

Exploring Play in Early Years Education: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Educators
in Tanzania

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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In this multi-case qualitative research study I explored the beliefs and practices of selected Tanzanian pre-primary educators, with regard to the role of play in early years education. The purpose was to gain insights into how the educators conceptualize play, understand its contribution to development, and if and how they incorporate it into their teaching/learning activities. Factors influencing their beliefs about play also were investigated. The study helps address an imbalance in the professional knowledge base in Early Childhood Education by providing research about play from a non-Western context. Fifteen interviews were conducted with three head and five pre-primary teachers from four schools. Observations (a total of 240 minutes at each school) were made to establish the presence of play and playful behaviour, with selected sessions video-recorded. Video clips, used to aid recall of, and reflection on, teaching practices and activities supported the teachers' interviews. Information from observations and curricular document reviews was used to enrich the findings from interviews. Data were thematically coded and Fler's (2002) three sociocultural planes (personal, interpersonal, and community) used to analyze the influences on participants' beliefs and practices. Findings indicate that play is primarily understood to consist of enjoyable physical activities which teachers can exploit to motivate/activate children before and during lessons, but such play was not seen to contribute directly to the cognitive/academic development education is expected to enhance. Large class size, parents' demands for written work, curriculum requirements and teachers' limited competence were found to impede provision for play in the classroom. Implications and recommendations for contextually appropriate policy, curriculum, and pre-primary teacher education programs are outlined. The need for expansion of traditional notions of play and its role in education, as well as the use of traditional games and culturally meaningful materials in the curriculum are highlighted.

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Dedication

To Tanzanian pre-primary teachers, who work very hard despite the challenging working conditions.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this multiple case study, my aim was to seek a better understanding of the role of play in early education in Tanzania. The purposes of the study were to explore Tanzanian early childhood educators' interpretations of children's play, as well as their views of the role of play in the education and development of children. I conducted the study with the main goal of shedding light on the place of this important element of childhood in the context studied. At the time when I conducted my study, early childhood education was a relatively new area in the formal Tanzania education system and so related studies conducted in the country and similar contexts were very scarce. It was anticipated that the study would help address an imbalance in the discourse and the knowledge base, which informs theory and practice in Early Childhood Education by providing research about play from a non-Western context.

The study was conducted in four public primary schools in Tanzania's capital city of Dar Es Salaam and involved pre-primary teachers and head teachers. I anticipated the findings from this study would extend knowledge on how this important element for children is understood and valued, and so potentially inform curriculum design and implementation at the pre-primary level as well as teacher education in the particular context.

I begin this chapter by describing in general the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Tanzania as a background that frames the study, followed by a brief account of my own background in relation to the study. I then present the research problem, purpose and questions, followed by a short description of my research

approach. I next describe the contribution of the study to ECE discourse as well as potentially to the Tanzanian education policy, and then note the delimitations of the study before giving definitions of some key terms used in this dissertation.

Background and Context

For a long time Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Tanzania remained in the hands of families and communities. According to their report on the situation of early childhood education in Tanzania, Kweka, Binagi and Kainamula (n.d.) note that before the introduction of formal education during colonialism, child rearing and education were mainly the responsibility of parents, siblings, the extended family, and the community at large. Modernization and the growth of towns, which came with colonialism, disrupted the communal child rearing practices and hence created the need for schooling, even for very young children. Schools established by colonialists were for older children, from standard one of primary school (which is the first year in primary school, equivalent to Grade 1), with the main aim of preparing the people to work in the colonial offices. As mothers were to go to work, older siblings, who would previously have stayed with the young ones at home, had to go to school. Consequently, the young children had no one to stay with and so this situation, after independence, created a need for institutionalized child care and education. However, the government was not financially capable of providing the care and education at this level. Therefore, individuals and local and religious institutions started day care centers and nursery schools, and the Ministry responsible for education took on the role of overseeing/supervising them.

Major government initiatives happened in the mid-1990s in response to internal and external demands and forces. Around this time, Tanzania ratified two international conventions that stressed the importance of education from the early years. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) contributed to the need for a review of the education system in the country. Hence, the government formed a National Task Force in 1993 to review education provision in Tanzania, and it came up with recommendations, which were given considerable weight in the establishment of the Education and Training Policy of 1995. One of the recommendations was to make preschool education compulsory for all children (United Republic of Tanzania [hereafter referred to as URT], 1993). Although the government acknowledged the importance of early care and education for children from 0-6 years of age, it was not considered feasible to formalize education for the whole of this age group. The government therefore systematized pre-primary education for children only 5-6 years of age and involved parents, local communities, and non-governmental organizations in providing early care and education through pre-primary classes and preschool centers (for children 0-5 years of age).

In Tanzania's education policy, pre-primary education thus refers to education for children aged 5-6, and children spend two years at the pre-primary level and enter primary school by the age of seven (URT, 1995). The main aim of pre-primary education is "to encourage and promote the overall personality development of the child, that is his or her physical, mental, moral, and social characteristics and capabilities" (URT, 1995, p. 3). Preparation for primary school education is stated as the last objective for pre-primary education. The policy also includes a position on the

developmental characteristics of children and how they learn, noting they are “normally very active, learn by imitation, emulation and are ever eager to try out things” (URT, 1995, p. 3). The education policy was revised in 2014, and some changes were made on the entry age into pre-primary school. Children now have one year of pre-primary and the entry age can vary from 3-6 years of age depending on the capacity/competence of the child (URT, 2014). With regard to the aims and objectives of pre-primary education, no changes were made. At the time when I conducted my study, the 2005 syllabus was being reviewed in order to align it with the new policy statement. However, the 1995 policy was still being used and so I refer to it throughout the discussion.

With regard to pre-primary education, the Tanzania education policy contains information on the language of instruction, and teacher education. According to the policy, Kiswahili is the main language used in teaching and English is introduced as a subject. The document contains no information about teaching strategies at the pre-primary level. However, the objectives stated in the policy are used to formulate the subject content and recommended teaching strategies in the pre-primary syllabus. According to the syllabus, teachers are expected to be creative in choosing teaching strategies depending on the availability of resources. Although play is not directly identified, the syllabus directs teachers to utilize their “knowledge, skills, and experience in selecting teaching/learning strategies according to the ability and age of the child” (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2005, p. v). Following the introduction of pre-primary classes, the government devised two initiatives for teacher education. First, the government offered pre-primary in-service teacher education in eight of its Teacher Training Colleges. This program was for teachers who had completed four years

of ordinary secondary education and had undergone a two-year certificate course in primary education. They were expected to qualify as pre-primary school teachers after attending an additional one-year fully residential course. The other initiative was the provision of Early Childhood Education content as one of the courses in the pre-existing two-year certificate program aimed at preparing primary school teachers. All pre-service teachers would therefore take the compulsory course on care and education for 5-6 year old children. After graduation, the teachers could be allocated to teach in any class from pre-primary to standard seven according to the needs in a particular school.

Very little is known about the beliefs of these teachers with regard to various aspects related to the provision of classroom activities for the young children. My focus in this study was on play as one of the important elements in childhood. As part of this background information, I next give a brief historical statement about my own background and the experiences that have promoted my interest in studying play in educational contexts.

The Researcher's Background

After spending two years in part time jobs, following my university graduation, I was hired as a Kindergarten teacher in a private school. Though from my experience teaching is not highly regarded in Tanzania, the country from which I come, its status is even lower for those teaching in the lowest age/grade levels. I can further point out from my observation that slightly higher status is accorded those teaching in private schools. Teaching the young children was a very challenging experience for me. The main struggle was dealing with a large number of children (30 children aged between four- to five-years-old), in a situation where space and learning materials were not adequately

provided. However, I managed to make the best use of the available resources to make learning meaningful and enjoyable for the children. My responsibility was to implement a prescribed curriculum aimed at attaining stated learning goals. The focus was mainly on introducing the children to the basics of numbers and the letters of the alphabet as preparation for their learning of reading, writing, and mathematics. In addition, pre-science and social studies concepts like colors, animals, plants, days of the week, months, and weather were introduced. I would verbally introduce the concept to the class then engage the students with hand written (photocopied) worksheets for each of them to trace, write and color depending on the requirement of a specific task. Students would also be required to participate in identifying the letters, numbers, or pictures of objects from wall charts. I did not regard play of importance to the serious task of teaching until I was exposed to scholarly work on play. A course on play I took during my graduate degree exposed me to various scholarly resources that challenged my understanding, and made me reflect on the experiences I have been through. The debate on what play is and what it does for children aroused my curiosity. The discourse, however, seemed to be biased because it appeared to be based mainly on resources from Western countries. The best examples of the earliest approaches to play are said to be found in early nursery schools in the United States in the 1920s (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012). Frost and colleagues name “the Teachers College Nursery School of Columbia University and the University of Iowa Child Welfare Research Station as the “first and perhaps the purest of the play-based programs” (p. 260). Perspectives on the importance of play can further be identified from various models including the Tools of the Mind curriculum (Bodrova and Leong, 2007), The Reggio Emilia programs (Gandini, 1997), the New Zealand Te

Whariki curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) and Roskos' and Neuman's Literacy Play model (Roskos & Neuman, 2003). The theoretical perspectives behind these models were derived mainly from studies conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and New Zealand. In non-Western countries, a few studies related to play were conducted in South Africa (Sekhukhune, 2014); Tanzania (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009; Shavega, Brugman & Van Tuijl, 2014); and Kenya (Andiema, Kemboi & M'Mbone, 2013).

Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined teachers' perspectives with regard to play (Bennet et al., 1997; Hyvonen, 2011; Pyle & Bigelow, 2014; and Saracho, 2002). and all of these studies have been carried out in Western contexts. I thought it would be interesting to examine the teachers' beliefs about play in non-Western contexts as understanding their beliefs could lead to a better understanding of the education environment provided in their classrooms and the provision of play in those contexts.

Because of my background as a teacher and a graduate student, I have developed a strong belief in the beneficial contribution of play to children's learning. My assumption is that the presence of at least some characteristics of play would make the learning environment, no matter how challenged, more conducive for learning to take place. This assumption is based on the conclusion of Howard, one of the scholars I highly regard: "Children learn in a number of ways but it would appear that regarding an activity as 'play' amplifies learning potential" (Howard, 2010, p. 153). My other assumption is that most teachers in Tanzania may not regard play as an important aspect to consider while doing the 'serious' task of teaching. This assumption is based on my

experience growing up in Tanzania where, in my view, matters related to children's welfare do not receive adequate attention. I believe the provision of resources and services for children deserve more consideration and this attention includes provision for play spaces for children, ensuring their safety, and respecting their opinions. I consider of value to the study my experience as a teacher and as a native speaker of Kiswahili with a good understanding of the environmental context. However, I acknowledge this same experience might have represented a particular subjective position during the collection of data and interpretation of findings.

It is also important to consider situational differences among and within the African countries. As most of these countries were former colonies, Marfo and Biersteker (2011) note the variation in the countries' advancement after independence. Consequently, these countries experience different transition stages of cultural values and traditions. A mixture of cultural values is experienced in Tanzania due to inter-tribal marriages as well as migration from rural to urban areas. Advancement in information technology has had considerable impact especially in urban areas, leading to rapid ongoing cultural changes in the country. It is not uncommon therefore to find different cultural ways of living and hence of raising children due to varied background experiences among a group of people who grew up at the same period of time in the same country. Therefore, I anticipated that an examination into teachers' beliefs utilizing a case study method would lead to rich information from different socio-historical backgrounds captured within a particular period of time.

Research Problem

As early childhood education is relatively new in the formal education system of many African countries, very few studies have been conducted on this area. Research on early childhood education and practice in these countries has, for a long time, been informed by studies from the Western countries. Principles guiding early childhood curriculum in these countries are mainly drawn from those identified in Europe and America due to colonial influence (see for example Akahara, 2013). The scarcity of information from non-Western contexts has resulted in the use of potentially irrelevant approaches to policy and practice throughout Africa. The Euro-American education models have been found to focus on values that differ from those of the Indigenous cultures (Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2008). For example, in a book on effective teaching and learning methods for Nigeria's pre-primary schools, Akahara's (2013) discussion on play's effectiveness for teaching and learning seems to be based on conformity to the principles that inform curriculum policies, with assumptions of a global childhood. The validity of the Euro-American knowledge base that informs theory and practice in Africa is therefore questionable due to differences in sociocultural conditions between these contextual environments (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011; Serpell & Nsamenang, 2014). I join Serpell and Nsamenang (2014) in believing that African societies need to carefully take note of the current sociocultural situation in their own countries, in order to have appropriate and effective early childhood education practices in place.

Play has been identified as of great importance in the education and development of children. Specifically in the Western discourse, play has been linked to the development of various early skills that are essential in preparing the children to learn

(Berk, 2002; Bredekamp, 2004; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, and Munro, 2007; Christie and Roskos, 2015). Different approaches to integrating play into school settings have been identified. Examples of these approaches include the Bank Street model (Goffin & Wilson, 2001 as cited in Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012); the Reggio Emilia programs, the Tools of the Mind curriculum and the High Scope curriculum (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012), all of which have originated from and have been implemented in Europe and America.

Although widely held to be a universal phenomenon with regard to children, play is found to vary across cultures in terms of its nature and its perceived role in children's development (Gaskins, Haight, & Lancy, 2007; Gosso & Carvalho, 2013; Roopnarine & Jin, 2012). In various cultural contexts, play has also been related to learning because of its close link to free learning as opposed to teacher-directed learning (Lillemyr, 2013). Rogers (2013) notes how the current discourse on play is shifting from an emphasis on so called free play to a focus on play's integration into the context of school curriculum. It is very likely that the diversity in the way play is conceptualized influences the position it is accorded in the school context. To identify the role of play in particular early childhood school settings, it is crucial to explore the views of the teachers responsible for teaching at that level. While studies on early childhood educators' perspectives and beliefs with regard to play are available, most of these have been conducted in Europe and North America (Hyvonen, 2011; Parsons, 2013; Peng, 2011; Pyle & Bigelow, 2014; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Sherwood, 2009). Consequently, little information is available as to how this 'complex' element of early childhood education is perceived and practiced in the context of the non-Western countries.

Due to the highly biased research base on the phenomenon because so few studies have been conducted outside of the Western world it is very likely that the information available is not representative of the majority of the world's population (Andiema, Kemboi & M'Mbone, 2013; Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009; Sekhukhune, 2014; Shavega, Brugman & Van Tuijl, 2014). Particular values and biases have therefore shaped how play is viewed in educational practice (Cannella, 1997). Cannella (1997) further contends that relying on information from particular contexts to guide practice outside of those contexts, "denies the multiple value structures, knowledges, and views of the world which are created by people in diverse contexts" (p. 127). Furthermore, there is also a risk of imposing practices that are not applicable into contexts where they do not fit (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011).

Research Purpose and Questions

Pre-primary teachers are assumed to be decision makers with regard to the activities provided in the classroom for young children of ages in which play is expected to be of particular benefit. It is therefore vital to explore these teachers' beliefs with regard to play to determine the contextual constructions placed on the role of play in the children's learning. My research aimed to explore teachers' beliefs about the role of young children's play in pre-primary classroom settings. The purposes of the study were to gain insights into how selected educators in Tanzania understand play and its role in teaching/learning activities, as well as explore the factors they consider to be influencing their beliefs about play. The main multifaceted question guiding the study was as follows: *What are the beliefs of a selected sample of Tanzanian pre-primary educators from four urban schools about the role of play in early childhood education? How are the beliefs of*

these educators reflected in their practices? And what factors can be identified as forming and influencing those beliefs?

To address the main question the following more focused sub-questions were explored:

- a) What do teachers in selected pre-primary schools believe constitutes play?
- b) Do these pre-primary teachers believe play to have any benefits for children's learning, and if so, what benefits?
- c) Do these teachers integrate play into teaching and learning activities and if so how?
- d) To what extent and in what ways, if any, are the home/family/community experiences of children considered by the teachers in any provision made to support play at school? If such provisions are made, what do the teachers identify as the possible contribution to learning made by connecting home/ family/community experiences to children's play?
- e) What factors do these teachers believe both support and impede integration of play into teaching practice?

I anticipated that responses to these questions would provide insights into the perceived meaning and benefits of play as well as its integration into classroom situations in this particular context. Interviews, observations, and video-prompted recall were employed to gain an understanding of the Tanzanian teachers' beliefs with regard to play and the history behind those beliefs, and to assist them in reflecting on their practices.

Research Approach

I acquired approval from the Human Research Ethics Board of the University of Victoria and embarked on studying the beliefs of head teachers and pre-primary teachers from selected public primary schools in Dar es Salaam. I used a qualitative case study

approach because it seemed most suited considering the present study's features and characteristics. My aim in the research was to explore a social phenomenon in a particular setting using multiple data sources. In the case study I describe the context and participants, as well as the analysis of the themes (categories) and issues emerging from the interviews and observations. It should be noted that although these findings might be applicable in other settings of similar context, the purpose of the analysis was not to generalize beyond the cases studied. As it is for case study, my purpose in the research was to give a description of the particular cases to understand the issues emerging from the description.

The primary method for data collection was interviews. Information obtained from a total of 15 interviews with head teachers and pre-primary teachers formed the basis of the overall findings. Overall, the total interview time was 595 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Swahili, the common local language; they were recorded and then transcribed and translated into English language for analysis. I also used observation and analysis of documents to inform the findings from the interviews. Total observation time was 240 minutes for each of the four classes observed. While only one interview was conducted with each of the head teachers, for pre-primary teachers there were three phases of interviews, one of which was supported by video clips recorded on observation, which were used for recall of events in the classrooms. In the analysis, the coding process was iterative and led to the identification of main categories and sub-categories under each.

Contribution of the Study

This study makes a contribution in addressing the paucity of information from cultural contexts scarcely featured in the current early childhood education discourse by focusing on a particular African context. Information obtained from this exploratory study has shed light on the place of play, an important element of childhood in the preschool contexts studied. The findings add to the existing literature by addressing the absence of research information on play and its potential role in education from countries in the majority world, which has led to a biased, or non-representative research database and professional discourse. The thinking and beliefs of teachers documented during the study through teachers' reflections are significant for potentially informing policies and curricula related to early childhood education, as well as teacher education in Tanzania and other African countries. Furthermore, I believe the findings from the study have contributed to participating teachers' learning by providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their own practices. It is expected that enhanced reflective skills have enriched the teachers' with new understandings about their practices, which may consequently lead to improving their actions for better outcomes. As the use of video as a recall prompt is not likely to be a commonly used research method in this context, my research has created an opportunity to try out the viability of the method for possible future use in other studies.

Delimitations

Play is a very broad area of research that has been widely studied. In my study, the focus of play was restricted to its role in the education of young children at pre-primary public schools. My aim was to determine from the beliefs and practices of

educators of selected schools how play is valued, particularly in education settings.

Specifically, I investigated if and how play is regarded to be beneficial both in itself, and as part of the teaching approaches in the pre-primary years of schooling for children between five and six years of age in Tanzania.

Furthermore, my emphasis was on the beliefs of the teachers and head teachers as well as their practices as observed in the classrooms. It is acknowledged that the beliefs of other stakeholders like parents, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and the children are also important but it was not within the scope of the research to examine the beliefs of all of them, given limited resources available. It is expected that the findings of the study will provide an initial contribution to the literature in an attempt to begin to address the paucity of studies from the non-Western world.

Definitions of Key Terms

Although in chapter 2 I discuss the term play as portrayed in the literature, I provide here some definitional background on the use of the term that denotes play in Swahili, the local language of Tanzania where I conducted the study.

In Swahili, play is translated as *mchezo/michezo* (singular/plural) and it signifies a variety of activities ranging from physical activities like physical games and sports, physical exercises, dancing, actions while singing, to theatre performance like drama and also role plays. Different from the way play is commonly understood in the Western ECE literature, play in Swahili is used as a general term for all those activities. In the school context, the word *michezo* comprises the variety of activities mentioned, that children engage in for pleasure, some of which involve competition between classes or schools. A

good example is seen in an online Swahili newspaper article in which an author discusses the importance of play for children. In one of the paragraphs he comments:

Nilisema kuwa michezo si tu shughuli ya kuzungukazunguka kwenye uwanja halafu basi. Michezo ya aina yoyote humjenga mtoto kiakili si tu kwa sababu anapata muda wa kupumzisha akili yake baada ya kazi ya masomo, lakini vilevile ujenzi wa mikakati ya ushindi na kujenga tabia ya kuthubutu katika michezo huweza kuhamishiwa katika masomo. (Kayoka, 2016, para. 2)

I said [play] games is not only an activity for a child to move around the field/playground, that's it. Any types of games are beneficial in the mental development of the child not only because he gets time to rest from his studies, but also he develops winning strategies (in competitions) as well as boldness in competitive games, the skills that he can transfer and use in improving his performance in studies. (My translation)

In this excerpt, the author uses the term *mchezo*, here referring to competitive games and sports. In another article (Ndossa 2014), the author, drawing from Western literature, uses the term *michezo*, to describe pleasurable children's activities. In the same article, the term *michezo* is used as he commends the Ministry of Education for initiating inter-school games and sports competitions for primary and secondary schools.

I have given the description above mainly to show how differently play can be understood and/or described by a Swahili speaker, a language in which the interviews were conducted. Other terms that I find important to define are:

Pre-primary – A class attached to primary school. This level consists of children aged 5-6 years prior to beginning Grade 1 in the primary school.

Educators – Teachers and Head Teachers in a primary school

Beliefs – Views that one holds to be true according to one's cultural and historical background and experiences.

Culture – the ways of life particular to the communities where people live, study or work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I situated the study by describing the context of early childhood education in Tanzania, highlighting the paucity of studies on ECE in Tanzania and other similar non-Western contexts. I briefly presented my background as a researcher, and stated the problem and the purpose of the research. I also provided an introductory account of the research approach and noted the contribution the research makes to the existing literature. The scope of the study was described in the delimitation section and a few key terms were defined as they are used in the dissertation study. In the following section I present an analysis of relevant literature.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Frameworks and Literature Review

The purpose of my multi-case study was to explore the beliefs selected pre-primary educators in Tanzania hold about the role of play in early childhood education settings. Specifically in conducting the study, I sought to understand how these educators conceptualize play and its role in the teaching and learning process. I understand that play is a very broad and heavily researched area. In the review of literature, I therefore focus on resources and studies directly linked to my research aim.

I explore generally the conceptualization of play and its relationship to early childhood education, under the following sections. First, in the conceptual frameworks section, I explore different models and approaches in an attempt to define play with a specific focus on young children, its place in early years classrooms, and the pedagogical role of playfulness. I then discuss relevant theoretical conceptualizations of play, describe how culture is conceptualized in this study, and present the sociocultural theoretical lens used to frame the study. In the second half of this chapter, I review relevant, selected research literature. Topics include the importance given to play in early childhood education including a discussion of reported developmental benefits, as well as teachers' perceptions of the role of play, looking at perspectives from Western and other cultural contexts. Finally I review relevant literature from Africa to establish how early childhood education is portrayed and specifically how play in educational contexts is featured.

Conceptual Frameworks

Defining play in the early years.

Play has received considerable attention from scholars in different disciplines but has proven a difficult concept to define. The attempt to define it can be compared to “trying to seize bubbles” as Moyles (2005) notes, “for every time there appears something to hold on to, its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped!” (p. 4). It has therefore been perceived, defined, and theorized differently by different scholars utilizing a range of characteristics such as freedom, pretence, creativity, sense of humour, spontaneity, and problem solving (Burghardt, 2011; Elkind, 2008; Huzinga, 1950; Liberman, 1977; Smidt, 2011). The focus on these varied behaviours and activities, regarded as play by different theorists, complicates the possibility of a standard definition for play (Fleer, 2009) which makes it difficult to have all the views, perceptions, experiences, and expectations connected with it, embraced in a single definition.

Among other scholars, early childhood education scholars have given attention to play in relation to the education of young children. Consideration of play by early childhood scholars is attributed to its appropriateness and significance in children’s development and therefore is given attention in the education setting. A variety of behaviours have been linked to play and regarded as having developmental benefits for children, especially when the behaviours are connected to the play theories. Different types of play are therefore recognized as being beneficial for different aspects of children’s development (Smith, 2009). For example, locomotor and object play, involving physical activity of the body as well as use of objects, enhance physical and motor development; social play, involving interaction with others, enhances social

relationships; and pretend/symbolic play, involving imagination or make-believe, enhances language and literacy development (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2011). Smith (2009) further states that due to its representational nature and its use of language, pretend play is regarded as a uniquely human form of play, perceived as educationally relevant, and hence accorded considerable attention in the theoretical and research literature.

Conceptualizations of play in early years classrooms.

In early years education settings, complexity in defining play is due to challenges in the categorization of children's behaviours as either play or not play. Wood (2013) argues against a dichotomous categorization of behaviour as *play* or *not play* but suggests instead that play be understood as ranging along a continuum from pure play to non-play according to the number of criteria observed. Wood adopts the six criteria Fromberg (2002) used to define play, which are: *voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, rule-governed, pleasurable, and episodic* (pp. 10-12). Fromberg acknowledges the influence of context in the content of children's play and therefore views the six criteria as describing the nature of play *in relation to a particular context*. She describes play as one of seven conditions for learning that are ever changing and which encourage active participation of the young children in construction of meaning and hence learning. The other conditions are induction, cognitive dissonance, social interaction, physical experiences, revisiting, and competence (Fromberg, 2002, pp. 9-10).

