many children can, of course, engage in several activities, while others will devote all of their attention to a single activity. The assertion from DAP agrees with this current study finding which is allocating much time for pupils to engage in play activities in order to reap the full benefits of play.

A careful look at the kindergarten time table reveals that, no time has been allotted purposely for play activities. In the Ghanaian kindergarten curriculum (2019), specific time has not been allocated purposely for play activities on the kindergarten time table. The time table indicates periods for circle time, group activity 1 (indoor/outdoor), break, group activity 2 (indoor or outdoor), phonics time, learning centres, and story sharing.

Specific time allocated purposely for play activities is conspicuously missing on the kindergarten time table. Kindergarten (KG) pupils normally engage in play activities during break time. This time they use for play is inadequate for them to realize the full benefits of play. The research question sought to explore how time allocation for play activities in the kindergarten promotes children social development.

Key Findings

The following were the key findings of the study:

1. It was found that the kindergarten schools have inadequate play materials and that the availability and use of play materials contribute to social development of pupils.
2. From the study, it was established that no time has been allotted for pupils to play on the kindergarten time table. Part of the break time is rather used for play activities and that sufficient time for play activities promotes the social development of kindergarten pupils.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings above, the following conclusions were arrived at:

The availability and use of play materials contribute significantly to social development of kindergarten pupils. This is because, when children are playing, they share play materials and also take-turns in the usage of play materials and this result in the acquisition of sharing and turn-taking skills. The study also concluded that, sufficient time provided for play activities contributes enormously to pupils' social skills acquisition. This is because, the more time provided for pupils to play, the better they learn social skills. The continuous interactions of pupils among one another during play time enhance their social development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are provided:

1. The District Education Directorate of Nanton, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and other stakeholders should provide kindergarten schools with enough, varieties, and developmentally appropriate play materials to facilitate the social development of kindergarten pupils.
2. The Ministry of Education with Ghana Education Service and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) should by a policy allocate more time of 45-60 minutes daily, purposely for play activities on the kindergarten timetable to give the pupils more chance to engage in play activities regularly.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest. I have seen and I agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. I certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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