For the purposes of my study, Wood's (2013) described conceptualization of play was considered a useful working definition, with the inclusion of Fromberg's (2002) criteria, and in particular, her emphasis on the influence of context on a specific activity.

Within a continuum, an activity or behaviour is regarded as play when more of the criteria are present, and non-play when the criteria are not featured at all. I found the flexibility of these criteria useful for teachers in their efforts to incorporate both child-initiated play activities and teacher initiated pedagogical activities into teaching. The blending or integration model as proposed by Wood (2013) helps to counterbalance the pressure of attaining curriculum goals (Bruner, Jolly & Sylva, 1976).

The working definition was used to guide the study in exploring teachers' beliefs about play in relationship to their practices in the classroom. It is important to recognize that in education settings, the teacher's freedom to provide varied activities, or to make room for *play*, can be considerably constrained by the demands of curriculum. Play, for the purposes of my research, was therefore identified according to the presence of some or all criteria mentioned. In addition to the definition, a model of integrated pedagogical approaches (see Figure 1) was used to inform this exploration of play in educational settings (Wood, 2013).

A model of integrated pedagogical approaches.

In the integration model (see Figure 1), Wood (2013) argues for a balance in play presence between child led and teacher guided activities. She believes both kinds of activities to be beneficial and argues for integration of the two *pedagogical zones* as she calls them, in order to combine the benefits of the two approaches.

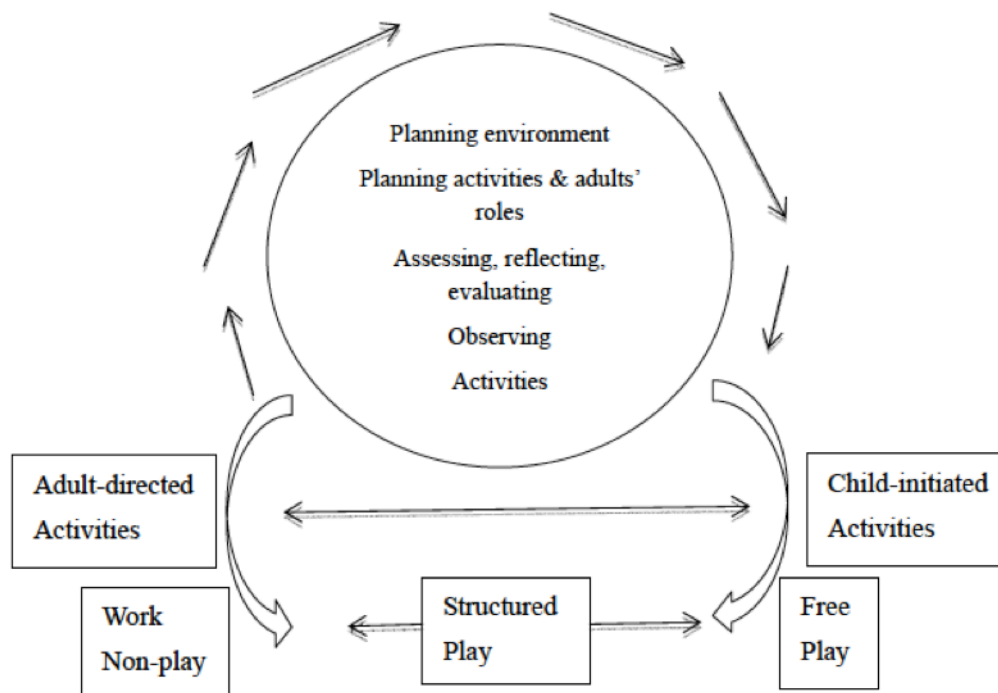


Figure 1. Model of integrated curriculum and pedagogical approaches (Wood, 2013, p. 71).

According to Wood (2013), the integration allows for elements of playfulness in both child initiated and teacher directed activities. The main feature of the model is the continuum between the two kinds of activities depending on the extent to which the activities are structured. Practitioners are expected to move across zones in order to meet the needs of the children as well as connect the curriculum goals and the children's goals.

Wood's conceptualization of play provided an initial guiding framework for the classroom situation, where, during data collection, the focus was on activities provided as well as the classroom atmosphere (in terms of teacher attitude), both of which were geared toward attaining curriculum goals. A dichotomous categorization would provide less room for exploration and could result in a possibly misleading indication of a total absence of play in the classrooms observed. In addition to the view of play as a continuum with consideration of the criteria described above, play can also be described

by looking at behaviours and attitudes of the students and teachers in the classroom identified as involving play as described below.

Playfulness.

In an effort to integrate play into curriculum, practitioners commonly adopt a playful orientation, and so the notion of playfulness also deserves attention in an exploration of play in education settings (Hutt, 1979; Lieberman, 1977). This attitude of playfulness may be manifested through children's and teachers' demonstrations of qualities of play namely *spontaneity*, *manifestation of joy*, and *sense of humor* (Lieberman, 1977, p. 23). Therefore, in addition to conceptualizing play in terms of the playfulness of activities as ranging on the continuum between play and non-play (Wood, 2013), I also focused on playfulness as reflected in the extent of involvement of the children and their teacher in the production or consumption of the identified qualities of play (Lieberman, 1977).

Playful teaching is another mode of integration in which the teacher uses tasks closely related to the characteristics of play (Moyles, 2010). Moyles (2010) further describes the role of the teacher as needing "to ensure the tasks are planned and presented in an enjoyable and meaningful way to the child(ren) and to make links with the required curriculum assessment procedures" (p. 21). Adoption of an attitude of playfulness can therefore be used as a strategy to enhance children's learning. Story animation, the use of imaginary scenarios, and demonstration of humour in various ways are a few examples of ways that teachers may adopt playfulness in teaching and learning (Wood, 2013).

Additionally, Hutt (1979) described playfulness as *ludic behaviour*. Hutt (1979) categorized ludic behaviours as "those playful activities which bear upon and utilize past

experience,” for example, children’s role play and representational object play (p. 176). She distinguished between ludic behaviours and epistemic behaviours, which are concerned with acquisition of knowledge (e.g., problem solving and exploration). *Ludic* according to Hutt extends to describe a manner of performance of activity (playfulness) and hence, as she further argued, even epistemic behaviours can be performed in a *ludic mode*. Hutt’s description of play is framed in a context where play activities are drawn from real world experiences and presented through imitation, verbalization, and use of gestures to represent actions or situations.

Drawing from the models/theories described, the presence of play (playfulness) in the classroom can be observed where activities and/or actions from real world experiences are presented through imitation (pretence), verbalization and use of gestures, with demonstration of qualities such as sense of humour, joy, voluntariness, and spontaneity. I find this explanation relevant in describing playfulness in classroom settings.

The conceptualization of play presented above was used as a working definition to guide the study. One of the research questions focused on exploring the meaning of play as viewed by the participants and so the collection of data were open to extended and different conceptualizations, if any.

Relevant Theoretical Conceptualizations of Play

Prominent foundational scholars in early childhood education have advocated for play, and these scholars continue to influence current practices. Important contributions to understanding the role of play in children’s learning are made by Piaget and Vygotsky. At the core of their theories, these theorists recognize that play has a central role in young

children's development. Below is a brief discussion on how play (here referring to pretend, make-believe or symbolic play) is described in the theories developed by these scholars.

Jean Piaget.

In Piaget's view, children were not only recipients of knowledge from adults, but also creators of knowledge. According to Piaget's theory (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000), knowledge is acquired through adaptation – modification of one's own means of interacting with the environment – to fit personal needs. As noted by Zhou and Brown (2014), Piaget's work provides a basis for constructionist theories with the belief that “knowledge is constructed and learning occurs when children create products or artefacts” (p.13). To Piaget, child learning occurs through independent discovery and the child's own construction of the world through interaction with physical objects (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Piaget believed intellectual development passed through “a series of connected stages, in which some knowledge from an earlier stage is incorporated into the next” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1966/2000, p. x). With regard to play, Piaget's (1962) emphasis was on two stages of play: practice play, that he related to sensory motor activity, which evolves to symbolic play due to involvement of representational thought. To him (symbolic) play is “an area of activity whose motivation is not adaptation to reality but, on the contrary, assimilation of reality to the self, without coercions or sanctions” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1966/2000, p. 58). Piaget and Inhelder further argue that imitation in play nevertheless facilitates adaptation through accommodation to new experiences leading to new behaviours. For Piaget therefore, developmental functions of play are immediate.

Lev Vygotsky.

Vygotsky's theorizing about child development differs from Piaget's with respect to the emphasis Vygotsky placed on the influence of the social cultural context on cognition. Differing from Piaget's initial ideas, Vygotsky viewed the social context to be the determinant of the cognitive processes leading to child development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky purported that culture, history and interpersonal interactions are key aspects in development and hence have implications for education provision (Zhou & Brown, 2014). He described development as appearing at two levels, first at the social level (interpersonal) and then at the individual level (intrapersonal). Development is described as occurring through the reconstruction of an external activity operation, to an internal one. This transformation from external activity (interaction with social, physical world) to internal activity (internally oriented thought) is called internalization and Vygotsky described it as "a distinguishing feature of human psychology" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Development therefore, according to Vygotsky, depends on interactions one has with other people, and the tools that are provided by the culture in a particular social context.

Vygotsky viewed play as having a major contribution in child development. According to Vygotsky, creation of "pretend play situations" is what distinguishes play from other children's activities (Smidt, 2009, p. 105). Furthermore, to have the full benefits of play, he pointed out three essential components of play: "creation of an imaginary situation, taking and acting out roles, and following a set of rules determined by specific roles" (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 129).

Vygotsky further argued that the imaginary situation has rules of behaviour (made by the child himself), which a player is obliged to follow. In adherence to these rules, the child learns to act cognitively independently of what he sees. Play, therefore, according to his theory, creates a zone of proximal development as a child's behaviour in play is said to be "above his average age, ... it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 552). In short, imaginary realization of unrealizable desires contains rules of behaviour that a player subordinates to and this subordination teaches him to separate meaning from object. As Vygotsky (1976) states, "the child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Thus a condition is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees" (p. 545). Separation of meaning from object or action (development of abstract thought) is a necessary component for the development of literacy, a requirement for understanding that, for example, the shape 'a' or 'A' represents the letter *a*.

To Vygotsky (1976), play is regarded as *a leading activity* of the child's development during the preschool and Kindergarten years. As the young child develops, his actions, which used to be determined by objects seen and experienced, develop to being determined by thought. This transition shows how imagination develops and Vygotsky sees play (through imagination) as providing a transition between the two stages of human perception (being dominated first by object and then by meaning). Therefore, through creation of an imaginary situation, play provides a transitional stage from the merging of meaning with object to the development of abstract thought. Development of abstract thought is the developmental accomplishment typically expected between the ages of 4 and 6 (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Bodrova and Leong

draw from Vygotsky's idea that play is a leading activity for preschool and Kindergarten children because of its capacity in enhancing the developmental accomplishments expected at this age. Play as a leading activity can facilitate the internalization process that moves development from visual thinking to internal (abstract) thinking through imagination. According to Rogoff (2003), Vygotskian theory asserts that: "in play, children enjoy ignoring the ordinary uses of objects and actions in order to subordinate them to imaginary meanings and situations" (p. 298).

Vygotsky made a distinction between play and similar activities that are beneficial for children's development namely games with rules, and productive activities like drama and story telling (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Although these kinds of activities may complement and enrich play, they are distinguished from pretend play because of their characteristics. Bodrova and Leong describe games with rules as different because of their explicit rules, which should strictly be followed for the games to continue. Furthermore, in activities like drama, although the acting out may provide similar pretend scenarios, the use of scripts created before (mostly by an adult) makes it different from pretend play.

Play is expected to develop to a mature, developed or advanced level of competence in order to lead to the expected achievement for pre-school to kindergarten children (Elkonin, 2005). To be a leading activity that promotes development, play therefore has to be at the advanced level (with imagination as the key feature) and hence, as pointed out by Bodrova and Leong (2007), have the following characteristics: "symbolic representation and symbolic actions, language is used to create a pretend scenario, complex interwoven themes, rich multifaceted roles, and extended time frame"

(p.142). Children need exposure to play contexts where they can get support to gain the required play skills. Bodrova and Leong (2001) stress the important role that teachers can play, through careful intervention, in improving the quality of children's play in order to realize its developmental benefits.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky emphasize the representation inherent in symbolic (pretend) play, which leads to abstraction. They both make a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between play and literacy mainly because of the relation between the symbolic nature of play and the symbolic nature of literacy (Saracho & Spodek, 2006). Nevertheless, they differ in how they perceive its developmental consequence. For Piaget, play is mainly a mechanism for assimilation by incorporating new experiences into existing thinking. On the other hand, Vygotsky viewed such play as having greater significance for developmental outcomes, mainly the development of understanding in social roles and also, from object meaning separation, the development of abstract representation, a pre-requisite for literacy learning.

African Indigenous views.

Despite the insights offered, and their considerable impact on educational practice, the theories outlined above may not be an accurate representation of the conceptions of development and intelligence outside the contexts in which they were developed. Nsamenang (2006) argues against assuming "universally applicable milestones of human development, since every culture recognizes and assigns different developmental tasks to their perceived phases of human ontogenesis" (p. 295). Focusing on African Indigenous views, Nsamenang, presents a theory of social ontogenesis that regards human development as focusing on social integration which although in line with

Vygotsky's ideas, differs from the individualistic focus emphasized by Piaget (cited in Serpell, 1994). In a social ontogenesis paradigm as argued by Nsamenang, human development is attained with reference to interconnections with other people in the community and the enactment of the social roles, hence social responsibility is seen as a determinant of intelligent behaviour. He further asserted that development is attained through participation in the cultural activities in the society and is hence measured by the acquisition of the competencies necessary for full participation in the family and society as a whole.

Nyota and Mapara (2008) also wrote about the emphasis on interconnection in Indigenous ways of learning. In their analysis of traditional games and play songs for Shona children in Zimbabwe, they highlighted guided participation as the key element identified in learning the games and songs. The kind of social interaction focused on was between the elder child who has already mastered the tasks and skills of the games, and the younger one who is still learning. These two children, as Nyota and Mapara contend, interact in accomplishing a task, through a mentor-apprentice relationship. They found the young children under mentorship are expected to master the skills and then become mentors of the younger ones.

Although the Western and Indigenous African contexts are very different, there seems to be considerable agreement in the theories presented above. Both Vygotsky's theory and Nsamenang's social ontogenesis theory emphasize the importance of social interactions as having a major contribution in human development. Both theorists recognize the role of a knowledgeable other, and other cultural tools in facilitating the

learning and development of a child. Vygotsky and Nsamenang agree on the crucial contribution of the social context on the learning and development of children.

However, the two perspectives differ in how intelligent behaviour, as an indicator of the attainment of knowledge and skills, is conceptualized. Vygotsky (1976) emphasized the acquisition of internal developmental (mental) processes and viewed cognitive performance as the key criterion for development. Vygotsky largely based his ideas on the learning and development within the formal school system (or preparation for it). In contrast, the African Indigenous perspectives are based on an informal system of education where learning occurs through guidance and participation within the social activities of the family and community. In the African perspectives as described by Nsamenang (2006), children are instructed in order to take on the social roles of their culture and hence the demonstration of social responsibility is given prominence as evidence of intelligence (Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2008).

In general, although further exploration of human development in various cultures and contexts is necessary, I consider Nsamenang's social ontogenesis theory to make an important contribution in describing Indigenous traditional ideas on learning and development. In recognition of the multiple perspectives on children's learning and development, I used a sociocultural perspective (Fleer, 2002), drawn largely from Vygotsky's work, as a lens of analysis for my study. In the following sections I present how I conceptualize culture in this study, and then I provide a description of the sociocultural theoretical framework used to frame the study

Conceptualization of Culture

The Open Education Sociology Dictionary (2017) defines culture as society's ideas and concepts including attitudes, beliefs, customs and values which are passed from one generation to another. According to Hall (1976), culture touches varied aspects of human life including people's personalities, the way they express themselves, the way they think, move, plan and solve problems. These cultural aspects are acquired through experience as children grow and hence they form part of a resource from which teachers can draw in creating teaching activities.

In gaining understanding of play as a concept and of its role in education, emphasis in this study was placed on understanding the situated context of the phenomenon. I therefore drew upon a definition of culture as ways of doing things in a particular community, "rather than equating culture with nationality or ethnicity of individuals" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 3). With a focus on the physical and social aspects of the settings, attention was given to the ways of life valued in the school community as they are reported to be factors influencing the teachers' interpretation of play. Furthermore, teachers' comments about the culture of the communities in which they live, as reflected by their memories of the values promoted and the activities they engaged in while children, were also accorded attention. This information was accessed through in-depth individual interviews with the teachers and head teachers, as well as through observations of the teachers' practices as they guided children's activities in the pre-primary classroom settings.

Culture was central to this investigation because it distinguishes the way play is conceived from one society to another. It is observed, "Children do not have unlimited

imagination, their make-believe, and by extension, other play forms are constrained by roles, scripts and props of the culture they live in” (Lancy, 2002, p. 56). Children in their play therefore act out adult activities they witness everyday. A study by Kirova (2010) demonstrated productive utilization of this integration of culture and play behaviour. Taking a sociocultural perspective, a community initiated project was conducted to create a smooth transition from home to school culture through children’s play to address the educational needs of children from refugee families in Canada. In this project 10 children, through acting out cultural practices experienced in their home communities, were able to mediate between home country and host country cultures. The children acted out various activities involved in episodes like tea serving and going to the market. This project is a good example where, through a sociocultural approach, play was used in merging different cultural practices for children who were facing barriers in education. In a mixed culture society, play was found to be instrumental in both preserving identities of the cultural groups, and creating a common one.

Theoretical framework: A sociocultural perspective.

In recognition of the multiple values and contextual influences on human activity, Fler, (2002) argues for a sociocultural approach in thinking about and analyzing children and their learning. Fler considers the largely disregarded “multiple value structures, knowledges, and views of the world which are created by people in diverse contexts” (Cannella, 1997, p. 127), and commends sociocultural approaches for providing scope on which to build new foundations. She further calls for the use of Rogoff’s (1998) description of a sociocultural approach to “help us move away from ethnocentric Western

views of development, and to focus more genuinely on children within the collective context of their culture and historical learning journeys” (p. 109).

Drawing from Vygotsky’s (1976) interpsychological (social level) and intrapsychological (individual level) functions in child development, Rogoff, (1998) proposed using three lenses of analysis: a personal plane, an interpersonal plane, and a community/institutional plane, which taken together constitute a sociocultural approach to research. She further elaborated that these three lenses, which are to be considered simultaneously, translate as (a) the participation of the children, (b) the participation of the adult in the teaching and learning context, and (c) the cultural tools that are used in the environment. My research took a similar perspective to the study of the meaning and role of play in early education in the particular context studied. I used a sociocultural approach to examine the play constructions and practices of teachers, with emphasis on each of the three lenses.

In my study, a sociocultural perspective was understood to be concerned with human activity as a result of the influence of individual, social, and contextual issues (Schoen, 2011). The sociocultural perspective focuses on the cultural beliefs of educators with recognition that various influences set the foundation for the content of those beliefs. Sociocultural theory regards these cultural beliefs as foundational in the structure of education of young children (Rogoff, 2003). In the context of my study, it was therefore assumed that in their practices that are shaped by their beliefs, the pre-primary teachers drew from their Indigenous ideas about learning. Furthermore, equally impacting their practices would be ideas shaped by the influence of various factors such as teacher

education, national and school policies and culture, and ongoing changes occurring in the society.

According to Rogoff (2003), the main assumption of sociocultural theory is that “individual activity cannot be separated from its social and cultural-historical context” (p. 50). Inspired by Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural historical theory, Rogoff regards individual and cultural processes as *mutually constituting* instead of being defined separately from each other. I believe sociocultural theory is an appropriate framework for interpretation of the findings of this study because of its underlying assumption of no universal appropriate practice (Fleer, 2002). Consistent with the aim of this study, a sociocultural approach recognizes that beliefs and practices should be interpreted according to the norms of the particular context. The theory therefore facilitates discussion by underscoring the importance of considering the particular views of the educators in relation to the contexts in which they are operating.

As previously noted, drawing from Vygotsky’s (1976) interpsychological (social level) and intrapsychological (individual level) functions in child development, Rogoff, (1998) proposed three lenses of analysis in early childhood education. Therefore, from a sociocultural perspective, educators’ beliefs and practices are located in/linked to the individuals’ own background, experience and characteristics, which constitute the personal plane; their interactions with the students, other teachers and the head teachers form the interpersonal plane; and the norms, beliefs and culture of the school and the society reflect the community institutional plane. Hence, the three planes were used to inform my interpretation of the beliefs of educators in this particular context, with regard to play and its role in children’s learning.

After presenting the framework of relevant concepts and theoretical perspectives for this study, in the following section I review the importance of play as portrayed in Western literature as well as in other contexts, and then I present relevant literature on play and early childhood education in Africa.

Review of relevant literature

Importance of play for young children.

Play in education: Perspectives from Western literature.

Western scholarly discourse has generally featured play as being of great importance in the education of young children. Play was found to be beneficial for children's early development of mathematics and science skills, language and literacy skills, and social and self-regulatory skills (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2011). In the early years of preschool, the focus is mainly on preparing the children to be ready for learning in a school environment. Play has been linked to the development of various so-called 'school readiness' skills, mainly self-regulation and early literacy skills (Bredekamp, 2004). Findings from research revealed that play experiences in the classroom have advantages for children with relatively low self-regulation skills (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007), and that integration of play into curriculum can enhance children's ability to attend to tasks directed by the teacher (Berk, 2002). Conclusions reached in both of these studies indicated that play functions to enhance 'school readiness' through developing self-regulation.

However, enhancing school readiness has been linked to the early subjection of young children to direct/didactic teaching of school subjects in the formal curriculum.

The pressures of curriculum demands and parents' aspirations, as well as teachers' under-qualification are argued to be challenging the provision of education through the most appropriate methods for the young children in South Africa (Ebrahim, 2012). Likewise, in the United States early years education, play has been undermined as some Kindergarten children spend more time on instruction and tests through prescriptive curricula (Miller & Amon, 2009).

Other aspects of behaviour positively impacted by play are social skills, language, and early literacy skills (Bredekamp, 2004). Although salient features of play influential in literacy learning are still being defined (Christie & Roskos, 2013), a large body of research evidence indicates a strong relationship between play and the development of emergent literacy. The use of language in children's play was found to develop skills essential for reading development (Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). In these studies, play activities and play environments were found to encourage the use of language among children and consequently stimulate development of early literacy skills. Christie and Roskos (2013) specify that "literacy-rich environments increase literacy behaviours and sociodramatic play supports literacy-related cognitive-linguistic processes" (pp. 192-193). Play experiences were found to also impact print and phonological awareness. This claim is evidenced by increases in children's ability to write their names, increased vocabulary, and improvement in comprehension skills and word awareness (Bellin & Singer, 2006; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2009).

The play-literacy link is argued to be effective in encouraging early literacy development (Roskos, Christie & Richgel, 2003). According to Christie and Roskos

(2013), an increase in studies examining play in relation to literacy is mainly due to the evolving view of literacy acquisition. Although previously it was not expected children would learn much about reading and writing before formal instruction, currently, early literacy experiences are more emphasised and these experiences are found to be connected to play in promoting children's literacy learning (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Various literacy (reading and writing) behaviours and experiences, that are useful in developing literacy skills, have been observed in children's play both at home and at school (Rowe, 1998; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). For example, preschool children tend to highly enjoy adults reading books with silly, wild and dramatic stories to them, and this experience enriches children's play (Christie & Roskos, 2015). Furthermore, to enhance literacy development in the school context, teachers are expected to assume various roles in a literacy-play context such as "discussion leader, storyteller, examiner, instructional guide, informer, learning center monitor, and decision-maker" (Saracho, 2002, p. 25). These roles are discussed later in this chapter.

In another study conducted in the United Kingdom, which involved 129 children aged 3-5 years, the researchers aimed at providing empirical evidence demonstrating the link between play and the emotional well-being of young children (Howard, 2010; Howard & McKinnes, 2012). Howard and McKinnes used the presence or absence of some cues to identify activities that children would regard as play (and hence the activity as playful) or non-play. Data were gathered through engaging two groups of children in two sessions with a similar activity but one was labeled 'like play' and another 'not like play.' Children's emotional well-being was then measured using the Leuven involvement scale. Analysis of the data revealed that the cues used by the children to

determine whether an activity was like play or not like play were “adult presence (either present or proximal), location (activity occurring either at a table or on the floor) and choice (child asked to participate or given a choice)” (Howard & McKinnes, 2012, p. 739). The researchers further found that play can not only be seen as an observable behaviour but also as a mental state because of its positive impact on the emotional well-being of the children when an activity is perceived as playful. Results from the study revealed increased behavioural indicators related to emotional well-being for children who participated in playful activities as compared to those who took part in those activities regarded as not playful.

The discussion above demonstrates the previously found developmental benefits for different approaches to play in children’s early education. The implication is that integration of play into the school curriculum leads to valuable outcomes. However, realizing the potential benefits from play will require taking measures to ensure its careful integration, taking into consideration the demands of a structured curriculum in an institutionalized setting. As Nicolopoulou and her colleagues (2009) recommend:

tapping the potential value of play for learning and development is not simply a matter of alternating didactic/academic instruction with free-play periods. Rather, educational practices should systematically integrate the play element into the curriculum in carefully structured ways that simultaneously engage children’s enthusiasm and provide scope for children’s own initiative and creativity. (p. 43)

Practitioners are thus urged to devise different ways of integrating play in their curriculum-focused activities (Wood, 2013).

The use of play in fulfilling academic goals, however, has received criticism, especially with regard to the influence of an adult in what is supposed to be children's 'free' play (Goncu & Gaskins, 2011; Kushner, 2012). Kushner argues against classifying the various teacher-led interactive classroom activities as play and recommends that play should be part of the curriculum, that children be given adequate time to play, but that it should not be used for fulfilling academic goals.

Although disagreement exists about how play should be integrated in a classroom, various approaches have been argued to be effective (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012). Frost and colleagues describe three approaches for integrating play into the curriculum: trust-in-play approach, facilitate-play approach, and learn-and-teach-through-play approach. They give examples of curriculum models under each approach where teachers attempting to integrate play in their classrooms can borrow some key concepts from each approach. Below, I give a brief description of the approaches as highlighted by Frost and his colleagues.

In the trust-in-play approach, a teacher provides an environment and materials for self-guided and open ended play (Frost et al., 2012). The assumption is that play leads to learning in a natural way without adult involvement. Based mostly on Freud's view of play as a way for children to express themselves, the overall goal for programs adopting this approach, according to Frost and colleagues, was to enhance social development and mental health. In the second approach, facilitate-play approach, the emphasis is on the guidance of the teacher in promoting play activities. The intention is to enhance the play abilities of children by emphasizing the kinds of play (e.g., pretend play and games) deemed particularly useful for school outcomes (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Smilansky,

1968). The teacher has the main role of not only creating an environment for play but also of intervening and guiding by encouraging interaction. The learn-and-teach through-play approach is described as focusing not on play itself but rather on using play to meet learning outcomes. A teacher's role in programs adopting this approach is to encourage play as a context for promoting concepts and skills in literacy, maths, language, social development, and problem solving. One of the ways to enhance literacy skills, for example, would be for teachers using this approach to ensure their class is equipped with play materials relevant to reading and writing in order to encourage literacy behaviour (Christie & Roskos, 2013). Evaluative research into the developmental advantages of programs that have used these approaches would be most worthwhile.

It is important to note that the approaches highlighted above are drawn from observations of education contexts where play is explicitly incorporated into the official curriculum. In recognition of the importance of understanding views from different cultural contexts, in the following section I highlight views on play in different cultures.

Play in other cultural contexts.

From much of the reviewed literature, it can be seen that the assumption of a *universal childhood* has impacted the discourse on the developmental benefits of children's play. The majority of the literature on play is based on studies in Western contexts. However, it is not appropriate to assume that children in all societies will develop in similar ways through play and other experiences. One of the main limitations of the applicability of the literature reviewed above is the variation of the age that children's pretend play reaches maturity. Due to the impact of sociocultural activities in

human development, children grow at different rates and hence, as Gaskins, Haight and Lancy (2007) argue:

Although children of all ages are found to engage in play, pretend play in particular appears to peak as an important kind of play at different ages in different cultures It is unlikely that it will have the same developmental force at these different ages. (p. 195)

The differences in how and what types of play are valued in different societies are likely to lead to differences in perceptions of the functions of play, and the emphasis they are given, in different contexts. Although play is argued to be common in many societies, variations exist between societies in the time spent on play (Lancy, 2002). For example, based on observations in a so-called *primitive* society, minimally influenced by Western colonial ways, Lancy (2002) contends that time spent playing by children gradually decreases as they grow older and take on more responsibilities by learning from adults through working. While time spent in play may decrease as most children get older, no matter their society, time-frames can differ considerably within and across cultures.

Although play is said to be an integral part of children's activities, and children from different contexts with varied social and economical situations were found to engage in play or play-like activities (Gosso & Carvalho, 2013; Roopnarine & Jin, 2012), play is also affected by specific cultural contexts just like any other human activity (Gaskins et al., 2007). Gosso and Carvalho (2013) further argue that various contextual aspects like availability of time, space, objects and playmates, and adults' involvement in and attitudes about play have been identified as affecting the frequency, duration, and the

nature of children's play. An example of variation in the value granted to play was described in a study by Morelli, Rogoff, and Angelillo (2003), who found higher adult frequent involvement in children's play in the United States (a technologically developed country) than in the 'Efe' and 'San Pedro' societies in Congo and Guatemala respectively. Adults in each setting were therefore found supporting the children as they experienced various activities including play. However, the differences with respect to adult involvement in the play suggests variations in how play is valued in different contextual situations.

Another example of variations in the value granted play comes from an analysis of features of play in four cultural contexts, Euramerican, Taiwan, Liberia and Mexico, by Gaskins et al. (2007). In the first two contexts, in which play is said to be *culturally activated*, play is recognized as important and hence parents play with the children, and give other opportunities that stimulate play such as making play materials available for the children. However, some differences were identified between Euramerican and Taiwan settings in this category. While children were found to be interacting with caregivers in the Euramerican context, in Taiwan the caregiver leads the activities in order to attain specific goals. Additionally, while the use of play objects and imaginary themes were found to be the focus in the Euramerican setting, in Taiwan play was focusing on social routines in order to enhance social conduct.

The second context brought up a scenario named *culturally accepted*. One of the authors, David Lancy, studied Kpelle society in a village in Liberia (Gaskins et al., 2007). The study's findings indicated that play is not regarded as important activity by the Kpelle in Liberia. Although children are expected to play, in this society involvement of

adults is not expected. This view is linked, by the authors, to primarily low income, rural areas of a non-industrial society.

The third context involved the study of a Yucatec Mayan village in Mexico (Gaskins et al., 2007). In this setting, only minimal amounts of play were found to be tolerated by adults, hence play was described as *curtailed*. Play was integrated into daily life but was not privileged by adults, and the physical and social resources available also limited play opportunities. In this context, play was found to be useful when needed to distract children from disturbing adults while working. The adults believed the acquisition of skills takes place through observation and imitation and not play.

In the same way as variation is noted in the value placed on play, the view that play is linked to learning also varies across cultures. Similarly, variations in how teachers conceptualize play have been noted, leading to differences in play opportunities offered in the classroom (Gupta, 2010). Differences have also been recorded in how parents regard play. For example, in a study conducted by Chowdhury and Rivalland (2012) in Bangladesh, parents were found to regard play as leisure activity, which should be monitored in school settings so that it does not compromise academic instruction time.

The differences in cultural expectations with regard to play lead to the assumption that teachers' beliefs about play also differ and result in different related classroom practices. Findings from the very few studies that have explored teachers' perceptions and beliefs about play in early education, and how they came to hold those beliefs have revealed that play is defined and valued differently by different people. In two studies exploring parents' and experts' perceptions about play that involved 1,130 US mothers and 99 child development professionals, Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and Gryfe (2008)

found the two groups demonstrated different beliefs with regard to the learning value attached to different activities perceived as play or non-play. For mothers, play comprised all activities ranging from unstructured imaginary behaviours to structured, goal-oriented activities. The participating mothers were found to regard structured activities of more learning value. On the other hand, professionals in the study regarded structured activities as non-play and hence associated less learning value to them compared to unstructured activities. The difference in interpretation of play highlighted in the study by Fisher and colleagues demonstrated the complexity and difficulty in defining play. The authors therefore recommend, “to fully understand what constitutes play, we must go beyond experts to parents’ implicit beliefs of play and how these beliefs are fostered not only by the individual, but by culture and society” (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 314-315).

Variation in the way play is understood and constructed also has been noted among pre-service teachers (Jung & Jin, 2014; Sherwood, 2009), and in-service teachers (Hyvonen, 2011; Parsons, 2013; Sandberg & Heden, 2011). Some of these studies are based on positivist designs, employing surveys to explore perceptions of a large number of teachers and parents; in-depth examination of the beliefs and practices of teachers framed by a constructivist paradigm represent another group of studies. In the following section, I review studies that report on how play is understood and practiced by teachers.

Beliefs and practices of teachers with regard to play.

The arguments in support of play in the early childhood curriculum seem to be based “more on rhetoric than on sound pedagogical reasoning” (Bennet, Wood & Rogers, 1997, p. 31). Bennet et al. argue there is a need for a focus on the reality of teachers’ actual practices, asserting that knowledge of what teachers do in the classrooms and why

they do it is of utmost importance. Various researchers have explored the beliefs and practices of teachers with regard to play in an effort to tease out teachers' understanding of play, their approach to the integration of play into the curriculum, and teacher roles assumed to promote learning in the play-based curriculum.

I was able to locate only a few relevant studies on teachers' beliefs (Bennet et al., 1997; Parsons, 2013; Peng, 2011; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Sherwood, 2009). Findings from these studies indicate a range of play definitions offered by teachers, and a variety of perspectives on what play accomplishes for the child. I find the model developed by Bennet and colleagues (see Figure 2) a good representation/example of the teachers' understanding of the nature and benefits of play.

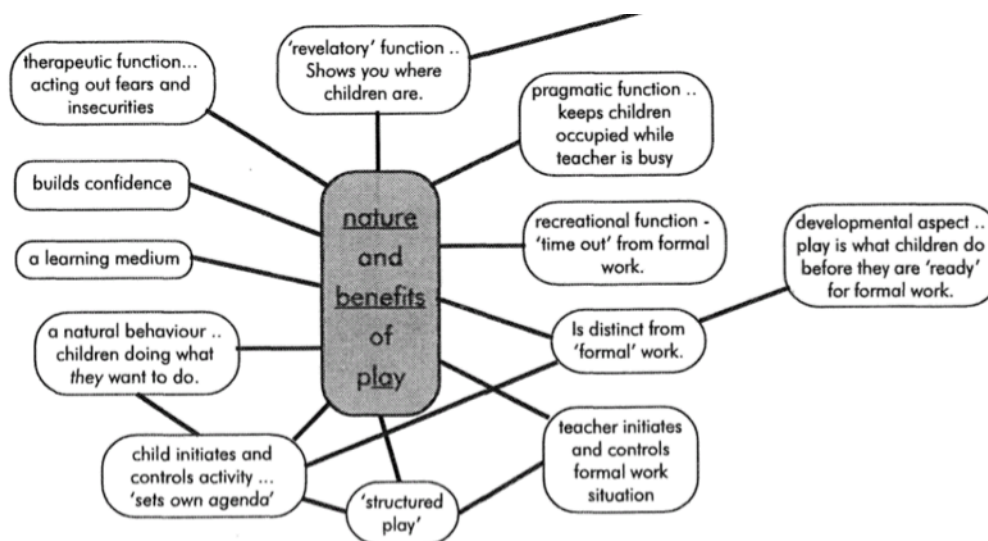


Figure 2. Teachers' perspectives on the nature and benefits of play (Bennet et al., 1997, p. 32)

Findings from studies on the integration of play into the curriculum portray different integration approaches. In a study which specifically examined Canadian teachers' approaches to integrating play into the classroom, Pyle and Bigelow (2014) conducted interviews with three teachers, as well as classroom observations. The two

researchers identified three play-based learning approaches: play as peripheral to learning, play as a vehicle to social and emotional development, and play as a vehicle for academic learning. These approaches were derived from the teachers' perspectives as revealed in the study findings. Pyle and Bigelow argued that the differences in approaches highlighted challenges in integrating play into Kindergarten. They recommended further research across different contexts to validate their results.

Other studies on teachers' perceptions of play focused on the roles assumed by teachers in integrating play in the classroom (Bennet et al., 1997; Hyvonen, 2011; Saracho, 2002). From the views of the teachers presented in the findings of the studies, teachers' roles fall into three groups: leadership role, observation role, and participation role. In Table 1 below, I present a summarized description of each role as given in the particular study indicated.

Table 1: Teachers' perspectives on their role in provision of play activities

	Leadership role	Observation role	Participation role
Bennet et al., (1997)	<u>Provider</u> : Providing a stimulating environment	<u>Observer</u> : Observing behaviour for assessment and diagnosis	<u>Participant</u> : Roles change as activities change: collaborative, supportive, facilitator, unobtrusive.
Hyvonen (2011)	<u>Leader</u> : Plans and executes play in classroom.	<u>Allower</u> : Observing to ensure safety	<u>Afforder</u> : Acts as facilitator or tutor
Saracho (2002)	<u>Instructional guide</u> : Plan and set up experiences, environment and materials <u>Learning centre monitor</u> : Monitors activities, materials and interactions to ensure learning occurs <u>Discussion leader</u> : lead discussion in a literacy-play environment		<u>Storyteller</u> : reads story while encouraging children to participate in predicting events <u>Informer</u> : Provide clues to help children learn new concepts <u>Examiner</u> : ask questions, monitor responses, clarifies concepts in a meaningful way (using concrete experiences)

The teachers' roles presented above underscore the crucial position of the teacher in the provision of classroom activities/experiences for children.

However, it is also argued that adult rules limit play opportunities for children especially because of the focus on assessment of educational outcomes (Anning, 2015). In her analysis of play as featured in the UK legislated curriculum, Anning argues that teachers are familiar with models of play but they find it challenging to translate the models into practice. This observation was earlier noted by DeVries (2002) in the US with regard to a play oriented ECE framework – Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). DeVries argues that there seems to be no consensus in understanding or implementing DAP among the teachers. From her observations of teachers' implementation of the play-oriented curriculum, De Vries presents different examples of how play is incorporated into classrooms revealing a continuum from where play is very marginalized to where play is fully integrated into learning activities.

The approaches discussed in this section suggest a wide range of play situations that teachers can provide in classrooms, although recognizing that challenges arise from teachers' interpretation and implementation of play. However, the models presented were developed for use in particular contextual situations and might not be applicable in others, especially where play is viewed and valued differently as described in the previous section. In the following section, I review literature from African contexts that is relevant to the dissertation study.

Early childhood education and play in Africa.

Conceptual background.

Early childhood education is relatively new in the formal education systems of most African countries. In Tanzania, for example, it was not until 1995 that the country's education policy made it mandatory for every primary school to establish a pre-primary class (United Republic of Tanzania, 1995). The few studies conducted in Africa on early childhood education relevant to my study were conducted in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Principles guiding early childhood curriculum in African countries are mainly drawn from those identified in Europe and America due to colonial influence (Akahara, 2013). For example, in a book on effective teaching and learning methods for Nigeria's pre-primary schools, Akahara's discussion on play's effectiveness for teaching and learning seems to be based on conformity to 'Westernized' principles that inform curriculum policies, with assumptions of a global childhood. However, the varied cultural values and traditions in African societies may greatly differ from the approaches that dominate the literature (Hickman, 2014) and hence the need for contextualized approaches. The use of mother tongue to create play that suits the child's purpose, as found in an English medium program, is one of the ways sociocultural background can be used to contradict conformity to imported curriculum principles (Ebrahim, 2013). Ebrahim believes the sociocultural background of children is an important aspect in influencing promotion of creativity and expression.

While Akahara's (2013) guidebook on effective teaching methods depicts play practices informed by imported principles, some initiatives have been suggested to

promote Indigenous ways to facilitate transition to primary school, especially for vulnerable children, with play being one of the strategies recommended (Africa ECD Voice, 2014). Play and learning is the title of one of the seven modules of an African Indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education (IECCE) curriculum framework model (Awopegpa, Odulowu, & Nsamenang, 2013), which focuses mainly on making use of Indigenous knowledges in facilitating children's learning in local contexts. In this framework, play is regarded as providing opportunity for children to learn in their cultural environment, with the teacher being the designer of a play environment "that reflects attitudes and values of the surrounding culture" (Awopegpa et al., 2013, p. 100).

Review of African studies.

A few studies from South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya, depict perceptions on the meaning and benefits of play. Sekhukhune (2014) reported how two teachers interviewed in South Africa perceived play as non-serious, spontaneous activity that was beneficial in children's language acquisition and mathematics development. However, findings from research conducted in Ghana and Tanzania that explored early childhood programs in those contexts revealed parents were not in agreement with the integration of play into school (academic) work as academic work was regarded of more significance (Adjei, 2012; Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010). None of the studies was specifically aimed at an in-depth examination of perceptions of play and/or its integration into teaching and learning.

An examination of play (and aspects related to play) is found in six studies conducted in Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, and Zambia. In a phenomenological study to examine experiences of play by children in Zanzibar,

Tanzania, views were sought from children aged 10 -13 years on what play meant to them (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009). A photovoice strategy, using photographs taken by participants to elicit discussion, was used in collecting the children's views. Play as experienced by the children was found to be "self-driven, a social endeavor, and about waking the body up and occupying free time" (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009, p. 103). Creativity and resourcefulness were demonstrated in play, which was found to be influenced by culture. However, although the authors saw this influence of culture, they failed to see lack of adult participation as also cultural and regarded it as a deficit. This study was aimed at examining what play meant in this context, with a focus on only the children. The participants were children older than those in pre-primary schools and the play situation investigated was not the classroom situation.

In another study with a focus to understand children's behavioral adjustment in pre-primary classes in Tanzania, Shavega, Brugman and Van Tuijl (2014) involved 20 teachers and 320 students from 20 pre-primary schools in Tanzania. They used a multi-level approach to investigate how the teacher-child relationship, teachers' cultural beliefs, and classroom emotional support related to children's behavioral adjustment. Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), Prosocial scale of the Preschool Behaviour, Questionnaire (PPBQ), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) were adapted and used to assess results from questionnaires and observation. One of the aspects revealed in the findings is that teachers' negative perceptions of inclusion of play in the classroom led to impaired behavioural adjustment of the children. From the findings, it was indicated that teachers believed that school was not the appropriate place for promoting the social skills that play is expected to enhance.

In a closely related context in Kenya, Andiema, Kemboi, and M'mbone (2013) used survey methods to examine the relation between the implementation of play activities and learners' academic performance. Quantitative questionnaires, as well as structured interviews and observations were conducted in primary schools, with 16 head teachers and 90 teachers. The qualifications and experiences of the teachers were related to their effectiveness in classroom undertakings, translating into the ability to provide children with required play opportunities. Statistical analysis led to findings that indicated participation in play was significantly related to students' academic performance, implying the beneficial contribution of play to children's learning and development.

In another study, Aronstam and Braund (2015) sought to explore the perceptions of teachers with regard to how play is supported in the reception (preschool) class in South Africa. The researchers assisted by student teachers, interviewed 104 teachers in primary schools and early childhood centers about their views and understanding of play, its value and integration into curriculum. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis according to four key areas identified from the literature. The findings indicated that teachers prefer structured (formal) play, which they are in control of, over free (which they termed informal) play. Furthermore, these teachers were not aware of their role during 'informal' play. The researchers recommended the teachers be given in-depth training on the pedagogy of play in order that their students benefit from the developmental values of play.

The two studies above from Kenya and South Africa were conducted with the assumption that understanding of play in early childhood education is universal. In the

study by Aronstam and Braund (2015), teachers' views of play as structured (formal) in the learning context were described as lacking comprehension of the concept. Seemingly, the researchers failed to appreciate the particular knowledge of the teachers, overlooked the impact of multiculturalism in multiple societies and appeared guided by the assumption of universally appropriate understandings and practices of the play concept. This assumption has been questioned (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999) and sociocultural approaches are recommended as providing possibilities for new foundations in early childhood education (Fleer, 2002).

Songs and music are the aspects that were described as closely linked to play in African contexts. In an examination of children's play songs in Ga society in Ghana, Abbary (1989) found that the songs reflect the ways of life of the people in the particular society including their beliefs, values, knowledge, and manners. Abbary further described how the songs were mainly aimed at enhancing traditional education with the focus on imparting the qualities "that would make the Ga children good members of their communities" (p. 202). According to Abbary, the play songs and rhymes included nursery songs, games and dance songs. In a traditional society before formal education was introduced, the role of play in the form of songs was already recognized.

In another study conducted in Zambia, Kalinde and Vermeulen (2016) embraced an Indigenous African education perspective to investigate how music in the mother tongue in a cultural context can foster educational aims. In an ethnographic case study, the researchers adopted observation as a primary data collection method. They observed a resource person while teaching music in mother tongue to 18 children between 5 and 6 years of age. Sixteen songs in Zambian languages were used to guide children's musical

activities in their mother tongues. Each session lasted between 20 and 25 minutes. Music in the mother tongue was found to be multimodal and its features included, amongst others, play. Two kinds of play observed in the music sessions were sociodramatic play, as governed by simple rules, and object play involving manipulation of materials. The authors argued that these aspects of play contribute in a natural way, children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development especially because of the use of the mother tongue.

It is also reported that children in African societies start to experience singing very early in their life and that singing later becomes part of their lives (Finnegan, 2014). In the reporting on ethnographic research and documentary sources about children's play, Finnegan argues that children in African societies learn to play beginning in their mothers' wombs by listening to their mothers singing. She views singing extending to 'songs for work' by adults and describes how children, carried on their mother's backs, inevitably listen to their mothers as they sing songs that lighten "the day long pounding of rice" (Finnegan, 2014, p. 295). She highlights the featuring of play through songs in different life situations that children experience like disaster and war, and recognizes the recreation function as well as artistic creativity within such songs.

The contribution of the studies above in addressing play and its role in education is acknowledged. However, an in-depth examination of play in the teaching/learning context remains necessary. The statistical evidence provides part of the story on the role of play in an education setting. However, to add to the story, naturalistic inquiries are needed to explore through a sociocultural lens, how play is understood or believed to be as well as how it is reflected in practice.

In the curriculum framework for Indigenous early childhood education for Africa designed by Awopegpa and colleagues (2013), play is also regarded as beneficial for children and seen as contributing to cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The authors further argue that play creates an opportunity for children to learn from new experiences by being close to the community and objects with which they are familiar, and that the school setting is the best avenue for creation of such opportunity. Play in this framework is defined as, “a behavior that is self-motivated, freely chosen, process oriented and enjoyable” (Awopegpa et al., 2013, p. 99). Although this definition may seem generic, and not specific to the particular Indigenous context, the authors further highlight the importance of the cultural environment and that the role of the teacher is to create, “a play environment that reflects attitudes and values of the surrounding culture” (Awopegpa et al., 2013, p. 100). Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011) similarly emphasize the importance of play by recommending establishment of playgroups as an intervention to facilitate the transition of young children to school in the areas where children do not have opportunities for pre-primary school.

In summary, play in African contexts is claimed to contribute to children’s development especially when the practices are adapted to children’s experiences through incorporating local culture into school programs. According to Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011), “children develop in culturally constructed environments that are designed by adults on the basis of what their culture tells them is the correct way to rear children” (p. 118). Classroom environments therefore are expected to be designed by the teachers based on their cultural beliefs. Teachers’ practices may also be influenced by

professional training as well as the guiding policy of education, and both training and policy may give precedence to values imported from outside the local or national culture.

The meaning a teacher attaches to play impacts the way he/she designs classroom activities, which consequently impact children's learning. To understand the meaning teachers attach to play and its role in classroom settings and to children's development, it is necessary to explore the beliefs and practices of the teachers. Through observations and video recall prompted interviews, my study was designed to uncover the beliefs of the participating teachers, the basis for those beliefs, and therefore enhance knowledge of the meaning of play and its role in pre-primary classroom settings in Tanzania and other contexts with similar characteristics.

Chapter Summary

In the first section of this chapter, I explored the general conceptualization of play and its relationship to early childhood education. I discussed different models and approaches in an attempt to define play as well as relevant theoretical perspectives. I also presented a brief conceptualization of culture and then a sociocultural lens as used to frame the study. In the second section, I critically reviewed literature on two main topics. In the first part, I looked into the importance given to play in Early Childhood Education focusing on perspectives from Western and other contexts. I analyzed reported developmental benefits as well as the integration of play into the classroom. In the second part, I reviewed relevant literature from Africa to establish how early childhood education is portrayed and specifically how play is featured in relation to its education significance. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology I used in conducting my study.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the beliefs and practices of selected Tanzanian pre-primary teachers with regard to play and its role in early years education. Considering that children's learning and development are influenced by, among other factors, the cultural beliefs of the teacher who designs the learning environment, I believe that a better understanding of the phenomenon will permit policy makers and teacher educators to design and facilitate teacher education programs from a more informed perspective. In this chapter I describe the methodology of the research. I first describe the rationale for qualitative design and case study methodology. I then give a description of the setting and the research participants, and the procedures for data collection and data analysis, and address issues of ethics and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is essentially based on a constructivist paradigm with assumptions that there exist multiple realities; understanding is co-constructed by the researcher and the participant through a naturalistic set of procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to understand meaning as constructed by the people involved in the situation studied (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is described as focusing on the aspect in research whereby human thinking "relies primarily on human perception and understanding" (Stake, 2006, p. 11) in an effort to enlighten the meanings, actions and social contexts of the participants (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson,

2002). In contrast to quantitative methodology, qualitative researchers place virtually no emphasis on examining cause and effect, sees truth as depending on context and time, and therefore acknowledges the non-possibility of generalization of findings (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012).

I found qualitative research methods appropriately suited for eliciting the rich data necessary to address the purposes of my investigation. My study was consistent with the following key descriptive features of qualitative research as highlighted by Yin (2011, pp. 7-8):

- 1) Studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions;
- 2) Representing the views and perspectives of the people;
- 3) Covering the contextual conditions within which people live;
- 4) Contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; and
- 5) Striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

The study was conducted in school settings, where I researched the meanings teachers attach to what they do in that particular context. Furthermore I used multiple sources of evidence to capture participants' views on the role of play.

It is however important to acknowledge that a mixed method approach would also be applicable in a study like mine. Although the area of play in education settings has been widely researched in Western contexts, in this particular context it is relatively new. While it would certainly be methodologically appropriate to conduct a mixed methods study to capture perspectives from a wide and varied sample of participants through

quantitative surveys and questionnaires, and then purposefully select fewer participants for in depth interviews and observation, limited resources and researcher inexperience suggested a more cautious route. Ponterotto and Grieger (2007) advise graduate students conducting research against a mixed method approach, as it is not recommended for a novice researcher. Instead they recommend the use of mixed methods when the researcher is already experienced in conducting studies in the various approaches separately. As the study was intended as an initial exploration designed to reveal the participants' beliefs and insights about play and its place, if any, in their practice, rich descriptive data were required (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I thus considered qualitative approaches more suitable for providing the rich descriptive information needed to address the questions of interest. A mixed method approach will be considered at a later stage of my research journey.

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

I aimed to present a holistic overview of perspectives and experiences of the participating teachers through the case study method. A case study research method can be simply described as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Although there is no consensus regarding what constitutes the case study strategy, Schwandt (2007) emphasizes the centrality of *case* in case study as a distinct feature. Yin (2013) describes case study as involving an in-depth investigation with the assumption that contextual conditions are applicable to the particular case and not necessarily to any others outside the case. Due to relevant features described here, case study was determined to be an appropriate method of inquiry to answer my research questions. Yin argues that a case study method is more relevant when a study seeks to

answer *how* or *why* questions which are more explanatory in nature. This element is relevant to the overall question that guided the study: How do selected educators in Tanzania understand play's role in the teaching/learning activity, and what factors can be identified as forming and influencing their beliefs about play? Case study was an appropriate design choice because of its suitability in describing, interpreting, or explaining occurrences (Bassegy, 1999).

Also the aim of this study was consistent with Bassegy's (1999) statement that educational case studies of theoretical type are aimed at giving "theoretical accounts of the topic – perhaps of its structures, or processes, or relationships – which link with existing theoretical ideas" (p. 40). The aim is neither to evaluate nor change the situation, although findings may later be used to initiate some change. Rather, the multiple case study was aimed at uncovering the meaning constructed by the teachers as they live between, and interpret multiple, intersecting social realities, a characteristic of a constructivist/interpretive research paradigm.

Research Setting and Participants

In a multiple case study, the cases are chosen on the basis of how they might help the researcher to understand the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2006). The goal of having multiple cases is not to replicate findings across cases and predict similarity or contrast of results, but rather to elicit broad insights on the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2013). As my study explored teachers' practices in relation to their understanding of and beliefs about the role of play in education, the school setting was the best unit of study (case) to focus on. I selected pre-primary classes in four schools as cases, and each was investigated to provide information in response to the research questions. As the

study was mainly aimed at exploring an under-researched phenomenon in this particular context, the focus was to provide rich descriptive data rather than a broad sampling of information (Braun & Clark, 2008).

No methodological rules exist for sample size in qualitative research; selection is guided by the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015). I used typical case purposeful sampling strategy as proposed by Patton (2015) to select schools in Kinondoni (rural) district, which is one of the six educational districts of Dar es Salaam city. These districts are formed from three main administrative districts of Kinondoni, Ilala and Temeke. Due to the size of the city and the large number of schools, each administrative district is divided into a *rural* and *urban* section depending on the distance of the schools from the city centre. Schools from Kinondoni (rural) district were selected as the site for this study because they are presumed to be more typical of the majority of primary schools found in Tanzania than are those in the urban section of the district (which are closer to the city center). The criteria used to define typicality here take their cue from Patton's (2015) statement that the site "is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual" (p. 284). Schools in proximity to the city center tend to have relatively more adequate resources, a privilege enjoyed by only a minor number of schools in the country.

Four schools out of approximately 90 primary schools with similar characteristics in Kinondoni (rural) district (in Dar es Salaam region) were purposefully selected. To maximize the possibility of learning about the beliefs and practices of pre-school educators about play, the four schools were selected on the basis of being primary schools with a pre-primary class. I found four schools to be adequate considering the

number of participants required, two from each school. Eight participants (four head teachers and four teachers) were adequate for my initial exploratory investigational goals of seeking in-depth information concerning the phenomenon rather than a larger number of participants, which would be useful if aiming at understanding diversity or variation.

However, it should be noted that all 90 schools in the district have similar characteristics and hence would qualify to be used as cases in the study. An officer in the district education office, who was knowledgeable about working with the schools, assisted me in selecting four schools that were easily accessible. By accessibility I refer to those schools that are within proximity (one from the other) and where it was likely I would be accorded the expected cooperation from the teachers and head teachers.

However, I want to emphasize that while any of the 90 schools in the district could have served the purposes of this research, the small size of the sample and the decision to attend to accessibility were influenced by limits on my available time and resources (Patton, 2015). After discussion with the officer, we chose the four schools and identified them with pseudonyms: Sunrise, New Star, Moonlight and Heaven Light. I give detailed descriptions of each school in the presentation of the context section of Chapter 4.

Procedures for Data Collection

Various methodological steps were taken in collecting/gathering and analyzing data. Before going to the selected schools for data collection, I acquired approval from the University of Victoria Human Ethics Research Board. The approval process involved ensuring adherence to specified standards for conducting research with human participants including confidentiality and informed consent. I also obtained research

clearance from the research authority body of the country where research was conducted – the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (Appendix C). I then submitted the clearance letter to the Municipal Council Director requesting permission to conduct research in the municipality. I obtained the permission letter (Appendix D) with which I had to report to the Municipal Education Officer (Primary section). After reporting to the Education Officer, I obtained a letter of introduction to the schools (Appendix E). In the process of obtaining introduction letters to the head teachers of the schools, I discussed site selection with the officer responsible who assisted me as described above.

With the introduction letter in hand, I visited each of the four selected schools and introduced myself. All of my first visits were after school hours to avoid interrupting the classes. The head teacher and one pre-primary class teacher in each of the four selected schools were invited to participate yielding an expected total of eight participants in the study. I clarified the objectives of the study and what would be required of the participants, while addressing some of their questions. I gave the potential participants time to make a joint decision about their participation. I expected that in each school the two potential participants, that is the head teacher and the pre-primary class teacher, would discuss and decide together. I gave them a day to make a decision after which I followed up with a phone call. Except for one head teacher who was unable to participate due to absences from the school for official duties during the period of the study, all those approached agreed to participate and signed consent forms. Therefore three head teachers (one male and two females) and five pre-primary teachers (all females) participated in the study; the total number of participants remained eight as initially expected, although the sample composition was slightly different. Data collection

was conducted in one setting at a time to make efficient use of time, and to help me effectively manage the data as they were collected and minimize confusion (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This procedure also allowed me to address in the other settings issues raised in, or found to be in need of attention from, a previous setting.

Data collection methods.

No specific data collection methods are designated solely for case study design (Bassey, 1999). I therefore used multiple methods in order to increase the credibility of the findings (Yin, 2013). The three methods used to gather information included semi-structured interviews, observation and video recordings, and review of documents. Semi-structured interviews were the main technique used to collect data. Each of the three head teachers was interviewed once. For the teachers, the interviews were conducted in three phases. While further descriptions of the methods and procedures are provided in the sections below, I would like to emphasize here that my decision to gather and triangulate multiple sources of data was done with the intention of generating a broadly informative picture of the cases studied, rather than for judging or checking on the accuracy of what was reported.

Semi-structured interviews.

The use of interviews allowed me to gain access to the participants' views on the phenomena in question (Patton, 2002). The main assumption underlying the use of interview, as a data collection technique, is that there is some knowledge beyond what the researcher has that can be gained from the interviewee (Josselson, 2013). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) further emphasize that, "individuals have unique and important knowledge about the world that is ascertainable and that can be shared through verbal

communication” (p. 94). Interviews therefore enabled me as the researcher to explore with head teachers and pre-primary teachers, their understandings and beliefs about play and its role in the education of young children.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most suitable as the semi-structured format maximizes the comprehensiveness of the data, allowing participants to elaborate on their responses, and myself to rephrase or prompt as appropriate. As the wording and sequencing of questions were predetermined, the format facilitated the organizing and analyzing of the data through enabling comparison of responses from different participants (Patton, 2002). A general set of questions was used for all three the head teachers, and another for the five teachers. However, there was some variation in how the questions were posed whenever a need arose (Lichtman, 2013). I made an effort to employ flexibility in questioning to encourage “naturalness and relevance of the questions and answers” (Patton, 2002, p. 349).

In developing interview questions, I used the study’s research questions as a guiding framework. I made an effort to establish the relationship between the research questions and interview questions by employing matrices illustrating and ensuring the link between the two. In consideration of the two groups of participants (teachers and head teachers) in the study, I developed a separate set of questions for each group. It was necessary to have different sets of questions because of the kind of information sought from each group of participants. However, in some cases similar questions were asked when information sought could be obtained from both groups. I developed the questions at the time when I was taking a methodology course in qualitative research and so I asked the course instructor to review and comment on the questions. I received very useful

feedback/comments, which I believe enhanced the questions. The final interview guiding questions are included in Appendix H and I. After approval of the interview questions by the supervisory committee and the ethics board, I translated all of the questions into Kiswahili, the language used during the interviews.

As pointed out earlier, I conducted interviews in two different ways with the two groups of participants: a) a single interview with each of the head teachers, and b) three individual interviews with each of the teachers. Head teachers were individually interviewed in-person only once in order to learn from their experiences as teachers and overseers of the pre-primary programs in the schools. My decision to have a single interview with the heads of schools was in consideration of their availability because of pressures on their time due to their administrative responsibilities. The main purpose for interviewing the heads of schools, in addition to exploring their beliefs about the role of play in the school context, was to determine how supportive the administrative climate was with regard to provision of play in the schools (see Appendix H - Guiding interview questions). Before the interviews commenced, each interviewee was asked to review and sign the consent form (Appendix G). The duration of the interviews was between 45 and 60 minutes and they were conducted in the participants' offices in their schools.

For the pre-primary teachers, individual interviews in-person were carried out in three phases, with one of the interviews drawing upon video clips obtained from classroom observations. The first interview mainly focused on exploring the teachers' beliefs with regard to the role of play in the early education context. Questions focused on their understanding of what constitutes play, as well as their play experiences during different stages of their lives with the goal of gaining insight into factors influencing their

beliefs. After the interview, each teacher was observed as she taught mutually agreed upon selected sessions and some of these sessions were video recorded. (See *Observation* sub-section for more information about how the videos were collected.) Each teacher was then interviewed for the second step in the interview process. Video clips from her classroom teaching were used as prompts to facilitate recall of the classroom activities to identify any instances of inclusion of play in her teaching. The second interview was designed to invite the teachers to reflect on their beliefs about play as identified in the first interview and to provide an opportunity for them to relate their stated beliefs to their classroom practices. Each participant was first invited to reflect on and briefly talk about the lesson with specific attention to what she was doing during the observed sessions. The teachers did not have access to the video prior to our post-observation meeting. The video was then viewed together and the participant was asked to alert the researcher verbally or with a non-verbal signal, to pause on or replay the sections she wished to talk about. I did not select specific excerpts from the videotapes in advance for discussion; the participants themselves determined what they considered relevant or worthy of attention. I gave the teachers as much time as needed to watch and reflect on their own practices as seen on the video clips. Once they had shared their thinking about the segments on the video related to play, I asked questions accordingly. The third phase of the interview process focused on linking the discussions from the first two interviews. Questions in this phase provided an opportunity for the teachers to confirm and expand upon the issues raised and link them to factors they believe to have influenced their beliefs about play. The questions were mainly designed to probe for additional explanations and to

encourage reflection on their reactions to seeing their classroom practices in relation to play as captured on the video.

The use of different interview steps in the study was intended to allow time for each participant to explain her perception of their context, to build rapport and trust with me, and to facilitate the reconstruction and reflection on the meaning of participants' experiences within the context (Seidman, 2006). In addition to gaining information, the first interview was aimed at putting the teachers at ease before moving into more focused questions. I used the opportunity to familiarize myself with the teachers and also to give them opportunity to feel safe in sharing their views with me. As I am somewhat familiar with their background experiences, it was easy for me to share with them some interesting stories about childhood and hence attempt to mitigate any feelings of inferiority they might have been having because of the difference in our levels of education. The second interview, which included the use of video for recall, was aimed at providing an opportunity for the teachers to view themselves in action in their classrooms and hence better reflect on their practices and classroom interactions. In the third interview, I gave the teachers an opportunity to discuss the issues they wanted to share more information about. In general the main aim of having three interviews was to provide ample time and opportunity for the participants to familiarize themselves with me and share information needed for the study. All interviews were audio recorded.

The interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, a language that is commonly used by participants both at work (school) and home. Careful consideration was therefore given to the fact that there might either be difficulty in finding a relevant word for play, or there might possibly exist several words closely related to it. Different techniques

were used in probing for participants' play conceptualizations and experiences. For example, the topic was approached indirectly by asking participants about objects and activities that remind them of what they used to enjoy during childhood. I also used the video clips on the second interview, to ask the teachers to point out activities and practices they thought contributed to the children's enjoyment of the session. The semi-structured interview format allowed me the flexibility to gather information through different ways of questioning. In all, 15 interviews were conducted with the head teachers and teachers of pre-primary classes. Interview data comprised a total of 595 minutes of audio recording and 120 pages of transcripts.

Observation.

Observations occurred over five school days in each of the four schools. I spent the first two days building rapport with the participants, and familiarizing myself with the daily schedule, which was necessary for determining which sessions would be formally observed. Furthermore, it enabled the participants to become comfortable with my presence in the class as well as with the video recording, which was practiced for a few minutes each day. Formal observation data were collected during specific identified sessions (Yin, 2013). For each of the four classrooms under study, the original plan was to observe sessions for all six subject learning activities for each class, as per the pre-primary education syllabus (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MOEVT], 2005). However, in contrast to the expectation of five 20 minutes periods per day as indicated in the syllabus document (MOEVT, 2005), there were two or three periods and each lasted for 30 to 40 minutes. Formal observations were conducted within three full days for each participating school with the aim of ensuring that sessions for all subjects

were viewed. The focus of the observation was mainly on the classroom activities with particular attention given to each teacher's practices as she facilitated/guided the children's learning, in order to establish the presence and extent of the play criteria (voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, rule-governed, pleasurable and episodic) as identified by Wood (2014). In addition, some cues, adapted from Howard (2010), were used to determine the playfulness of the activities directed by the teacher (affect, space and constraint, adult presence, and activity – see Appendix J). I used these criteria to guide my observation, and portray the similarity and/or differences in how play is perceived in the particular context. In each setting, I asked the teacher to select two sessions, which she felt most likely to provide instances of play, to be video recorded. Observation sessions lasted up to 80 minutes (two 40 minutes sessions) for each of the three days.

My observations were non-participant as I was not involved in any of the school/classroom activities, nor did I engage with the children beyond normal courtesies of acknowledgment (Spradley, 1980). In the classes students sat in desks arranged so that all were facing the blackboard where the teacher was usually positioned. During the observations, my position was at the far back of the class where the teacher would usually have in place a chair or desk for me to sit on. I was able to observe all the classroom activities and hence video recording through my small camera was easily carried out. I used my journal to note the proceedings according to the class schedule from the start of the day to the closing. I also used the observation guide (Appendix J) to record the teacher's practices to determine play presence. However, during video-recorded observations, the focus was solely on the recording, and no notes were taken, as I

believed the video clips would capture sufficient information to determine whether and how play was being integrated into the teaching and learning activities.

Some limitations of the observation method were however anticipated, the main one being the possibility for practices to proceed differently because of the observer's presence (Yin, 2013). To minimize my effect as observer, the first two of the five days' sessions were mainly aimed at familiarizing through sitting and watching. I also took time after classes to build rapport with the teachers by having friendly conversations with them, in an effort to reduce the social distance that existed. I noticed the enhanced feeling of easiness on the teachers' part during the subsequent classroom sessions.

I would like to acknowledge however, that despite my sincere efforts to minimize any discomfort or uneasiness the teachers might have experienced as a consequence of being observed, videotaped, and interviewed, it is quite possible they may have felt intimidated or even evaluated. Even though I did my best to keep the atmosphere relatively informal, I recognize that the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the use of pre-determined categories to focus the observations created a situation far from naturalistic.

The use of video.

The use of video segments recorded during the observations to stimulate recall during interviews proved efficient in enabling the teachers to reflect on the class experiences. None struggled to recall what had taken place in the classes, and all were able to easily describe the meaning of the practices observed. Whole class sessions were recorded and the complete, unedited video clips were presented to the teachers during the interviews. I deliberately did not pre-select the focus of interest in the videos as my goal

was to explore and learn from the teachers' perspectives concerning their activities in relation to play. These video segments also provided an opportunity for repeated observation. As Angrosino (2007) notes, video recording offers the researcher "a way of reliving the field experience so that observations can be repeated at will in order to discern levels of nuance hidden at the outset" (p. 72). It makes it possible for a researcher to carefully watch the video, after observation has taken place and detect any aspects that were not noted during the observation. However, Angrosino also cautions about potential technical problems with the equipment which could result in either unclear images and sound or none at all. The use of video may also be obtrusive and hence disrupt the normal flow of events in the class. In consideration of these limitations, the first two days in each classroom were used to familiarize both the teachers and the children with the video camera, and with being recorded through practice video recording. The practice video recording helped to check on the functioning of the video camera. The initial plan had been for practice video clips to be shown to the class and then deleted immediately after the class sessions. However, due to the large number of children in the classrooms, it proved not possible to show them to the children.

Although the video clips were primarily intended to facilitate recall during interviews with teachers, they were also used to provide extracts that would illustrate points identified in the data analysis. Like the field notes, the video data were not analyzed in isolation. These data were used to support the discussion of the findings obtained from the interviews. The video data were organized by highlighting and noting instances of play as per the six criteria described by Wood (2010) as outlined in the observation guide. The focus was on activities as directed by the teacher, with the

expectation of providing insights into the discussion on integration of play in teaching and learning activities. Therefore, in addition to data from the interviews, I collected a total of 146 minutes of video recordings.

Review of documents.

Relevant documents were another data source. Analysis of the documents provided background information on if and how play is featured in curriculum and policy documents. Although Yin (2013) recommends using relevant documents (in this context, policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and syllabi) to authenticate and enhance evidence obtained through interviews and observation, the primary goal in reviewing the documents in this study was to clarify and more fully understand the professional context in which the teachers worked.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves transforming data into findings. According to Patton (2002), “the challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data ... reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 432). In consideration of this caution, Merriam (2009) recommends that data analysis occur concurrently with data collection to avoid the risk of the researcher being overwhelmed by so much data. In my study data analysis occurred simultaneously with, and subsequent to, data collection and involved the following steps: organizing data; constructing categories; sorting and

refining categories across data sources; naming and verifying the categories; and linking the categories to the literature reviewed.

Organizing data.

After every participant interview I listened to the audio recordings to make sure the audio clip was well captured and I made note of any corrections needed (e.g., whenever a question appeared to have been misunderstood). I identified questions I thought would need to be rephrased in subsequent interview sessions. When needed, I made minor changes to the wording of the questions without altering the content. I also noticed the need for improved audibility of the audio clips and so during subsequent interviews I changed the positioning of the recording device and asked the participants to increase their volume whenever needed. At the end of every school visit, I organized all the information gathered on that particular day, labeled the audio and video clips, and the observation and reflection notes. All materials were then stored for easy retrieval during data analysis.

As the interviews were conducted in a language other than English, the transcription process involved translation of the interviews. I undertook the transcription and then the translation of all of the interviews myself. I managed to effectively do the translation, and am confident I was able to maintain the meaning intended by the participants because of my previous relevant experiences. I then verified the data, ensuring all data had been transcribed by checking through all of the transcripts and audio clips. Then I labeled the transcripts to match the corresponding audio clips, and a copy of each was securely stored on a back-up disk. Next I did a preliminary read through of the transcripts, noting initial ideas in a summary of the responses from each participant. The

review stage involved again closely reading through the transcripts and writing additional thoughts and comments. A summary of responses for each participant was prepared in order to get a sense of the issues that emerged from the data and to establish how the research questions were being answered. Soft and hard copies of these summaries were labeled and stored with the corresponding transcripts.

Category construction.

To guide the analysis process it was crucial to identify how the results of the study would be presented in the final report (Yin, 2014). Attending to the four options outlined by Yin, I had initially planned that results from each school would be presented singly in separate sections, with the final section featuring a cross case analysis. However, during the analysis process, I noted considerable similarity in responses from the participants and so using this form of presentation would create unnecessary repetition. Yin emphasizes that, although it is important to have an initial choice of the form of case study presentation, various conditions may lead to alteration of the choice. Another organizational form of presentation was indeed found to be more relevant; consequently, the report of the findings from the study contains mainly cross case analysis highlighting categories and issues arising from the data pertinent to the research questions. However, contextual information for each school as a unit of study was analyzed and presented as separate sections.

The analytic process was guided by an interweaving of inductive and deductive thinking, as recommended for qualitative research (Bloomberg & Voolpe, 2015). The process was back and forth, beginning with insights and initial codes that evolved into categories and then coding the data under the categories, then review and development of

sub-categories from the coded data, as I describe in detail below. I adopted some components of the phases for thematic analysis as proposed in the step-by-step guide by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo software was also used to facilitate data analysis. I decided to use NVivo software after consideration of the features, functions and the necessary logistics involved (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). All transcripts were then uploaded to the software installed in my personal computer ready for coding.

After reading and re-reading the data, noting some insights in an attempt to make sense of the data, the next step was generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I found structural coding useful as a categorization technique because of its suitability for studies employing semi-structured interviews with multiple participants (Saldana, 2013). Guest et al. (2012) describe structural coding as an approach in thematic analysis, “which is used to identify the structure imposed on a qualitative data set by the research questions and design”(p. 11). I approached the code identification by asking, “What are these people talking about that is relevant to the research objectives?” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 28). Therefore I adopted structural coding to guide the first phase of analysis by using the interview guide to develop codes as recommended by Guest and colleagues. I performed three activities simultaneously: reading through the transcripts, coding, and naming the codes. Using the NVIVO software, I coded excerpts from the transcripts by looking for text where responses to interview questions and/or probes could be obtained. I named the codes according to issues/topics mentioned that are relevant to key areas covered by my research questions. Therefore, each time a topic was identified in the interview data, I used short descriptions to either name it as a new code or place it under a previously formulated one. I used structural coding systematically across the entire

data set collating data relevant to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After back and forth formulation and revision of codes, 11 codes were identified, with six sub-categories under three of the 11 codes (Appendix K). Under each of the 11 codes I generated a long list of excerpts/quotes from the transcripts.

The NVivo software facilitated the storage, management, coding, exploration and reduction of the data, which generally facilitated the analysis process. Although the software provided for auto coding, the software was used mainly for organizing the data. Analysis involved careful reading through the transcripts that were uploaded in the software, and manually creating and assigning codes within the software.

After the coding process, the next step was to merge, review, and generate major categories, which were directly tied to the research questions. I developed the following four major categories: *conceptualizing play*, *role of play*, *integrating play into teaching and learning*, and *influences on the integration of play*. At this stage of the analysis, the categories were general statements and so I needed to engage in further coding to generate categories that portrayed the more particular and specific-to-the-context findings of the study. Therefore, I categorized the data under each major category by allocating relevant quotations from the data under the categories. During the process, the codes were reviewed whenever necessary. I also reallocated quotations and lengthy excerpts from one category to another when there was a better match. A long list of categories was developed under each major category. It is important to note that data analysis was conducted as an iterative process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I engaged in ongoing refining, merging, remerging and deleting of categories, their names and descriptions, whenever appropriate. A final list comprised four major categories and a total of 16 subcategories

under the major categories. One of the research questions with regard to consideration of local experiences in the provision of play did not seem to feature in the categories. After initial coding, I realized very few responses were relevant to this question, and therefore it was insufficient to warrant it standing as a major category. I therefore decided to incorporate it as an extra category under the category *influences on the integration of play*, which I renamed as *play provision and integration into pre-primary education*. The final presentation of categories and sub-categories using examples of extracts from the transcripts is detailed in the findings chapter.

Summary tables.

In the process of reading, sorting, and coding the data, two other processes occurred: preparing data summary tables, and recording insights in the researcher's journal. The tables presented in Chapter 4 represent in summary form, the distribution of participants' comments across the identified sub-categories. I used the tables to provide a rough and rudimentary indication of the number of times the category topic is featured in each participant's comment(s). For example, under Category 1: Conception of play (see Chapter 4), I identified four sub-categories: Play involves physical actions; play involves pleasure; play involves pretense; and/or play involves voluntariness. The check marks in the table represent the number of times a particular participant's response indicated that play involves any of these criteria. I want to emphasize that the number of check marks communicates the number of times (across the whole interview for head teachers and all three interviews for teachers) a particular sub-category was mentioned in each participant's comments. Frequency counting was based on the number of quotations coded under a particular category with each checkmark representing a single quotation.

In Appendix L I provide an example of NVivo extract of quotations under the sub-category *play is peripheral to academic work* (in Category 3: Play provision and integration into pre-primary education). From the extract, the number of quotations for each participant is reflected by the number of check marks in the corresponding column in the summary Table 4 on page 125. I developed a data summary table for each of the four major categories as presented in Chapter 4. I acknowledge this ‘measure’ provides no indication of the length of the comment noted, nor of the emphasis given to it by the speaker. So, for example, a short quote from Maggy’s responses, “But in the middle there I cannot bring in any play, in the middle of numbers/arithmetics, in the middle of reading, in the middle of writing, I cannot, but in the beginning at the introduction” is represented by a single check mark on the summary table under the sub-category *play is peripheral to academic work*. A much lengthier comment by Kabula however, is also recorded as a single checkmark under the same sub-category because it the same single sub-category is featured within the comment.

For me, I usually do this in the morning as I teach Maths activities, as soon as I enter the class, I let them stand, and we sing, but because there is another class close by they have to sing in low voices, so because I know that if they jump around they become active, I make them stand, there are songs they like that make them jump, I have them do some physical exercises, you see, after that then I tell them to sit down and be attentive because it is time to learn...

To repeat, the main aim of the use of the tables was to highlight the distribution of the evidence used to support the findings of the study, and to succinctly indicate the relationship of the data to the research questions.

Research journal.

My research journal proved to be a useful tool for recording some of my insights, thoughts and ideas that came up during data collection and in the process of interacting with the data. In Chapter 4 my descriptions of the teachers, their personalities, and their reactions to my being there, were drawn largely from my journal recordings. Furthermore, my reflections in the journal recorded during the long process of transcribing and translating the interviews, were also very useful in informing the analysis of the data. When conducting the transcription and translation, I referred to my journal to help me recall and reflect on the actual situation and the attitude of the participants while responding to the questions. I recorded these reflections and they contributed to the decision making during the coding process. The journal ideas/insights were also useful in the presentation and discussion of the findings, especially when making clarifications or extending an explanation. I also referred to my journal for my recorded suggestions for possible interventions and changes and these ideas provided a starting point in writing the recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

After fragmenting the data through various steps and categorizing them into categories and sub-categories, the next step was to formulate a discussion/explanation of the data. My overall approach was to present an interpretive description framed by sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1998; Thorne, 2016). In my discussion of the findings in Chapter 5, I look at elements in the findings that were prominent and deserving of further examination. Specifically, I point out those aspects that seemed to depart from practice norms or differ from what would be expected based on the literature. I began the process

by revisiting the sources previously identified in the literature review and then explored new sources in order to identify any insights not previously anticipated. Interpretation entailed looking into contextual influences in an effort to understand possible reasons for a certain occurrence (Thorne, 2016). After thinking carefully, I generated a list of elements I thought needed further discussion. For example, play criteria like physical actions, pretense, singing as play activity, co-teaching, and influences on teachers' views like class size, and demands of the parents and the curriculum. These elements were further analyzed/explored in the light of relevant literature. Insights recorded in the journal were also useful at this stage of interpreting findings. In general, the three planes in sociocultural theory (Fleer, 2002) framed the interpretation, as is discussed in Chapter 5. Based on my analysis and synthesis, I considered the implications of my findings and formulated several conclusions and recommendations that I present in my closing comments.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues related to protection of the participants are important to consider in all research, including qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). As described previously, my study was subjected to the ethics approval process of the University of Victoria Research Ethics Board. Although no harm or ethical threats to participants were anticipated, multiple measures were taken to maximize the protection and rights of the participants.

Informed consent was given primacy during the study. Written consent was required from each teacher before she/he could participate in the study. After the initial written consent, I continuously sought participants' ongoing consent before each session

of data collection. Participants also were guaranteed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. As information from all sources would be shared in the written document, measures were taken to protect the anonymity of the participants. School names were changed, and pseudonyms for participants were used in analyzing and reporting data, and the key for the substitutions was kept separate from the data transcripts. However, due to the small number of teachers of pre-primary level at the particular schools, it is acknowledged they could be easily identifiable. Cautionary measures were therefore taken in storing data, and only I had access to the raw data. In compiling the final report of this research, I chose to primarily use summaries of the data, with direct quotes (attributed to pseudonyms) used when appropriate.

Monetary compensation was given to the teachers for their time because the interviews were conducted after work hours. Most of these teachers depend on public transport to and from their work place. It was anticipated that staying late for one or two more hours would expose them to transport problems due to traffic jams during rush hours, that they would not experience normally. In an event when they were required to stay late at school for the purpose of this research, the teachers were given a token compensation of 12,000 Tanzanian shillings, equivalent to CAD \$7.25, to enable them to find faster means of transport home. This token amount was given with the understanding that it was not sufficient to coerce the teachers to participate if they were not willing to. However, it was made clear that if a participant decided to withdraw from the study, compensation would be discontinued from that point, as it was given on the actual day of participation. All teachers received this compensation for three interviews

each, as the interviews were conducted after school. None of the participants withdrew from the study. The head teachers did not receive the compensation because the interviews were conducted during their office hours.

The issue of power was also considered. Coming from a university, a researcher may be perceived as an expert and hence possessing power which could be intimidating to potential participants. Furthermore, as per procedures for conducting research in the country, the permission letters from the higher authorities that the researcher had to present to the schools could also seem coercing for the head teachers and teachers requested to participate. The researcher was aware of the situation and so in inviting the participants, it was stressed that they were all at liberty to refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time, without explanation or consequence. In addition, procedures for protecting confidentiality were clearly explained beforehand and whenever participants raised any concerns. During one interview a participant expressed her worry that the information from the interview might be shared with the head teacher, and I gave the reassurance as explained in the consent form that she signed.

However, I would like to acknowledge that the issue of participant recruitment could be questionable. Although I can hope that each head teacher had talked to the teacher and that it was a joint agreement to participate, there is no denying that it might not have been completely voluntary especially as the research was conducted within the school environment.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Within an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, trustworthiness comprises a set of criteria used to judge the value of qualitative research. In place of positivist criteria of

validity and reliability, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest the use of credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility.

Credibility is mostly about the description of findings in as accurate a manner as possible. Three processes were used to maximize credibility (Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation was used whereby data collected from interviews, observations, and document reviews at different time intervals yielded a richer picture of how play is perceived and practiced in Tanzanian pre-primary schools than would have been obtained from any of those sources alone. Moreover, the use of three phase interviews, which enabled the teachers to reflect on and reconsider their responses from one interview to the next, enhanced the richness of the findings. Adequate engagement in data collection by exploring the phenomenon in four settings demonstrated both similarity and variation in the four school cultures, which enriched the findings. Reflexivity or self-reflection was also used to enhance credibility. Clarification of my subjectivities and assumptions with regard to the research have been offered in an effort to create a better understanding of how particular interpretations of the data have been made.

Dependability.

At the centre of determining the rigor of the study lies the issue of dependability or auditability. This aspect, as described by Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2007), mainly requires the researcher to make each stage of the research process as explicit as possible so that the findings are the closest to reality as described by participants. An audit trail was used in this study to account for every process and every decision made, and how and why the decisions were made (Merriam, 2009). An audit trail describes in detail the

decision making throughout the inquiry. A researcher's journal was therefore used to record the process. In this journal, I recorded reflections and decisions made at different stages of research. I noted my questions, and ideas that came up during data collection and when interacting with the data. In the course of reading the transcripts I wrote notes on aspects that seemed to be of vital interest. Through recording my thoughts of the proceedings, I was able to identify new categories as they emerged and to note the overlaps and omissions. The reflections and ideas recorded also helped to inform the interpretation of the findings as well as the development of conclusions and recommendations.

Transferability.

Although generalizability is not a goal of the research, some strategies were employed to enhance the possibility of transferring results to other settings or contexts that might seem similar to the one in the current study (Merriam, 2009; Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). I made an effort to provide as detailed an account of the settings as possible in order to give the reader a clear idea/image of the context. I used this strategy to facilitate the reader's assessment in determining similarity between the context described in this study and that of the readers. In addition to description of settings, I made sure, I have clearly outlined the information of following key issues for consideration in deciding for transference (Shenton, 2004, p.70):

- a) the number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based
- b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data
- c) the number of participants involved

- d) the data collection methods that were employed
- e) the number and length of the data collection sessions
- f) the time period over which the data was collected

The choice of so-called typical pre-primary schools, as recommended by Ryan and colleagues (2007), is an example of measures to maximize the meaningfulness of the results to other public pre-primary schools not involved in the study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided a description of how I employed qualitative case study methodology to explore the beliefs of selected educators in Tanzanian pre-primary schools with regard to play as related to the learning of the young children. Participants were purposefully selected from four schools in the capital city, Dar es Salaam. I described in detail the sample selection process, the use of interviews, observations, video recording and documents as sources of data. I also outlined the analysis process using thematic analysis aided by NVIVO software as well as the use of my researcher's journal and the creation of summary charts. Finally, I described how ethical and trustworthiness issues were considered in the research process to ensure the study met the aim of contributing to the understanding of this important element in children's life.

Chapter 4

The Findings

To review, the purpose of this study was to explore Tanzanian early years educators' beliefs about the role of young children's play in pre-primary classroom settings. My premise is that a better understanding of educators' beliefs about play will provide insights that can potentially enhance the provision of early childhood education in Tanzania. I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do teachers in selected pre-primary schools believe constitutes play?
2. Do these pre-primary teachers believe play to have any benefits for children's learning, and if so, what benefits?
3. Do these teachers integrate play into teaching and learning activities, and if so, how?
4. To what extent and in what ways, if any, are the home/family/community experiences of children considered by the teacher in any provision made to support play at school? If such provisions are made, what do the teachers identify as the possible contribution to learning made by connecting home/family/community experiences to children's play?
5. What factors do these teachers believe: a) support and b) impede integration of play into teaching practice?

To address these questions, I present the key findings that were identified based on the data analyses of the 15 interviews with eight participating educators, the classroom observations, and the relevant curricular documents.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first includes a description of the context of each participating school. In the second section I focus on teachers' beliefs about play. The findings are organized into four main categories derived from structural coding of the interview responses (Guest et al., 2012). As described in Chapter 3, NVivo was applied to facilitate organization and storage of the data and hence it facilitated the sorting and grouping of the information into their respective categories. An outline constructed from the research questions and data summary tables helped in the organization of these categories, and sub-categories. Under each of the four categories I describe between three to seven findings (sub-categories) relevant to the research questions.

The findings are primarily based on the different phases of the interviews that gave participating educators opportunities to reflect on both their past experiences as well as their current practices. A total number of eight participants were interviewed, including three head teachers and five teachers responsible for pre-primary classes in four schools. As I described in Chapter 3, one interview was conducted with each of the three head teachers, and three phases of interviews were administered to the five teachers of the pre-primary classes. In addition, information from my observations and the review of documents is used to reinforce or challenge the comments made by the participants during the interviews.

As presented in Chapter 3, the teachers' interviews were supported by video-recall technique. My expectation was that the videos would facilitate the teachers' recall of the variety of activities used in their classrooms. I was hoping to have the teachers describe the activities, if and how play was incorporated, and how they found them

beneficial for the children's learning. However, the dominant activity in all classes observed, reciting and repetition of what was written on the board. In rare cases, very few other activities were observed and these were mostly led by the teacher. The teachers were attentive when viewing the videos but they did not show any particular reaction on seeing themselves on the videos, nor did they initially offer much comment. I therefore made an effort to probe about the few activities and the playfulness that I noticed. My probing generated some conversation about the activities on the videos and their responses at this phase of interview were analyzed together with the responses from the other interviews.

Description of the Context

I begin this section by offering an introductory account of the general context of the schools involved in the study, followed by specific descriptions for each particular school, along with information about the head teacher, the pre-primary class, and the class teacher.

The study was conducted in four pre-primary classes in four public primary schools. The schools are located in the outskirts of the capital city of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam. Education is funded by the government but parents are supposed to contribute for the porridge meal that each school has to provide to all students during recess. Parents also pay for school uniforms for their children. Most of the children in these schools come from low-income families who find it difficult to contribute even 10,000 Tanzanian shillings per month (equivalent to \$6.00 Canadian) for the meal. I heard teachers (who collect the contributions) complaining about parents whose dues were several months in arrears, as their failure to pay was causing shortages in the provision of the meal. In

addition to meals and uniforms, parents are responsible for providing school supplies for their children. Parents have to ensure their children have writing (exercise) books, a pencil, eraser, and sharpener. However, it was rare to find a child possessing all the required supplies. The teachers would usually keep extra items and provide them when there was a need. Again teachers face a challenge in getting paid for these extra items by the parents.

Since 1996, the pre-primary class is housed in one of the classrooms within the primary school. The facilities and infrastructure, such as the playground and washrooms, are shared by all students from pre-primary to primary standard seven (age range 4-15 years). To make it more convenient for the very young ones, the children take their porridge meal in the class supervised by the teachers, while the older students take theirs outside. The challenge observed however, is that available facilities are not adequate for the large number of students in the schools.

In the following paragraphs I briefly described the situation in each school involved in the study. I then introduce the head teacher and the participating teacher, and subsequently present the information gained from the series of interviews conducted with them. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the schools and participants.

Sunrise school.

Sunrise School was started in 1958 (before the country's independence) as an elementary school catering for children from standard 1-4. Children would have to transfer to another school to continue with middle school education. After independence, the education structure was changed and primary schools were expanded to cater to

Grades 1-7. Following primary school, students would proceed to secondary school. In 1964, the first Grade 7 cohort graduated from Sunrise school, and it has continued as a primary school to this day. The school's enrolment total of 1,020 children is comprised of 80 pre-primary students and 940 students in standard 1 to standard 7. The total number of teachers in the school is 28, with one of the teachers serving as head teacher. The school's slogan/motto, *elimu ni bahari*, literally means 'Education is like an ocean.'

The head teacher.

The head teacher for this school is male and approximately 40-45 years of age. He holds a diploma in teaching from a Tanzanian teacher training college. He responded positively to my presence and to my study in general. He expressed his happiness that I was researching the early years class, which according to him, is not common. Unfortunately this head teacher was not available for interview due to the busy schedule he had at the time of data collection. I could see how busy he was because of the preparations for standard seven National Examinations, which forced him to spend his time out of school attending various meetings and other tasks. However, his consent for the school's participation allowed me to continue with interviews and observations with the pre-primary class teacher.

The pre-primary class.

At the time of the research, the pre-primary class in this school had 80 registered students (42 girls and 36 boys), although according to information from the teacher, full attendance was very rarely reached. Average attendance ranged between 65-70 pupils.

Students sat on desks arranged on one side facing the blackboard. Closer to the blackboard was the teacher's chair and desk, on which rested piles of exercise books

collected for marking at the end of every school day. Although the room was well ventilated, with wide-open windows on both sides, the children had very limited space to move around in the class. There were neither charts nor pictures on the walls of the room. At the opposite side of where the children were facing, various items, like firewood, cooking pots, buckets, cups, were stored which further reduced the class space available to the children.

Teacher Maggy.

The one female teacher of the pre-primary class, Maggy, was between 55-60 years of age. Together with the teacher, an older lady, a maid, helped out during meal times. Maggy started teaching in primary school before the introduction of pre-primary classes. She had been a teacher for 35 years. She completed the teacher education certificate course after her ordinary level (four years) secondary school. After working for several years, she completed a one-year Early Childhood Education certificate course: an in-service program which was one of the government's initiatives to cater for the then newly established pre-primary classes. Although she agreed to participate in the study, my first day being there seemed to make her uncomfortable. After the first observation, I spent time with her and she had an opportunity to inquire more about my study. Our conversation helped to build rapport and so at the time of the interviews and the subsequent observations, she was at ease and her participation seemed more relaxed.

Although Maggy was qualified to teach at a pre-primary level, she stated that if she were able to choose, she would not teach this level of students. The environment within the class was not pleasing for her due to the large number of children enrolled. However, she had no choice other than to abide by the placement of the head teacher. She

commented on how her interest in pre-primary grew after teaching the class for several years, mainly because she found the young children so innocent and friendly. She was compassionately concerned for children from very poor households to the point of offering some school supplies to those she knew could not afford to buy them. I observed her giving two cookies that she was selling to a student, without asking for money. I came to learn later from the teacher that this student was among the children coming from very poor households. When entering the class, she greeted her students with a big smile. However, Maggy demonstrated little enthusiasm or interest while interacting with the students. Observations revealed that she did not seem to be patient, especially when a child failed to follow her instructions.

Maggy shared her experiences at different stages of her life, and described how play was part of these experiences. She recalled how she used to like participating in sport games and athletics like netball, jumping and running. She remembered how her father was strict about disciplining his children, but also allowed them to play. She further described that during her school days at a church school, various play items were available to the children. A range of sport items, like balls, as well as classroom games like cards and puzzles, were donated by partner churches from Western countries. She reflected on how they were taught songs in the English language and how they enjoyed the songs, although they could not understand the content. Generally, she recounted how as a child she used to enjoy all these activities (ball games, athletics, card games and singing) and that she regarded all of these as play.

Maggy further recounted her experience as a pre-service teacher. She could not recall much but remembered that emphasis was placed on giving children many

opportunities to play and on the importance of grouping them according to their age. She expressed her belief that the focus on physical play and sports activities that her instructors emphasized was relevant to her classroom situation, noting that those sports activities are the ones that children enjoy most and that they help motivate them to attend school. These experiences at different stages of Maggy's life appear to have influenced her beliefs on how she views play and its role in the education of the children.

New Star school.

New Star School was started in 1974 as a primary school. It opened with few students but the number had increased to a total of 1,322 students at the time of the study. The total includes the pre-primary class, which has 65 girls and 67 boys. There are 33 teachers, one of them being the head teacher (Head Teacher Lawi), and two pre-primary teachers (Teacher May and Teacher Nay). The beliefs guiding the institution are expressed in the school's motto, *elimu ni ufunguo wa maisha*, which means 'Education is the key to life.' The school is located at the center of two other schools, a secondary school on the right and another primary school on the left. The other primary school (Moonlight School) was also a research site and is described later in this chapter.

Head teacher Lawi.

Lawi, who was between 45-50 years of age, was the head teacher for New Star school. He holds a diploma in education, which he obtained through upgrading his Grade 'A' teaching certificate. He did not expect to be a teacher but as that was the only posting he could get after completing secondary education, he was happy to accept the position. He had been a teacher for 24 years, holding the position of a head teacher for 14 years in two different schools. Lawi was extremely welcoming to me, even though he was having

a series of meetings in preparation for standard 7 National examinations at the time. He assigned his assistant to be of help to me in case I needed anything, which made me feel very welcomed. Despite his busy schedule, he managed to set aside time for the interview.

Lawi saw play as something that had been part of his whole life. His childhood experiences as well as his experiences during the different stages of his life seem to have influenced his understanding of play and its role. He described growing up in a rural area, experiencing a village life and playing freely outside in groups of mixed-aged children. Physical games and sports dominated Lawi's reflections on play. When asked to reflect on his experience with play at different stages of his life, he described his experience with sports competitions between different groups in the village from a young age. Lawi further recalled his teacher training and how physical activity, sports and games were emphasized both to student teachers as well as in the courses' content. He described how he had participated in games and sports from secondary school through to college and stated that he now holds a position of games and sports patron in the district. In addition, he recalled other play activities like construction (pretending to build a house), pretend cooking, role-playing, and singing, all of which he experienced at different stages of his childhood. In his opinion, play is a necessary component in children's education, mainly because of its physical benefits, which he believes enhance the students' learning. Under his supervision, the school hosts a pre-primary class that I describe below.

The pre-primary class.

With 132 students enrolled, the pre-primary class was the largest among the four schools observed. The room was bigger than the ones found in the other schools but it

was not spacious enough for the number of students. On the walls of the room a few alphabet and number charts were displayed. As previously noted, parents were expected to provide the school supplies needed (small exercise books, pencils, sharpeners, and erasers), and students were expected to write in their books every day. The books were kept in class for teachers to mark and were given out at the end of the week for students to take home.

Teachers May and Nay.

Two teachers, May and Nay, each between 35-40 years of age, were observed to be in harmonious collaboration when teaching this class. The teachers worked in partnership and they both expressed a preference for, and consented to, being interviewed together. Each teacher had her table and chair near the blackboard and on both tables were piles of exercise books for marking. Both were so welcoming and my presence observing their lessons did not seem to make any difference to them right from the first day of observations. Perhaps having another adult in the class was regarded as normal because neither of them is ever the only adult in the class when teaching. In addition, they seemed to be in a friendly relationship and they made it easy for me to join in as a third colleague.

May started as a volunteer teacher and then attended college for a one-year ECE certificate course. Nay had also completed a one-year ECE certificate course. They both claimed to be motivated to teach this class by their love for children. This interest in children and teaching was manifested in their teamwork as well as in the way they interacted with the children. They both demonstrated enthusiasm from the way they presented themselves, and from the start of the lessons through to the end they actively

worked to engage their students in the activities. Though working with a very large class, the teachers did their best to manage the children with one teacher teaching and the other one moving around maintaining discipline and attentiveness. They were both patient in correcting the students' mistakes, which they did playfully, in that their interactions seemed fun to the students. When it was time to sing an action song, the teachers would do the actions, jumping, clapping, and shaking their bodies together with the children. The joyful atmosphere they created in the classroom made me, the observer, enjoy the lessons, and look forward to the next day. I believe the children felt the same way.

May and Nay shared their experiences of play at different stages of their lives. They each commented on the way they used to love play while growing up. They recalled outdoor games around the neighbourhood, mainly in groups. Games included local ball games, hide and seek, and pretend play where they would assign family roles to each other and act like a family. All these games were played outdoors, both at school and at home. At school, no time was formally allocated for play but they recalled using their recess time to play. During class sessions, there was mainly singing with actions led by the teacher. They both remembered the opportunity they had for playing in class, when the teacher was busy with marking children's work. The teacher would allow some play activities in order to keep the children from distracting him/her as he did the marking.

May and Nay offered limited information about the kind of program they pursued for their teacher education. However, each had something to say about the experience of play during the program. Both recalled the activities they had in their training including handiwork like moulding and making some simple sculptures. Although these were part of the art curriculum, they regard them as play because they found them enjoyable for the

children they were observing during their practicum. Sharing their experiences during practicum, May described how she saw play materials like number blocks available to children mainly for construction games which they really enjoyed. Nay recounted sessions of pretend play, where children would play outside with sand pretending to make food and other things. The two teachers acknowledged the differences in environment and in the provision of resources and facilities between the classrooms in private schools they used to visit during their training, and their current classroom. They stated that if, in their current school, there was adequate provision of facilities such as play items and play areas they would be able to put into practice what they had learned in their teacher education programs.

Moonlight school.

Moonlight school, which is located close to New Star school, shares some of the same facilities like classrooms and the sports field. The school was started in 2002. Of the 1,470 students, the pre-primary class had 47 boys and 41 girls enrolled at the time of the study. Of the 36 teachers, one is the head teacher and another is responsible for the pre-primary class. Translated, the school's slogan/motto, *Elimu ni ufunguo wa maendeleo* means 'Education is the key to development.'

Head teacher Neema.

Neema, the head teacher for Moonlight School, is between 50-55 years of age. She has been a teacher for 33 years, and a head teacher for 14 those years. After her secondary education, she joined a two-year teacher training program. She holds a teacher education certificate from a government teacher training college. She warmly hosted me in the school and ensured I received all the support I needed.

Neema shared an interesting story about how she decided to quit nursing college and join teachers college. She recounted how she used to love teaching from a young age but never had an opportunity to join the teaching profession. After her secondary education, she had to join a nursing program as it was the only opportunity available. Due to her passion for teaching she started conducting informal classes for children in the area close to the college where there was no primary school. She continued with the classes during her free time in an unfinished building until when one of the elders of the village informed a district education officer who decided to visit the place. The officer was so impressed with what he saw that he offered to help her join a teacher-training program. She recalled how, when she was at the teachers college, she would return to visit her informal class, and that later, a school was built on that site.

Neema shared information about her childhood as she reflected on different ways she experienced play. She grew up in a village where she participated in games like skipping rope, hide and seek, ball games (using locally handmade balls). At school she recalled a teacher whom she says she will never forget. This teacher, “used to like play because in almost every subject that he was teaching, we used to do it by actions and by singing.” She described how the teacher’s enthusiasm made students enjoy the lessons and also remember what was taught.

The pre-primary class.

At the time of the research, the pre-primary class had 88 children but the average daily attendance was about 65-70. The classroom arrangement of furniture was similar to that of the other schools, with all the desks facing the blackboard and the teacher. There were not enough desks for all children to sit comfortably: four to five children were

sitting in desks that should accommodate only three children. The few alphabet and number charts on the walls seemed very old/worn out. As with the previous two classes described, no play items of any kind were present in the classroom.

Teacher Rose.

The female teacher for this class, Rose, is between 25-30 years of age. Rose is a graduate of the teacher education program that was designed after the introduction of pre-primary education. After her secondary education, she completed a two-year teacher training certificate program (which included an ECE course). She taught for eight years in primary school and then she was directed to teach at the pre-primary level, an assignment according to her, she would never wish for. Rose admitted that in general, teaching was not on her list of “dream jobs” but she accepted it because it was the only one available. However, Rose seemed very calm and patient in the class. Although some students were inattentive and hence distracting the attention of others, she showed no indication of irritation. Patiently, she relocated the students to other places when necessary. On the other hand, similar to Maggy above, her lack of interest was demonstrated by a lack of enthusiasm in interacting with students while teaching. She rarely smiled. Expression of more positive affect may have helped to create a warmer relationship between her and the children.

Rose shared her experiences with play during her childhood. She described how, during her childhood there was plenty of time for play both at home and at school. She compared the time she was growing up and now and found a big difference in that currently, children have very limited resources in terms of time and facilities to play. She recalled the competitive outdoor games she used to play at home with neighbour children,

and at school during break time. In class, singing was the main activity she described in relation to play. Reflecting on her teacher training, she reported that play was only briefly mentioned during discussions of teaching techniques. She recalled instructors emphasizing using play activities in teaching instead of direct/lecture methods, which were deemed inappropriate for young children. However, according to her, play was not adequately addressed. She expressed her desire for instruction on how to teach various sports and outdoor games, and believed such instruction would have built her competence in providing play for children.

Heaven-light school.

Heaven-light school started in July 2005 and of the 662 students who attended the school at the time of the research, 572 were in primary classes (standard 1-7). The pre-primary class had 47 boys and 43 girls. One of the 19 teachers taught the pre-primary class. The school's motto, *Elimu kwa maisha*, can literally be translated to 'Education for life.' Similar to the other schools, the school is administered by a head teacher, whose information is presented below.

Head teacher Mary.

Mary, who is between 40-45 years of age, was the head teacher for Heaven-light School. She had taught for 25 years, the last three of which she had served as head teacher. She holds a certificate of teaching from the Teacher Training College she attended after completing her secondary school studies. She had little to share about her reasons for joining the teaching profession.

Mary was very welcoming and jovial when I met her for the first time. However, on the day of the interview, she seemed ill at ease at the beginning, until when we shared

past memories after realizing we grew up during the same period of time. She mentioned the compulsory military service program she completed after her graduation from the college and we shared some memorable experiences after finding out we were in the same cohort. She was delighted by our memory sharing and when our focus returned to the interview, she was at ease and eager to respond to my questions.

Mary seemed to have had enjoyable experiences during her childhood. She was full of laughter and smiles when reflecting on her play experiences. She expressed her love for play as a child, stating “to say the truth, play was something we used to like more than anything in our life.” Growing up in a village, she described how she and other children spent most of the time playing outdoors, engaging in different kinds of play like dramatic play – pretending to be parents/children, teachers/students – as well as participating in competition games between groups. She described how adults would regard play as nonessential. Using her own parents as examples, she reported how they expected her and her siblings to help with house chores and other work all the time but confessed they would sneak out of the home whenever there was a chance to do so.

As a child in the school setting, she experienced play mainly as a subject: games and sports. With regard to teaching and learning techniques, she stated that she experienced very little play except when a teacher used a game as a demonstration of a certain concept. She also believed songs to be play activities that were used mainly to motivate children’s attention in class.

The pre-primary class.

As observed in other schools, the pre-primary classroom at Heaven-light is similar to the other classrooms in the school. All desks were arranged on one side facing the

blackboard. However, the desks were so close that there was space for only the small bodies of the young children to pass through. The teacher could barely move between the desks. This arrangement, according to the teacher, was aimed at creating enough empty space in the front of the room where children would sit during meals, and to facilitate some classroom activities. On the walls were a few alphabet posters with English examples, although the main language of instruction is Swahili.

Teacher Kabula.

The female teacher, Kabula, was between 20-25 years of age. She holds a certificate of secondary education, obtained after seven years of primary school and four years of secondary school. She had also undertaken a one-year certificate course from a privately-owned institution and immediately upon completion, she was employed by the school as a pre-primary teacher. At the time of the interview she had been with the school for one year.

Kabula was very positive, with a strong belief in the ability of children to learn. I noticed the patience and expectations she showed to a child who seemed to be having learning difficulties. The boy was older than most of the children in class but she was so supportive when talking to him. With the whole class, Kabula was enthusiastic and did her best to engage students in practicing reading and mathematics sums. However, during class sessions, I observed Kabula always holding a stick/cane, which she mostly used as a pointer. Although I did not see her use the stick to cane the children, the stick would likely threaten the children, especially those who are new and trying to get used to school life.

Kabula recounted how she came to join the teaching profession. She claimed her love for children and for teaching started long before she went for teacher training. She described how she used to spend time with her siblings, helping them with their homework, and how her interest in teaching increased as a result. The passion for teaching led her to decline the (Government) posting for nursing school after her secondary studies and instead she decided to join the teaching profession.

Kabula shared her play experiences at different stages of her life. She described how she used to be engaged in athletics and competitive games and sports as well as other local outdoor games. She also described engaging in dramatic/pretend play and how she and her playmates would enact different roles according to events and occurrences in the local society. During her early years of school life she recalled the playfulness of a teacher as he narrated a story to them, which he usually did at the beginning of a session. She recounted her enjoyment of these stories as well as the action songs the teachers used mostly at the end of the sessions. She recalled how she found these enjoyable activities a motivation for her to attend school the following day.

She further shared her experience during teacher training and how there was little offered for them to learn about children's play. The only time she could identify play receiving attention was when they had sessions with guest speakers who would talk on various kinds of games and play activities for children and describe various teaching techniques. The focus, as she recalled, was mainly on outdoor sports and games. Although songs were also introduced as teaching techniques, she regarded them to be play activity, especially because they involved actions in demonstration of a certain concept.

A summary of the eight interviewed educators' demographic information and the duration and location for each interview is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Summary of Demographic Information of Participants*

School (date started) & Number of students	Pseudonym	Years of experience	Gender	Age	Interview duration (Minutes)	Interview location
Sunrise (1958) WS: 1020 PP: 80 T: 28	Teacher Maggy	35	F	55 – 60	First - 33 Second - 45 Third - 31	Classroom – after school
New Star (1974) WS: 1322 PP: 132 T: 33	a. Head Teacher Lawi	24	M	45 – 50	43	Office – during school hours
	b. Teacher May	5	F	35 – 40	First - 32 Second - 54	Classroom – after school
	c. Teacher Nay	4	F	35 – 40	Third - 46	
Moonlight (2002) WS: 1470 PP: 88 T: 88	a. Head Teacher Neema	33	F	50 – 55	50	Office – during school hours
	b. Teacher Rose	9	F	25 – 30	First - 28 Second - 26 Third - 36	Classroom – after school
Heavenlight (2005) WS: 662 PP: 90 T: 19	a. Head Teacher Mary	33	F	40 – 45	48	Office – During school hours
	b. Teacher Kabula	1	F	20 - 25	First - 41 Second - 43 Third - 46	Classroom – After school

Note. Key: WS = Whole school, PP =Pre-primary, T=Teachers

Through the interviews, all of the teachers had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with play at various stages of their lives, including their experiences as student- teachers and in their subsequent professional practice. These various experiences appear to have influenced their beliefs about play, and these beliefs are presented in the following sections.

Teachers' Beliefs About Play

By conducting this study, I aimed to gain insights about how educators in Tanzania understand play and its role in teaching/learning activities as well as the factors educators consider to be influencing their beliefs about play. Concerning the second part of the research question, my earlier aim was to establish related influencing factors that educators consider through investigating how their beliefs have changed over time. However, analysis of the data revealed that beliefs participants held at different stages of their lives with regard to play generally remained constant. This consistency of the participants' views is possibly attributed to the fact that in the particular context, play has not featured as a scholarly topic as it has been in the Western countries.

The findings from the data analyses are presented in categories and linked to the relevant research questions. In forming the categories, I used and synthesized information drawn from participants' descriptions of their previous experiences with play in childhood and during their teacher training, and from their experiences as educators (related to their current practices). In presenting these findings therefore, I portray the general picture of the responses from participants. As the findings are primarily based on data from the interviews, for each category I include a table that represents a frequency count of the distribution of responses from all participants in particular sub-categories that formed the categories. As I explained in Chapter 3, the check marks in the tables provide a simple tally of the number of quotations from each participant relevant to the particular categories. Each check mark indicates a mention of the topic. Again, I want to emphasize that the main aim of these visual presentations is to give a summary sense of the responses, albeit in a very rough/crude form. I acknowledge that these descriptive

measures are inexact, but they do provide a sense of the range of emphasis given to each identified category by the different participants. In presenting the findings, I first present summary charts and then the supportive description from the data under each category.

Category 1: Conception of play.

The first purpose of the study was to examine how participating teachers conceptualize play. I was guided by the question: ‘What do teachers in selected pre-primary schools believe constitutes play?’ in exploring the various characteristics/features that teachers attribute to play. For all eight teachers interviewed, play was found to mainly constitute physical actions involving movement of the body, activities like singing and clapping hands, shaking bodies to the tunes of songs, jumping, running, playing ball and other active, competitive games. In addition to involving physical actions, other characteristics attributed to play were pleasure, pretense and voluntariness (Table 3).

Table 3: *Data summary for Category 1 - Conception of play*

	Play involves physical actions	Play involves pleasure	Play involves pretense	Play involves voluntariness
Kabula	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Lawi	✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	
Maggy	✓		✓	
Mary	✓✓	✓✓✓		
May & Nay	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Neema	✓✓✓		✓	
Rose	✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓

Play involves physical actions.

The majority of the participants' responses indicated that play involves physical actions and so activeness of the body serves as a key indicator of participation in play. From the participants' responses, physical actions imply movement of the body involving jumping, swinging, dancing, running, throwing, and catching and physical exercises. Play activities mentioned by participants ranged from ball games and sports like soccer and other local ball games, to skipping rope, hide and seek, singing with actions, and local/traditional dancing. Most of these activities involve competition between teams, within groups and between pairs. All responses referred mainly to outdoor play and some teachers went further in making reference to playing on the playgrounds with infrastructure such as swings and slides, as well as with natural objects such as sand. Generally, when the word play was mentioned, for the participants, it seemed to denote a physical action which may be a simple action that can be performed while seated (e.g., playing with objects, throwing and catching) or by movement of the whole body as described above.

Hence, the participants' main criterion for identifying a play activity was a child's physical activeness and his or her eagerness to participate in the activity. Asked what criteria can be used to distinguish a play activity from non-play, Lawi stated,

The criteria we can use is by looking at him/her physically that you can see someone who is just there, and doesn't seem to mind about playing. I mean he is just sitting there, he doesn't need to play, I mean he is just sitting. One who needs to play or one who needs to learn to play will definitely join in.

The child was therefore expected to move and participate in the play activity including taking a step to learn an activity that is new to her/him.

All the teachers identified the singing of songs that involve performing physical actions as a play activity. In reference to such songs, Teacher Kabula stated, “There is that singing with action, they do it as if playing, there are certain songs, it’s like they are playing.” Teacher Rose provided a similar example: “Yes, it is related to play because there a child sang, he was singing and showing, so even though he was singing and learning but there was play in there.”

As mentioned above, this categorization of play as involving physical action is expanded to include physical games and sports that involve competition performed both indoors and outdoors, such as ball games involving teams. In describing their experiences of playing in the areas where they grew up, the teachers noted that most of the play was outdoors and in groups. These kinds of games involved hide and seek, jumping to throw or catch the ball, and similar physical activities. Head Teacher Lawi summed up these activities as follows:

There are hiding games (hide and seek) so one has to find out where others are, there are jumping games, there are these ball games. There were so many kinds of play, there were these ball games for example for us boys mostly it was soccer, we used to form teams, when we were young we used to form competition teams, between even clans in the communities.

These kinds of activities are active and enjoyable for children, even when play materials are not there. As Teacher Maggy stated, “A child who is not active in class

when he goes out and play even if it is just jumping around without anything to play with, he becomes active, it is still enjoyable for them.”

Play involves pleasure.

The second common attribute of play evident from the analysis of the data is that play provides pleasure through entertainment. The majority of the participants' responses indicated that children play, that is perform activities they like, in order to amuse themselves. For example, by performing physical activities such as those described above, children and adults derive pleasure. All of the responses in this category indicated that the person's love for the activities is what makes her/him experience pleasure and fully engage in the activities. According to the teachers' observations, the children would prefer to spend all their time playing, and would do so without showing any sign of being tired. The pleasure that children experience during play results in committed engagement that sometimes makes them even lose track of time and sacrifice their time to eat.

Teacher May described how “they don't seem to get tired, they will not even tell you they need to eat even if you keep them for a long time, as long as they are playing.” The engagement in the activity leads to total concentration and makes the individual forget everything else. The player is regarded as purposely performing the activity in order to entertain their whole being. Head Teacher Mary explained that “play is the activity that one performs in order to entertain the mind, soul, body and the body parts in general.”

Furthermore, pleasure can be identified by the joy manifested by both children and teachers. The participants expressed the opinion that by observing the children, one could clearly distinguish play from serious learning. The smiles, laughing and generally the non-seriousness in the communication within the classroom, are some indicators of

the atmosphere of delight described by the teachers. As Head Teacher Mary expressed, there will be a notable difference between the play atmosphere and the atmosphere during classroom teaching sessions: “Yes they are there but it all depends, it [play] is there, when you see them you will see they are entertained but if it is a lesson you will see that there, they are learning and not being entertained, yes.”

Although clearly appreciative of the pleasure children take in play, the teachers emphasized that play in the learning/school environment was by necessity bounded and limited by the teacher. Opportunities for play are controlled by the teacher, and granted only when the teacher believes it to be appropriate. The teachers explained they feel obliged to control the children’s play activities, especially during class sessions because of the large class sizes. Teacher Nay explained, “You have witnessed yourself in the session some of them want even to jump. You saw the way the lesson was no longer in order, they want to play all the time.”

During teaching, the teacher may enliven the class with humour with the goal of amusing the children, but they might not regard this as play because it is in the middle of the ‘serious’ teaching and learning. Together with recognizing the importance of the joyful/playful atmosphere, the teachers believe it is necessary to maintain an atmosphere of ‘seriousness’ in order to ensure that children learn. However, there was a disagreement about whether children regard the humorous and playful atmosphere that the teacher creates in the classroom as play or not. May and Nay, team teaching the same class, took different positions. Nay viewed the humorous atmosphere as play mainly because of the joy the children seem to manifest, while May viewed it as not play because it happened during learning sessions in the classroom situation. In addition to physical actions as

criteria for play, the participants described pretence to be another criterion, as discussed in the following section.

Play involves pretence.

Analysis of the data indicated that make-believe play was another kind of play the teachers experienced at different stages of their lives. Children in the community commonly engage in this kind of play, which involves pretence. However, the pretence feature did not come up directly in the teachers' responses to questions about their perception of play. It was not until I probed more about pretence specifically that the participants described pretend scenarios. From reflections on childhood memories, pre-service teaching experiences, and classroom practice, all participants except Mary shared something about pretend play. Reflecting on their childhood, the participants described themselves as pretending to be in a family situation whereby they negotiated, assigned and enacted roles of different family members. In these pretend scenarios, children performed activities modeled on those they experienced in the day-to-day family life. For example, Head Teacher Lawi reflected on how he participated in such play as a young child:

And the others were playing to build houses, we build a house and say this is a house, you build it very well and show that this is a place for dad, mom We used palm/coconut tree leaves or banana plant leaves. We grew up in a place where banana is a commonly grown crop so we used to build with banana plant leaves and tree poles (big sticks), we built those houses. So in those houses we used to be staying, pretending we live in there. Sometimes we would even take some food from home, and cook in there, so it was so nice, yes.

Teachers' responses also indicated their experiences in the use of pretence in dramatic/role play within classroom instruction. Children would be given opportunities to act out actions they learned in class. Teacher Maggy explained, "Drama is like play. So when a child imitates to open and close the door, he dramatizes, yes, it is part of play."

Another participant described the use of pretend play in higher levels of primary school. Responding to whether she regarded drama to be part of play, Head Teacher Neema offered the following explanation.

Those ones are used in different subjects. For example Social Studies, History, when you are talking about a clan, family, village, and things like that, there you will find children acting. The teacher assigns tasks to characters; you are going to be the dad, and you the mom, etc. So get ready for tomorrow. Everyone should come as dad, mom, child, etc. You will be surprised the way the children will come with the costumes according to how they are told and then they act out.

Pretence was also claimed to be part of a practice activity in different subjects. An action vowel song, in which children demonstrate relating number/letter shapes they are learning with objects or parts of the body of similar shape, was offered as an example by Teacher Rose. She considered the vowel song to be play, noting that the child "regards it as play because he relates things. He does it himself and he says for example (this is *a*) 'it is like an ear', or (this is *i*) 'it has a hat on the head' and he performs all that by actions, that is play." Such play songs are used to teach the vowels at pre-primary level to assist students in identifying and recalling these letters.

In the above examples, pretence is seen in the scenarios where dramatic play is used as well as in pretend actions mainly to emphasize what the children have learned in

class. These scenarios are part of instructional practice, and are teacher-led. However, as I describe in the following section, participants also viewed play as a voluntary activity performed without any restrictions on time, space and type of activity.

Play involves voluntariness and freedom.

Voluntariness and freedom are other aspects of play that were mentioned by participants, although these criteria generated the lowest number of responses. Three participants, Kabula, Rose and May, regarded voluntariness and freedom to be aspects that distinguish a play from a non-play activity. Teacher Kabula reflected on her childhood memories, noting that,

the necessity to do that thing, that is not play because it is something you have to do! It is a must whether you like it or not, you must do it. That applies to the class environment, whether you want it or not, when it is time to read, you have to be serious and read.

Teacher Kabula clearly distinguished between the house chores that she was supposed to do after school and playing that she would participate in when she was done with the chores. She also described the classroom situation where there was a time to play without any of the restrictions present during lessons. She further argued that children will tend to feel free because of the playful mood that the teacher demonstrates in class.

First of all at that time he [the child] is free, and when he looks at the teacher, the teacher looks playful at that time, you see, when he looks at the atmosphere, it is not that of, 'keep quiet!' you see, it is that time to play. I mean, he [the child], himself feels it, he is free at that time!

Teacher Kabula conveyed that children will pick up on the playful atmosphere and hence regard the activities conducted at that time as play. Additionally, Teacher Rose argued that one would expect to see play during the free time periods like recess, when children are free from teacher planned activities and thus able to choose any games they want for the purpose of having fun. Teacher Rose stated,

For play, it can happen when you are outside during recess and everyone plays the way they want, it is not within the lessons. But the other things are activities we do within the specific subjects. Maybe today we do arts, or vocational skills, so for that one everyone has to do it and you are graded according to your participation but for play you play in order to amuse yourself/just to enjoy and the teacher will not look at how you play or do anything.

Furthermore, Teacher May conveyed that when the activity is performed voluntarily, even if it is a 'serious' task, the children will regard it as play. She described how in their class, they (May and Nay) give children the task to clean the cups used when taking porridge meals. In her opinion, the 'non-serious' tone/mood the teachers use motivates the children to volunteer for the task. May stated,

Yes, they regard it as play because they do it voluntarily. I don't force them. They do it themselves, not by forcing them. I would just say, 'aren't we doing the dishes today?' and [they respond] 'yes we will do them' 'who is doing the dishes' and they nominate each other. Some would tell each other: 'you washed yesterday and today it's our turn.'

Category 2: The role of play.

Another goal of this study was to find out what these teachers believe to be the role of play. In determining the presumed benefits of play if any, the question that guided the research was, 'Do these pre-primary teachers believe play to have any benefits for children's learning, and if so, what benefits?' Analysis of the data showed that all participants recognized play as having an important role in children's learning (and welfare). Generally, the participants believed the main function of play is to entertain the child. According to their views, a child finds joy in participating in various play activities. They considered the participation of children in physical activity play to provide learning/educational benefits, not only in providing joy but also in making the children active. All study participants therefore, acknowledged the necessity to provide play opportunities for children at school and at home. They all communicated their beliefs that play is beneficial mainly in encouraging children's learning and the love of school in general. They also conveyed that play can provide opportunities for the development of skills and behaviours. Additionally, the majority of participants believed playful contexts are beneficial in fostering children's learning. It should be noted that although in most cases the participants' responses were similar, there were some variations in some of the sub-categories. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Data summary for category 2 - Role of play

	Play stimulates love for school and motivation for learning	Play provides opportunity for skills and behaviour development	Play fosters learning through engagement in playful context
Kabula	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓
Lawi	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	
Maggy	✓✓✓	✓	✓
Mary	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓
May & Nay	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓
Neema	✓	✓✓✓	✓
Rose	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓

Play stimulates children's love for school and motivation for learning.

According to the teacher participants, play activities provide joy and liveliness to children, and hence stimulate children's interest in school. All participants shared this view and recognized the importance of making such activities available to children, mainly because they are beneficial in capturing the interest of the children, and therefore motivate them to be positively disposed towards school. Teacher Kabula remembered such experiences as a student in school.

For me, it really motivated me to like school because when I got home I could even recall the way we played and the stories we have heard, you see and would

be looking forward to the following day. Sometime we would even ask the teacher to sing a certain song. So it makes you motivated to go the following day.

All teachers shared the view that motivation and love for school consequently increased school attendance and so they found it advantageous to provide time for play.

Teacher Maggy explained,

Yes I came to realize that it is beneficial ... when I entered in the class, that a young child likes to play a lot. Even attendance is enhanced by play. For example if they have classes throughout the week, may be Monday to Friday, when they get an opportunity to play they become so happy and attendance goes high.

Teacher Maggy stressed the importance of having at least one session per week for children as a play session, when students are taken outside the classroom for different games involving physical actions, competition in teams or pairs, singing, or dancing. My observations revealed how each of the four classes had an outdoor play session once per week. When observing the play session, I heard teachers in one of the schools remarking on the high attendance on that specific day compared to other days.

Generally, the teachers believed that activities children enjoy provide good motivation for school attendance. Even pretend play activities, which were found to be a relatively less common occurrence in the classes, helped in creating children's interest in school. Teacher Nay noted, "These would help in motivating them to like school, because as he remembers that 'we cooked yesterday,' so he won't miss school, so this acts as motivation because they like what they do."

The play activities are also used to actively involve the children during the sessions, especially when the teachers sense that the students are tired and becoming

inattentive because of the prolonged 'serious' learning. Singing is a very common activity that is used when children seem to be tired and so losing interest in listening to the teacher. Head Teacher Mary explained,

You must enjoy, and it really motivates the child to like his lessons. If a teacher uses play in teaching, even singing is also play, and it really motivates the child to like his lessons ... so the teacher starts to sing this song you find that the children become active and they don't seem to be dosing anymore.

The teachers appeared to recognize the importance of adequate allocation of resources for children's play. Provision of adequate time for play as well as the desirability of play equipment clearly can contribute to a love for school. Teacher Rose explained,

For a child the largest part of his learning is through play so for a child to learn in the class, his mind cannot only focus on listening to the lessons only, what really motivates the child to come to school is play. So if a child knows that there are nice games he will be attracted and he will also like school, so for a pre-primary child the main thing is having more playing than even lessons because a child's mind cannot concentrate on lessons for a long period of time they mostly think of play, that is what makes him like his studies/lessons.

In Teacher Rose's opinion, the child's awareness of the availability of play facilities and the opportunity to use them are motivating factors for school interest.

Focusing on play equipment and materials, I needed to know if there were any efforts on the teachers' part to provide play items. Responses from all participants indicated they consider this provision to be the responsibility of the higher authorities.

The resources referred to by participants include mostly outdoor, industry made play items like balls, toys and playground equipment like swings and slides. My observations of the outdoor play sessions revealed that a ball was the only item in two classes, while the other two classes had no equipment and so children mainly were running around, singing, and chasing each other.

Play provides opportunity for skills and behaviour development.

The findings revealed that all teachers believed that children can practice and develop contextually relevant skills and behaviours through play. They viewed play as an opportunity for children to gain and practice skills necessary for their life in school as well as at home, currently and also in their future. Play was most commonly described as providing opportunities for building good relations among children. Four of the eight participants argued that it is through playing together that children build love and friendship, which consequently leads to cooperation. According to these participants, good relations developed through play create a favourable atmosphere for children's learning.

Findings revealed that through playing together, children build social relations. Head Teacher Neema described how these relations facilitate their learning together:

Play also builds friendship, because these children don't know each other, but when they start playing together, holding each other there comes a point, "I want to be with you, I want to be with you..." They already get used to each other and later they become one ... they tend to have good relationships and also in their learning, it creates the spirit of cooperation, that is why it comes a point when one is not scared of asking someone else, may I borrow your pen? But the first time

they come to class, you will see one just sits there he doesn't even understand. He may be crying for the first days for the whole school day, but later he comes to learn aah... these are my friends.

Participants expressed the opinion that as the children become more familiar with each other, they build stronger relations, and they become more confident as they get adjusted to school. The teachers communicated the belief that the learning environment is therefore made more conducive for them because of play, especially when the teacher participates, as described by Teacher Rose below.

It removes from the child fear which they always have when they come to school for the first time, so by the time he comes to learn other things he is free and not scared of the teacher so it is easier to share with the teacher whenever he has a problem without fear.

However, even though all the teachers said they valued participating in the play, my observation did not record all of them actually doing so. I observed only two teachers (May and Nay) actively involved with children's play in the classroom.

Two of the teachers, Kabula and Nay, found play to be beneficial in facilitating children's integration to school life. As children become friends and grow to love each other, integration to school life becomes easy. As most of the pre-primary children join school for the first time, they need time to get used to relating with the teachers and other children. These children have been spending time mostly with their parents, siblings, and extended family members who live in their homes. Play, therefore, is seen as facilitating the children's learning as they become familiar with others, and learn to relate and communicate well with them. Meeting a large number of children may be

overwhelming for a child and, as Teacher Nay explained, play can help in overcoming these feelings.

She is not used to spending time with a large number of children like this, children have to get familiar to each other in the class first, start singing, and ask each other's name, to know the name of a friend sitting closer to her, she sings, I sing, and she sings too, I tell her my name and she mentions her name.

Furthermore, as Teacher Kabula pointed out, play activities encourage active engagement in classroom activities. She described how, as a result of familiarization through play, children freely and eagerly participate in various learning activities.

There are so many children who would come, for example those triplets, they cannot do anything, all the time they are just snuggled to themselves, they wouldn't mix with other children. But when we saw that, we started to have songs in the morning, those songs in which children would jump, so we would go and get them up to play with others, they then start to jump too, as they see others playing, so they started to be active.

As well as believing play helps in building good relations among children and with the teachers, which then facilitates adaptation to school life and participation in classroom activities, 4 of the 8 participants described how children also learn the acceptable behaviours of the society in which they live through play. Head Teacher Neema described games with rules as creating opportunities for children to develop discipline and learn about obeying rules. She argued that as children obey rules in the games, they learn to do the same in real life. Furthermore, three other participants, Teachers Kabula, Lawi and May, argued that through pretend play, mostly practiced out

of school, children learn about family life and practice taking different responsibilities as preparation for adulthood. For example, children can learn from the morals of the story they are acting (role playing) – what is good and bad – and so become aware of how they are supposed to conduct themselves in various circumstances. Teacher Kabula described this learning opportunity explicitly:

For example, for those who are playing, and they will learn that aha, so this becomes this way, you see. They will learn from the teachings of the play, may be not to do something, or to do it, oh so, this is not good! He can see from the actions performed there.

Responses from these four participants revealed childhood play activities that they considered to have contributed much to shaping them as adults. Head Teacher Lawi stated,

so they were nice play activities for that time to say the truth. They contributed so much on strengthening/shaping us, it teaches someone that he can grow up to own and run a family, and become one of the family members.

Pretend play was the kind of play that was mainly described by the participants as bringing about this developmental benefit. Teacher May described the importance of this kind of play in preparing the children to take up social responsibilities when they grow up.

In this kind of play they learn about everyday social life of their mothers, how the people in the society live, especially where they come from. They get prepared before they reach adulthood where they will be required to cook. That is why we see children playing cooking.

Play fosters learning through engagement in a playful context.

Although the participants were largely in agreement that play has a role in children's development and education as described in the two categories above, the analysis of the data indicated that the teachers believe play to be separate from the 'serious' classroom activities. Nevertheless, a few responses revealed that a playful environment is believed to be beneficial in enhancing children's learning. Teachers' responses revealed that playful activities designed by the teachers are useful in presenting concepts to the young children. According to the teachers' views, the playful environment created through the use of playful activities may enhance children's memory, and overall, provide more teaching/learning benefits than direct instruction. However, my observations of the classrooms revealed that teachers minimally used various games and play activities to facilitate teaching. Most of the time I observed the teachers were engaged in direct instruction and even when the play activities were used, they were all prepared and led by the teacher. The classroom environments, as observed, did not seem as playful as the teachers described. It is likely that the teachers believe they would be in a better position to create such environments if they were not faced by challenges such as the lack of skills and resources. Teacher Rose provided the following example of a playful activity:

So, that [activity] will kill boredom which would happen if I would just stand there in front and tell the children to count, I would be teaching them Maths/counting by making them memorize, that will take a long time and children may not like it. But if there are songs, children might like it because they are singing.

Thus, Rose wished she would be able to provide such a playful environment for her class but she was constrained by the challenges pointed out above.

My study further sought to explore from the educators the practicalities and actualities of providing for play opportunities in the education settings. In the following section, I present findings from related curriculum documents as well as from the educators' interview responses, with regard to provision and integration of play into pre-primary education.

Category 3: Play provision and integration into pre-primary education.

One of the objectives of my research was to find out if the teachers viewed play, in any form, as featuring in the teaching and learning activities of the school. To provide contextual background for this question, I examined selected, relevant pre-primary curriculum documents and syllabi with respect to their stance on the provision of play in pre-primary education. I considered it crucial to examine the curriculum documents that have been designed to guide the practices of teachers in the classroom and also the views of participants regarding the role of these documents in their practice. Following the presentation of this background information, I present findings from the interviews and observations with regard to the provision for play and its integration into the actual teaching and learning in the classes involved in this study.

Play provision in the pre-primary curriculum.

The curriculum design documents relevant to this study, authored by the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, are the *Pre-primary Education Syllabus for Pre-primary Schools* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005), and *Course Module for*

Teaching Methods in Early Childhood Education: Teacher Training Certificate

(Tanzania Institute of Education, 2003). In this section I first present findings from participants' experiences with regard to their teacher education programs, and then I describe their experiences as teachers, using the pre-primary syllabus. The information obtained from the review of the documents is linked with that obtained from interviews.

It should be noted that the study participants completed different teacher training programs. While three of the five participating pre-primary teachers completed pre-service programs at private institutions, only one of them is a product of the pre-service program prepared by the Government specifically for the pre-primary level. The other teacher benefited from the in-service program that was one of the government's initiatives to produce teachers for the newly established pre-primary classes. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to review the various program documents from the private institutions, and so the review of documents focused on only the Government teacher preparation program for pre-primary teachers. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, pre-service student teachers took a compulsory early childhood education course in which there was a teaching methods module, and that module is the focus of this section. The participants' responses revealed that during their teacher training an emphasis on provision of play was through sports and games. Play, according to the participants, appeared solely as a course/subject on physical sports and games, mainly performed outdoors. The main aim for this course was to prepare them to teach the subject in schools. However, one of the participants, the only one who completed the Government pre-primary teacher training, declared not to have seen play featured anywhere during the training. Teacher Rose explained,

Ahhh I didn't learn much, I just learned about early childhood care and early childhood teaching techniques. So I just learned that young children are supposed to be treated this way... but play as it is, I didn't learn anything, but I learnt about which techniques I am supposed to use when teaching young children.

According to Teacher Rose's reflection, children's play was not featured in the program. However, a review of the teaching methods module for early childhood education used in her program shows two forms of play identified as teaching techniques among the five techniques delineated. In this module, teachers are explicitly instructed on how these techniques can be applied in teaching. In role play (drama) for example, children are expected to act out people's actions they have seen or heard from stories. The second technique featured is the use of songs with actions, to present various concepts as required by the syllabus. Furthermore, it is emphasized in the content of the course module that when these forms of play are used, children enjoy the lessons and so are motivated to learn more. Likewise, acting out or engaging in role play is regarded as beneficial because it enables children to easily remember what they have learned. The mismatch between the response from the participant and the content in the relevant document raises questions that are examined in the next chapter.

With regard to the pre-primary syllabus, the participant responses revealed that play is only minimally featured in the teaching learning strategies. Play is presented amongst the recommended strategies, but as Teacher Rose argued, the implementation or use of the activities might be challenging because teachers find them irrelevant to their teaching context.

Yes, it is featured; it is featured in the recommended strategies that guide me, in different topics ... And even if they have integrated anything on the syllabus, it is not integrated in the way that is conducive with our environment. I mean, you find that, for example there are activities that... it is difficult to use them, it is difficult to use them.

Paralleling the teacher training module, the play activities suggested as teaching and learning strategies in the syllabus document are songs and role play/dramatic play. It is recommended for example, that teachers guide the children in role play, demonstrating language competencies like greeting and introducing themselves. In Arithmetic activities, there are suggestions that the teacher use games and songs in showing the children how to do sums. Drama activity is suggested in the teaching of science, whereby the teacher is expected to guide the children to demonstrate various practices in maintaining body cleanliness. However, as Teacher Rose noted above, teachers face some challenges in putting these recommendations into practice. Teachers therefore pragmatically select what they consider relevant in order for their particular children to understand. Teacher May commented,

Yes, there is, in some cases and we have to study the environment of the children, which surrounds the teacher, some of them you will not be able to use them. The children will not understand you, so we usually look at techniques which are relevant to the class one is teaching because it is the class teacher who knows his class, and its challenges.

Findings presented later in this chapter identify the many challenges teachers face in providing for play. Nevertheless, even with the challenges found/noted, all participants

maintained that provision was made for play and its integration in their classrooms. Findings on the integration of play are presented in the following section.

One of the research questions that guided this study was: 'Do these teachers integrate play into teaching and learning activities and if so how?' The findings in response to this question are categorized into the following sections: 1) Play as peripheral to academic work; 2) Play as a vehicle for academic learning; and 3) Play as a vehicle for social and communication skills development. The interview responses revealed mixed views on the integration of play into the teaching of young children. On the one hand, data analyses revealed how play is viewed by some of the participants to be 'not serious' and so cannot be integrated directly into 'serious' academic work. However, on the other hand, as described previously, some participants viewed play to be useful in facilitating learning of academic content as well as the development of social and communication skills. Responses from all of the participants indicated different approaches to how play is being incorporated into class work. The majority of the responses focused on how play is integrated as a vehicle for academic teaching and learning. However, at the same time, a smaller number of responses revealed that play is not closely attached/linked to the teaching and hence is peripheral to academic work. Only two of the eight educators interviewed regard play integration as a vehicle for the development of social and communicative skills. Summary and percentage of responses are presented in Table 5 and details of each category follow.

Table 5: Data summary for category 3 - Play provision and integration

	Peripheral to academic work	Vehicle for academic learning	Vehicle for social and communication skills development
Kabula	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓
Lawi	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	
Maggy	✓	✓✓✓	✓
Mary		✓✓	
May & Nay	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓ ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	
Neema	✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	
Rose		✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓

Play as peripheral to academic work.

Since the findings indicated that play is mainly regarded by the participants as involving a child's physical activities, it is thus seen as making a very limited contribution to serious academic learning activities. In school, these play activities are mainly aimed at entertaining the children for the purpose of motivating them to learn through capturing their attention. Responses from all participants conveyed this view with variation on how play appears in class sessions. The Head Teachers described body exercises and activity as a way to enliven the children *in preparation* for the school day. The view common to the classroom teachers was the usefulness of play activities when

introducing a lesson. Some teachers went further and viewed play as useful in the middle of the lesson to activate the children when they seem to be tired.

I next present the findings about the different ways play is featured in the participants' own teaching practice, and as it was experienced in their school experiences as children.

The teachers described using physical activities as warm up activities to make students ready for the lessons. As described by two head teachers, Lawi and Neema, these activities involve simple sports and physical exercises including jumping, jogging, and simple (military) parade activities that are usually carried out in the beginning of the day. While these activities may be viewed as contributing indirectly to children's learning, the teachers' responses show they consider them peripheral to teaching and learning activities. Head Teacher Lawi described his play experience at school when he was growing up.

On play activities issues, mainly like the one I have told you, parade for the children, I found it very useful before going into class. A child should be made active, he should do the parade after that it means the body is already active so when he goes to class he will be ready to receive what he is taught.

Head Teacher Neema shared what she regarded to be play as a child, especially because of the fun she had which made her and other children like the teacher more. She explained,

There was another one, he used to be a sports teacher He used to make us run/jog everyday even when he is not on duty and we really liked him. It is

something that is not common these days. I wish the teachers could do the same now.

This view of play was expressed by only these two head teachers. They shared their concern that the current environment around the school is not feasible for encouraging running/jogging in the streets. While Head Teacher Neema raised a concern about the willingness of current day teachers to conduct such physical play activities, Head Teacher Lawi's comments revealed recognition of the benefits of such activities, but he showed concern about the traffic in the cities as he described his childhood experience.

Even for us in the past in the villages, it was necessary that we jog around the school, which is different from the environment in the cities. We are scared that children might be knocked down by cars. It was good and really when you get into the class after the jogging. You really feel active, because we were living in the cold areas. So when you leave home, you are shivering until you reach school but when he gets involved in the jogging and parade games, you find him already active and can receive what he is being taught.

Data analyses revealed that in the classroom, play has its place but one not directly related to learning. Kabula, Maggy, Lawi, May and Nay expressed their opinion that play is used to introduce the lesson and it should stop when the real teaching (serious learning) begins. Play, therefore, is seen as a useful way of warming up the class, and making the children active and ready for instruction. Play features as an introductory segment through games and songs carried out for a specified period and which is teacher-

led. In response to a question about her views regarding the position of play in her teaching, Teacher Maggy stated the following:

For me my chance to use play is at the introduction. On introduction ..., children will enter the class, when I come in they will greet me, or I might start to greet them and they would respond after that I might... for example if it's science session I might ask about their parts of the body, they may name them. Or I would show a game, for example in Maths, that song they sang, 'the bird song', ... But in the middle there I cannot bring in any play, in the middle of Maths, in the middle of reading, in the middle of writing, I cannot, but in the beginning at the introduction.

Teacher Maggy's response reveals the peripheral position of play in her class. Games and other play activities are used to usher the children into real learning but they are stopped when it is time to focus and pay attention to the teaching. Teacher Kabula described the process in her class as follows:

For me, I usually do this in the morning as I teach Number activities. As soon as I enter the class, I let them stand, and we sing, because I know that if they jump around they become active. I let them stand, and sing the songs they like that make them jump. I let them do some physical activities, you see. After that then I tell them to sit down and be attentive because it is time to learn.

As mentioned earlier, participants indicated that singing is the most used play activity possibly because of the physical actions involved. Although teachers have recognized a variety of play activities that they can use, they see singing as the best activity in their situation. The teachers also described introducing play in the middle

of lessons to activate and motivate students, whose attention may be waning. Teacher May stated,

Let me say this, here we teach, and during the process you may find that play is already in the lesson, you can start to teach and find that they are tired, you look, if I say this and that will they be active? They become active if you bring in a little play activity yes.

Play as vehicle for academic learning.

Despite its peripheral status, all participants acknowledged that play has a role in enhancing students' learning. Based on the analysis of the interview data, play seems to feature as a vehicle for academic learning mainly when the teachers demonstrate playfulness in their practices. In addition, play is incorporated as a practice activity when instruction is carried out. It was generally agreed, however, that the incorporation of play into teaching mainly depends on the teacher's creativity and competence. In this subsection, I draw upon participants' responses as well as my classroom observations, to describe the different ways that play is featured in the pre-primary contexts studied.

Play is featured as practice activity to enhance learning through demonstration. Teachers believe that games, as part of play, can be used to teach and/or illustrate concepts in various subjects. In the transcript excerpt below, Head Teacher Mary offers an example from her childhood, of using games to facilitate the teaching of Maths concepts.

He would say, "Like yesterday when you were playing, how many were there?" and we respond 6 by 6, and so he can say ok this group of six people you are supposed to be under this one and this one. Ok, so if there are 6 people on this side and 6 on the other, what if they are together, so for this game how many are

they going to be altogether? So teachers were using... and for a student it becomes aahaa! So here [laugh] we are supposed to add. So the teacher has taught addition using a game and there you recall your 'rede' game and the teacher's sum. So that really helps ... So even in other subjects you find play in there, yes.

Thus, Head Teacher Mary explained how a teacher incorporated a game that the children were familiar with and were likely to have played. Head Teacher Neema also described an activity used to illustrate a science concept.

We also incorporate play because, aah, for example when a teacher is teaching gravitational forces between the earth and the sun. When teaching that, you can take a tin and fill it with water, and then tie with a rope on the handle. And then you can swing it fast until at some point it turns upside down but the water doesn't spill. And then you can use it as an example in science. Later on in a different topic you may teach the children to throw a sling, to swing and let go, but in this case we don't let go. That is it.

I would consider the example quoted above more fittingly a description of a demonstration than play, as it is the teacher who is doing all the swinging of the can. However, Head Teacher Neema might have regarded it as adding a playful mood/moment to an instructional activity.

In some instances, the pre-primary teachers described the possibility of having play activities that can be integrated into instructional activity, but I rarely observed such activities in practice. Some play activities the class teachers claimed to be useful in enhancing children's learning were role plays, flash card games, and counting games using various objects. These activities may help the teacher in attaining curriculum

objectives. Teacher Nay described how a number cards game could be used in enhancing number recognition:

For example, we make a line as you know we teach at the black board, we make a line this way and we say 'when I say one you should immediately run fast', when I say two, immediately run fast and children rejoice shouting eeeeh! Children shout joyfully so that is one type of play but at the same time I teach there I just want them to understand more, one two three up to ten. Yes, I have my objectives but I use that way yes.

In enhancing the same competence, teacher Rose describes how number cards and objects could be used in a different way.

For example, we can make number cards, or small cards of a certain kind and then you ask a child, you just throw them down for children to look for numbers.

Those are the things that we can make and they are easy to make, so a child will be looking for a number, and as he looks for the number, he will be studying as he plays. Or we can take things like stones and throw them down for every student to pick, later on he comes to count how many did he get, so already he has counted although he was playing the picking up game.

Although data analysis revealed that some of the teachers believed various play activities had educational benefits to children, integrating the play activities into teaching was dependent on different aspects, as noted by Head Teacher Lawi.

It depends on how the teacher himself regards his own subject in the classroom, that if he decides to conduct it through play (as if it is play) he can do it, and it will be better understood to students, than direct teaching. Response depends on

each teacher's competence/ability. . . So you find for some teachers it is in him, but there are others who cannot, that is how they are. There are others who even if you encourage them they will not do it, they just go to class and teach and go.

As Head Teacher Lawi asserted, whether or not play might be integrated into the classroom activities in different ways, depends mainly on the particular teacher's quality/characteristics. Even in circumstances where the environment limits the use of various activities that the teachers find to be useful, an option that remains is the demonstration of playfulness by the teacher for the purpose of creating enjoyable experiences for students. With the exception of two participants, all others shared the view that the manifestation of play through teacher playfulness is one of the ways play is incorporated in the classroom. The intention is to create a playful atmosphere where children feel relaxed and free, as described by Teacher Kabula:

First of all at that time the child is free, and when he looks at the teacher, the teacher looks playful at that time, you see, when he looks at the atmosphere, it is not that of, 'keep quiet!' you see, it is that time to play I mean, he, himself feels it, he is free at that time!

Furthermore, teacher May described that one way to create the playful atmosphere is for teacher to be fully involved in playing and in identifying him/herself as one of the players: "It is for them to enjoy even more as even the teacher is playing, they enjoy."

Play as a vehicle for development of social and communication skills.

Analysis of data also revealed the use of dramatic (role) play in classroom settings. In addition to encouraging the practice of concepts taught in the class (as pointed out earlier in this chapter), dramatic play is an activity outlined in the syllabus and

considered to enhance the practice of social behaviours and skills. Teachers Rose, Maggy and Kabula claimed to see this kind of play as enhancing social and communication skills of the children. A teacher gives the children roles and asks them to dramatize various roles and/or actions. I observed these role-plays to be very short, possibly in order to give turns to more children. As argued by the teachers, the play activities are used in learning/practicing social behaviours that are listed in the syllabus. As Rose explained, “they can dramatize greeting, they may act/imitate various activities from the lessons like greeting, the home behaviours showing respect, maybe songs, or telling stories of activities that they do.”

All three participants agreed that role play activities are entirely guided by the teacher, and children are expected to participate fully. According to the teachers, role plays are used as practice activities whereby students would be given opportunity to practice various communicative aspects like greetings, or used to demonstrate various actions depending on the topic in a particular subject. The teachers view the children’s participation in such play-like demonstrations as facilitating development of social skills. Teacher Kabula described an example of how particular children gained social confidence through engaging in playful songs: “They wouldn’t mix with other children. They could not even say anything, after involving them in songs and other activities every morning, and they started to interact more with others.”

As pointed out earlier, the teachers’ recognition or identification of play in their teaching practices required careful probing from me. Similarly, identification and consideration of the role or influence of the cultural and local context in play activities also necessitated probing. In some cases, the participants responded by discussing their

various teaching techniques and I had to draw them back to the focus on play. Probing involved rephrasing the questions asked as well as using some examples in an effort to make the questions clearer to them. The issues related to the use of cultural/local context as revealed in the interviews and observations are presented below.

Consideration of cultural/local experiences/context in play provision.

The aim of one of the overarching research question and sub-questions was to explore the teachers' provision of play opportunities at school in consideration of the cultural experiences that are meaningful to the children. The research questions were: *To what extent and in what ways, if any, are the home/family/community experiences of children considered by the teacher in any provision made to support play at school? If such provisions are made, what do the teachers identify as the possible contribution to learning made by connecting home/ family/community experiences to children's play?* Below, I present findings from the interviews and my observations on the use, if any, of scenarios/events/materials that are familiar to the children, in the provision of play experiences.

The children's local experiences were given consideration mostly through songs, which emerged as a commonly used play activity both as a teaching strategy and a motivating activity. In recalling their memories of their childhood school experiences, four of the participants noted that one of the things that seemed to attract the attention of the children was the use of songs in the local languages. These participants went through education using a medium other than their mother tongue. Three participants (Kabula, Mary and Neema) expressed how the use of familiar songs was so enjoyable to them as children and so increased the love of school. One teacher, Kabula, expressed how they

used to enjoy the use of songs in their local language and further remarks that it was not only the language used but also the relevancy of the content:

Yes, we really enjoyed, because sukuma is our language so that is why he used the sukuma language song, all the children were sukuma language speakers.... and because of the words it said, that 'it is time to go home let us go eat some potatoes and corn and we should come back early tomorrow morning.'

The potatoes and corn mentioned on the song are the main local foods in the area. According to the participant, an activity like this motivated the children to come to school the following day. A common song, familiar from their homes, may also be used to stimulate attentiveness in a flagging class as Mary observes:

Even singing is also play, so a teacher may come in and teach for some time and when he sees children look tired, he introduces a song that children know from where they live, there are lots of songs [gives examples of action songs] so he starts to sing this song you find that the children become active and they don't seem to be drowsy anymore.

Another aspect that reflected consideration of the local context is the use of locally made play items using locally obtained resources. Teachers May, Nay and Neema described their experiences as children making various items according to teachers' instructions. Teacher May described making balls and skipping ropes:

For me if I remember correctly, if it's a ball, we used to make it by ourselves using pieces of cloth material, we would fold the pieces and take them to school to use in making a ball, a teacher would ask each child to bring a ball that he made, the teacher himself used to tell us, make a ball that you will come to use at

school. Another thing was the skipping ropes, there are these traditional ones from banana plants, I remember, we used to cut them from the banana trees.

From the participants' reflections on their childhood experiences, these locally made items were used for play at school and in the community. Participants were further guided to reflect on their own teaching practices but none of them expressed related observations in their experience as teachers. However, from my observation, I noticed in one lesson, very common play objects in the community being used in the classroom activity. Teacher Nay gave 10 plastic bottle covers to each group of four students seated in one desk. The teacher then asked the students to use them as counting objects in doing addition sums. I asked the teacher the reason for using such objects and she admitted that it was mainly because these objects were commonly used in children's play. However, Teacher Nay declared that she did not relate this activity to play, stating, "No, no, I was doing it as a lesson this was not a game, it is an activity in Mathematics lesson. They have to participate in doing so that they can remember."

Finally, my analysis of the data revealed the different aspects that impact the provision of play in the settings under the study. The factors influencing play provision are presented in the following section.

Category 4: Factors influencing provision of play in school.

I also sought to explore various factors the participants believe to be impacting the provision of play in school, through the guiding question: What factors do these teachers believe support and impede integration of play into teaching practice? Different factors were found to influence the provision of play, both in and outside the classroom and both positively and negatively. Responses related to this category are

summarized in Table 6. The factors are discussed below with a focus on the way the participants see them as supporting and/or impeding the provision of play.

Table 6: *Data summary for category 4 - Factors influencing provision of play in school*

	Size and profile of the class	Availability of resources	Demands of the parents	Teacher qualities	School administration	Demands of the curriculum
Kabula	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Lawi		✓		✓		
Maggy	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓			
Mary		✓	✓	✓		✓
May & Nay	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	✓	
Neema		✓✓		✓		✓
Rose	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓	✓✓	

Class size and availability of resources.

Data analysis revealed that participants believe class size is the element that mostly influences play provision. Most of the responses expressed concern about the very large number of students in the classes, and the limited resources available. From observation, I noticed that the number of students ranged from 65 to 120 present in a single class. These students had very limited space to sit and move around the classroom. With an average teacher student ratio of 1:70, all the teachers interviewed believe this

large number of young children in the class limits them from providing more play experiences to the children. However, it should be noted that none of the head teachers interviewed mentioned class size as an influencing factor. Findings presented in this sub-category therefore are from only the pre-primary class teachers. All the teachers understand the importance of play and acknowledge that although there are concepts and skills that can effectively be presented through play or playful activities, class size is the main hindrance for provision of such activities. They argue that the large number of students in the classes is an impediment due to variation in children's ages, availability of play space and materials, and ability to manage the class. When preparing play materials and using play learning activities teachers are confronted with the need to address/meet the varied interests of all children in the class. Teacher May specifically addressed this point:

I can say, the number of children, for me I am still on the number of children, because we need to allocate these children according to their ages, four years should be alone, five and six should be together because there is attentiveness, for the young children of four years they have their own attentiveness because of their age, but if I mix them with the five to six year olds, they also have their own attentiveness ... so the challenge I can see here, is not only the number but if we had different groups/classes; where the four-year-olds have their own place, five- and six-year-olds their own place. That would make it a lot easier for us.

My observations revealed that in the pre-primary class, which was expected to have five- and six-year-old students, children up to the age of 12 were enrolled. The teachers confirmed this observation. As these older children did not have the opportunity

to attend pre-primary school earlier for different reasons, they are new to school and are allocated to the pre-primary class to learn the foundations of literacy and numeracy. I observed how the children were seated in rows, according to their age group, and the teacher interacted with one group at a time, which is a difficult task for teachers as Teacher Maggy expressed:

I have one challenge of having children of different ages; this is very disturbing to me. That I give different tasks for the three age groups I have. Those ones will remain here next year. Those ones, the four-year-olds, even if one would be able to [be] ready, because of the age he cannot be promoted to Grade 1. So I have to teach him, after teaching those ones, I come to the second group, after that I come to those who could not be promoted to Grade 1 this year.

The mixed age group was also reported to be a hindrance in providing and using play objects in the classrooms. All of the teachers interviewed expressed concern about the challenge in providing for play materials suitable for all children. Even when they tried to make such materials available, the teachers argued that the older children tended to monopolize them and hence create chaos in the classrooms.

Compounding the problem of the large number of students is an absence of adequate structures, facilities and materials to support provision of play in and outside the classroom. Teacher Rose and Teacher Maggy expressed their desire to provide play activities rather than direct teaching but found their efforts hindered by scarcity of space.

Teacher Rose explained:

Here it is possible to have the play activities in the lessons but the number of students hinders, as the number of students is higher than the space we have in

this classroom so that is the main thing that hinders. I don't give it enough chance, for example maybe I was supposed to have the students in groups, and tell them may be to play a certain game, or maybe to take some objects and count, but now because of the large number of students in the class, the space available is not enough.

Therefore, the main concern for the teachers is the number of children, which limits their freedom to make available activities that children may find enjoyable. This large number together with age differences of the children and the scarcity of play spaces and materials makes it difficult for teachers to provide for play.

Although the Head Teachers interviewed did not express any concern about the number of students in the classes, analyses of the transcripts revealed that all of them remarked on the unavailability of play areas, equipment, and sports items in school and in the community. While Mary expressed her wish to have an equipped outdoor play area specifically for pre-primary, Neema was concerned about the school's inability to afford sports items. Lawi's concern was the lack of appropriate children's play areas in the community, hence the risk of children being knocked down by cars as they play close to the roads.

Demands of the parents.

Although the teachers view play to be beneficial for children, the parents seem to have different opinions. Four participants (all classroom teachers) expressed their concern about the parents' ambition to have their children start to read and write as soon as they are enrolled in pre-school. The parents' ambitious demands are another issue that affects play provision. The teachers believe that most parents find play to be a waste of

time and would prefer to see their children busy with written school work instead of playing. Teacher Maggy commented,

I think, a parent sees play as wastage of time, instead he would wish a child to be given lots of classwork, forgetting that play entertains, it makes the child active, it makes him exercise physically, yes. But when he sits at one place, and everything is provided there that is not good, I think it is not good, but parents do not recognize this, and regard it to be wastage of time.

Teacher May described from her experience, the concerns of parents.

Most of the parents do not know that we start with singing and playing ... they don't know, they want the same day they come with a writing book and a pencil, they start to write. It is very hard especially in these lower classes, most of them say that, teachers do not teach, the children go there just to play and sing.

Therefore, the teachers are faced with a challenge to justify to the parents any school time designated for play especially because parents see no evidence that their children are learning when engaged in play.

Teacher quality/characteristics.

The play activities at school described in the interviews are to a large extent led and guided by the teacher and so whether and how play activities are provided depends entirely on the teachers' characteristics. Unsurprisingly, the analysis of the data revealed that the teacher's character, competence and attitude towards the job determine the kind of experiences provided for the children, including the availability and integration of play.

A teacher's interest in the children and engagement with the job determine the degree of enthusiasm expressed in interacting with the children and in creating enjoyable experiences for them. Of the five teachers interviewed and observed, two of them were noticed to be utterly disinterested in the job. During the interviews, these teachers confessed that if they had a choice, they would not be working with young children. On the other hand, the other three teachers had expressed their interest in children and teaching even before they attended teachers' colleges. One told me how she used to volunteer to teach from a very young age.

Additionally, teacher competence and creativity were found to be other determinants of integrating playful experiences into the classroom. A competent teacher is better able to create a variety of activities relevant to the classroom. Mary expressed this fact bluntly: "To say the truth it is upon the teacher to create and use play, it depends on the teacher's competence."

Teacher Kabula described how creativity is crucial in forming learning activities that will facilitate children's learning.

We were taught that a teacher has to be creative, so I may teach a subject ... like when I started teaching, it was just counting, until I finish the book it is just counting. So I started thinking if I leave them like this they might forget let me find something that will make them continue to count. So I started a show of fingers, there is a certain song, I taught them (she sings) I made it up and so I started singing to them and they started singing, the following day, when I asked them what did we do yesterday, some of them started (she sings) to sing you see,

so it helped them. That is why some things for teachers we are told that you don't have to be taught. You have to create yourself.

School administration.

As pre-primary classes are newly introduced into the primary schools, the administration and staff of the primary school have a key role to play in contributing to the smooth conduct of the class activities. Findings indicated that support from the administration through providing space, time and even assisting in supervision of some activities by other teachers, supported the provision of play. Teacher May declared that she had full support from her school's administration for her pre-primary class. "They sing so freely, they are not restricted in anyhow, and they are not segregated on anything, they are equally treated, because these young ones are welcomed here to learn, yes."

Two teachers commented on timetabling as a hindrance for children's full participation in play. Kabula described how she could not take the children out for recess before the whole school was dismissed in fear that pre-primary children might make noise and distract other classes. On the other hand, Rose expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of time allocated on the school timetable for pre-primary class play. In her opinion, the school activities on the timetable limited the time the young children may have to play. Teacher Rose remarked,

Our regulations limit children's play because the school timetable directs me to do what I plan to in the classroom until recess, during recess children are having porridge meal outside, after that they come into class so there is no time for a child to play, so after that according to the timetable they have to be in class so

they don't have any other time allocated for play, it's not on the timetable, if you look at our timetable, you cannot find periods allocated for outdoor games.

According to Teacher Rose, the time that children would be expected to be playing is taken up by their recess meal. She cannot keep the children outside as the timetable requires her to have them back to class when the recess ends.

Demands of the curriculum.

Concern about time pressures were found also to be due to the demands of the curriculum. With a demanding amount of subject content to teach at this level of school, the teachers explained how they needed to focus on completing the syllabus, which left them with no time for children's play. Teacher Mary addressed this issue.

Most of the time we are constrained by time, because of the large number of subjects. You cannot believe, at pre-primary there are seven subjects. So time to do all that is very limited. So what the teacher focuses on, is to complete the syllabus so time to integrate play, to say the truth, it is hard/challenging, even if it is available then it would be very little amount, they don't get the sufficient amount.

These teachers communicated how the children are burdened with writing, which is how most of the class time is spent. In the opinion of Teacher Kabula, one writing lesson would be enough for one day.

Children are supposed to have only one subject lesson, and play the other time ... for the child, after the first subject lesson, even if you start teaching the other subject, they cannot concentrate. For example look at this one, after writing on

only one subject lesson, when she writes on one subject, even if you force her to write the other one, she will not.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings revealed by the analysis of data, organized in four main categories, according to the research questions. While reported data were drawn primarily from interviews, information from observations, videos, and reviewed documents were also used to discover the beliefs and related practices of the educators with regard to the role of play in early years education settings. As is the tradition in qualitative research, the participants' own voices were used extensively to accurately represent the participants' views.

Findings were presented in two main sections; first, a description of the context of the study and the second, the beliefs of teachers. The beliefs of teachers were presented as sub-categories under each of four main categories namely: conception of play, the role of play, play provision and integration into pre-primary education, and factors influencing provision of play in school. Within the discussion of each category I presented findings that emanated from participants' interview responses.

For the first category, conception of play, the highest number of responses indicated that play involved physical actions. Play was also described as involving pleasure, pretence, freedom and voluntariness. While all participants described play as involving physical actions in different ways, there was variation on the other aspects, as shown in the summary tables.

Three main findings relate to the second category, the role of play. The majority of participants' responses alluded to play as generating a love for school and learning as

well as the opportunity for skills development. That a playful context fosters children's learning was noted, but given less emphasis.

The third category encompassed somewhat contradictory responses. While some participants indicated that play can be a vehicle for academic learning, others viewed it as peripheral to academic work. The findings also revealed that play is a vehicle for social and communication skills, but this aspect was pointed out by only three participants. Consideration of the local culture in play provision was identified only from the participants' childhood experiences and not from their practices.

The fourth category included seven factors influencing the provision for play in school/classroom settings: size and profile of the class; availability of resources; demands of school administration; parental expectations; teacher qualities; demands of the curriculum; and donor/community support. As noted above, the number of responses reflective of each of the factors varied.

In Chapter 5 I present an interpretive account of the findings presented above. I focus on issues and questions raised by the analysis of the data with the aim of bringing meaning to the findings by highlighting particular aspects I found worthy of further attention. I then present the implications of the findings, the contribution of the study, its limitations and finally the recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 5

Interpretation of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

My research explored the practices and beliefs of selected early childhood educators with regard to children's play. I carried out the study in recognition of the key role that educators can have in supporting play in school contexts, with its potential for contributing to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development of young children.

In this chapter I offer a cautiously couched interpretive account of the findings presented in Chapter 4. My analysis focuses on the main categories identified and on issues and questions raised by the data that informed and addressed the research questions. In the analysis, I looked for patterns in light of the reviewed literature and theory that link to the practices and beliefs recorded. The discussion is intended mainly to bring meaning to the findings as well as to reveal underpinning assumptions, and highlight conditions that have likely given rise to the aspect of the play or pedagogical construct identified. Finally, in the discussion I aim to shed some light on the overall story revealed by the data about the topic. While most of the issues revealed in the findings are not unexpected and have been previously identified in the literature from the Western context, the aim is not to be evaluative or judgmental in looking at how these findings align with that literature, but rather to examine the contextual influences of the particular beliefs and practices of the educators under study. Therefore, the content of the discussion portrays the situation/reality in a particular context, in order to acknowledge the diversity of value structures and views of the people (Canella, 1997). As Canella argues, acknowledgement of multiple contextual realities is vital in guiding early

childhood education practice. As stated previously, there has been a tendency to regard practices common in Western settings as standard and hence they have been ‘exported’ and introduced to dramatically differing contexts. The understanding of particular knowledges minimizes the risk of imposing practices derived from outside the context, where they are not necessarily applicable (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011), and may prove counter-productive.

In the following sections, I present a discussion of key issues from the findings under the three planes of the sociocultural lens. I then re-examine my (researcher’s) assumptions, pointing out possible biases affecting the interpretation of findings. Subsequently, I describe the contribution of the research and suggest implications. Implications of the findings are aimed at expanding understanding of how play is perceived and integrated in early childhood education settings in the particular context under study. Finally, I identify the limitations of the study and present recommendations for future/further research.

Viewing the Findings From a Sociocultural Lens

As described in Chapter 2, a sociocultural approach was adopted as the primary theoretical lens used in interpreting the findings of the study. Three planes, the personal plane, the interpersonal plane and the community/institutional plane (Fleer, 2002), are used to frame the discussion of the beliefs of the teachers in relation to the particular context. I also take into consideration literature from both the Western and non-Western (African) contexts. I focus on the conceptualization of play, perceived developmental benefits of play for children, as well as provision of play opportunities or playful activities in early years of school settings.

Personal plane.

To review, the personal plane focuses on the elements within the individual that seem to influence human activity and/or views. In this section I analyze how some aspects within the teachers, their experiences and attributes, may have impacted their beliefs and practices with regard to play.

The findings revealed how play in the school contexts that were the foci of the research was perceived mainly as mere physical activities with no necessarily direct cognitive benefits. The importance of play was largely linked to the assumption that children enjoy the play activities, hence it is fair and right for teachers to provide opportunities for such activities. This conceptualization of play differs from the one commonly found in the literature, which accords considerable attention to pretend/dramatic/make-believe play, specifically because of its language use which has led to it being regarded as a uniquely human form of play (Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the other elements of play as highlighted in my working definition of play provided in Chapter 2 (meaningful, pleasurable, voluntary, rule-governed, and episodic) were found to minimally feature in the classrooms observed. Teachers' practices and the views of play indicated that the kinds of activities regarded as play in the classroom were mainly teacher-directed. These activities are regarded as too structured and fall on the work/non-play end of the continuum, on Wood's (2013) model of pedagogical approaches. Due to a distinction made by the teachers between play and academic activities, the advocated balance between the two ends of the continuum could be hardly observed. However, I present this analysis to show how the conceptualization can be viewed in relation to the model provided by Wood. I would like to emphasize that I do not regard this difference

to necessarily be a shortfall of the pre-primary teachers' practices observed, but to certainly reflect the context in which they teach.

While in the current study imagination in play was minimally emphasized, imaginative or pretend play has received a great deal of attention in the literature, mainly from Western countries because of the influence of classic ECE theorists, as well as Piaget and Vygotsky. Both of these two influential theorists regarded symbolic/imaginary play as a pure form of play with significant implications for learning and development of the child (Goncu & Gaskins, 2011). In addition, the perspectives of teachers with regard to play as revealed in the findings can be compared to those identified by Bennet and colleagues (1997). I highlight here some linkages between the findings and aspects of the model. Of the four functions outlined in their model (see Chapter 2), findings from the current study indicate teachers regard play as mainly featuring a recreational function, that is "time out from formal work". This view was clearly reflected in the teachers' practices, where children's opportunities for play in the schools was observed mainly during recess. Furthermore, the pragmatic function seems to be relevant to the findings in this study. With the responsibility teachers have to deal with large classes and mark the exercise books of so many pupils, it is very likely that outdoor free play is being used to keep the children occupied.

Generally, the nature of classroom play observed in the current study was mostly 'structured play' as pointed out on the model. As explained earlier, from the teachers' views and my observation, the classroom conditions likely necessitated that most of the time, the teacher initiated and controlled the classroom activities. As a result, there was no room for child-initiated activities. In addition, findings of this study reveal the

teachers' view that play cannot be combined with 'serious formal work', a view that is also noted on the model in the statement that "play is 'distinct' from formal work". These links indicate some similarities between the findings of the studies conducted in different contexts at different times. Although this study was not aimed at making comparisons, I found it relevant to point these links out.

Analysis of the data revealed how the teachers' own background and childhood experiences influenced their beliefs about play. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the common local language, Swahili, which is also the medium of instruction for primary schools, there is limited vocabulary that would differentiate amongst the variety of activities identified as forms of play in English. The single Swahili term used for 'play' encompasses a whole array of activities performed for pleasure, including playing with toys, engaging in various outdoor games, drumming and dancing, and participating in physical games, sports, and action songs. From the teachers' viewpoint, these activities are performed by children mainly for fun and they tend to encourage physical development. The criteria they employed to identify a play activity seemed to be the physical nature of the activity and the joy experienced during the activity. However, the varied activities they described as play were not regarded as directly beneficial in children's learning.

The limited view of play as physical activities to entertain the child likely curtails the possibility of seeing the range of potential learning benefits of play as highlighted in the literature (Bellin & Singer, 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2009; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Although the reviewed Western literature indicated imagination is the core aspect of play in the classroom

context (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Smith, 2009), in the current study this aspect came up only after probing during the interviews. I believe imagination in play (in the classroom) did not receive the emphasis that would be expected in a Western context because of the perception that the teacher is the authority and the only one possessing knowledge of the content in the classroom. Due to didactic methods used children are expected to be submissive during instruction, and follow the rules made by the teacher. According to Bodrova and Leong (2007), the three main components of pretend play from Vygotsky's perspective are creation of imaginary situations by children, taking on and acting out roles, and following set rules with children as the main players. It is through these features that the benefits of play in children's education settings are identified and realized as highlighted in Chapter 2.

In the current study, pretence in play was only minimally acknowledged. In the classroom context, pretence was described as used in the demonstration and practice of skills through brief role-plays and action songs. In this kind of play the teacher tends to lead the activities and children are expected to follow the instructions given. Elements of pretence in play were found more in non-school/classroom contexts. In the dramatic play observed and described by the teachers during the interviews, the children created a situation close to real life that had a moral and values for them to learn. These dramatic plays can be linked to traditional dramas which are aimed at imparting cultural skills to the young ones to prepare them to be responsible members of the community (Amayo, 1984; Nyota & Mapara, 2008). As presented by Amayo (1984), African Indigenous education was aimed at imparting knowledge, values and skills from one generation to another. Nyota and Mapara (2008) described how games and play songs were used to

educate the young generation in a traditional Shona community in Zimbabwe. All participants in the current study grew up in African villages with similar traditional ways of life and hence their childhood experiences are likely to have influenced their beliefs about play.

Although analysis of the data showed the teachers generally thought that play could not be mixed with actual teaching, they also expressed the wish to incorporate play activities into teaching to facilitate the children's learning. However, the teachers seemed to lack confidence and competence in the use of play in the classroom, likely due to limited knowledge of the teaching techniques related to play. The teachers seemed to have limited knowledge of the ways to interweave play and content to provide a valuable medium for children's learning. Because of the focus on didactic methods of teaching, findings from the current study suggest that the only cognitive benefit of children's play recognized by the teachers is memory or enhanced retention. However, the kind of play activities referred to by the teachers, as argued by DeVries (2002), are academic exercises that are made superficially attractive but may not be appealing to children. The intention of the activities (like songs featuring letters and numbers, and letter and number recognition games) is to drill the children on the topics taught so they can memorize them, and as DeVries suggests, these activities are used mostly by teachers in attempt to introduce the element of play to make the task more palatable.

While the literature reveals the many ways that play is related to children's learning and development (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009), classroom play activities observed and described in the current study were believed to be beneficial in facilitating the memorization and recall of some concepts. These findings align with Lowden's (2000)

contention that African traditional games promote memory as part of cognitive development. Although this focus seems narrow with respect to the potential benefits of play, this aspect deserves further examination in order for the teachers to fully exploit the use of play activities to enhance children's memory of what they have been taught. Furthermore, the teachers seemed unaware of how play can contribute to the development of language and literacy among children, which are the key aspects focused upon in early years education (Christie & Roskos, 2013). It might be of interest to discover if the teachers are aware of, or have been exposed to studies addressing the potential impact of play on language and literacy development. Have they had an opportunity to reflect on the topic? It is likely that the teachers' participation in the study may have initiated reflection on the concept of play, and an expanded interest in its broader developmental outcomes.

The pressure placed on imparting academic content at an early level as preparation for higher classes seemed to be another reason for the teachers' beliefs and practices. Miller and Amon (2009) and Nicolopoulou (2010) argued that the focus on teaching academic skills was found to be the reason for squeezing play out of preschools and Kindergarten even in Western countries.

In addition, teachers' personal attributes impacted the way they provide learning experiences for children. Based on my observations, some of the teachers showed playfulness (enthusiasm and heightened activeness in interacting with children) in their teaching. This playfulness created a friendly learning environment and hence positive response to school. Rose and Maggy, two teachers who completed the government teacher education program (pre-service and in-service respectively), were the ones who

seemed least playful. Is their lack of playfulness linked to their personal attributes? Or is their program of study part of the reason? It is of interest to note the difference in age between these two teachers; while Teacher Maggy was close to retiring age, Teacher Rose was approximately 20 years younger. Both Maggy and Rose showed less interest in the job than did the other teachers participating in this study. However, drawing any conclusions, correlational or otherwise, about the reasons for these two teachers' teaching demeanour is unwarranted due to, amongst other things, the small sample size. However, investigation of factors contributing to the propensity towards teacher playfulness warrants further follow up, due to the very positive impact it can have on the learning environment created. As described by Moyles (2010), teacher's adoption of a playful attitude can be beneficial in enhancing children's learning when carefully linked with prescribed curriculum procedures.

Thus, the consideration of the personal plane, which is comprised of the teachers' background and experiences, their personal attributes and traits, the conceptualization of play in the local language, and their teacher education experiences, revealed possible influences on the teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to the role of play in education. In the following section, I continue the analysis with a focus on the interpersonal plane.

Interpersonal plane.

As described in Chapter 2, the interpersonal plane refers to the relations that a participant has to other people and their influence on his/her actions. In this section, I analyze some aspects, in the teachers' interrelations identified as likely to have an influence on the teachers' perspectives with regard to play.

Class size and teachers supporting each other.

The large number of children in the classes understandably seemed to limit the opportunities for personalized interactions between teachers and students and among students themselves. The participating teachers were observed to work in very difficult conditions where the teacher child ratio was at an average of 1:60. The recommended teacher child ratio however, is 1:15 in a Kindergarten class of not more than 30 children (Earlychildhood.org, 2016).

The observed number of children seemed to be a burden to the teachers and a hindrance not only in providing play opportunities for the children, but also in attaining the required learning outcomes. In one of the schools I visited, New Star School, where the pre-primary class had the largest number of children (112 children were present on one of the observations), two teachers (equally qualified) were found to co-teach the class. I learned from these teachers that a shortage of rooms was the reason for this combined class and so they had twice the average number of children than the other classes observed. Counterintuitively though, despite the large number of children, these two teachers working together were able to create a very positive atmosphere and environment.

The co-teaching in this class was observed to have positive effects likely because of the peer support these teachers provided for each other. These teachers were able to divide responsibilities: while one was leading the class in an activity/lesson, the other would be helping those who needed additional support in participating in the activity. Thus, the responsibility of the class size seemed to be felt less because of the support the teachers gave each other. Another reason for such successful co-teaching is possibly peer

inspiration. Due to the nature of human beings, it is likely that a teacher would give her best while teaching in the presence of another teacher. Another key issue worth mentioning is that these two teachers clearly demonstrated love and respect for each other, which is crucial for effective co-teaching. I observed a friendly relationship between them even after classes. All these attributes led to the smooth running of the class cooperatively.

Co-teaching has been found to be beneficial in children learning at various levels. It is commonly used as an approach to support students with disabilities included in 'mainstream' classrooms (Friend & Reising, 1993; Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011; Walsh, 2012). However, co-teaching is not a common practice in Tanzania. Although some challenges associated with co-teaching have been observed, as pointed out by Gurgur and Uzuner (2011), Walsh (2012) highlighted students' improvement in reading and mathematics assessment as a result of co-teaching. Friend and Reising (1993) described co-teaching as having its roots in secondary education, and claimed it later became useful in elementary classes. It has additionally been described as beneficial for early years classes by providing a lower student-teacher ratio and increasing one-on-one time per child (Cecchini, 2007).

Head teachers support for play.

Head teachers as supervisors of the schools claimed awareness of what happens in the pre-primary classes but did not seem to recognize class size as a hindrance to play provision. Although class size was regarded by teachers to be a major limiting factor for provision of play and using play activities in classroom, none of the head teachers mentioned this fact. The head teachers stated they occasionally visited/spent time in the

pre-primary classes observing the teaching learning activities. However, they did not remark the challenges faced by the teachers. It is questionable whether the head teachers are fully aware of the other classroom challenges pointed out by the teachers. It would be of interest to find out if the head teachers have any power to modify the class composition in terms of the age range of children within it. This element would have been a question I could have raised in a follow up interview of the head teachers and so I find it worth noting as something to consider for future studies similar to mine.

Demands of the parents.

Parents have a major influence on the education of their young children. Involvement of the parents in the education of their children is one of the key issues commonly noted in the literature with respect to the provision of early childhood education (Hickman, 2014). However, the nature and value of involvement is likely to vary in different contexts. In Tanzania, parents' involvement was found to be mainly through inspecting children's exercise books and sometimes, helping their children with homework (Centre for Economic Prosperity, 2012). They also have an opportunity to give their views on the curriculum when nationwide curriculum reviews are conducted. While it would be of interest to analyze the views given by parents during curriculum reviews, documents from the institution responsible for curriculum development would need to be secured, and such action was not within the scope of my study.

The parents' focus on written work as evidence for learning was also revealed in the findings and it reflects the society's focus on syllabus completion and test performance as evidence of children's learning. Although data analysis revealed that the teachers generally value play as beneficial for children's learning, they expressed concern

about parental expectations and demonstrated that they were influenced by the demand for evidence of learning through written work. Due to pressure from parents, these teachers were hesitant to use playful methods, which would not involve children writing in their books. Although the parents' perceptions reflect the community's belief in the didactic approach to teaching which puts emphasis on performance as the goal for the children's education, this observation does not imply that all parents have similar perceptions with regard to teaching and children's learning. In an investigation of parents' beliefs on ways to teach basic skills to young children in the USA, level of education was found to make a difference in the beliefs of the parents (Stipek, Milburn, Clements, & Daniels, 1992). According to Stipek and colleagues, parents who have relatively lower education were found to more strongly support didactic methods than those parents with higher education. It is not my intention to suggest that the parents referred to in the current study have lower education, but rather, I believe the findings by Stipek et al. reveal variation in parents' perception in relation to level of education. It would be useful to learn from corresponding studies sampling the views of African or Tanzanian parents but I was not able to find any such research. Clearly additional studies in many related areas are needed. Nevertheless, with formal early childhood education being a relatively new area in Tanzania, it is likely that parents need to be sensitized about children's early learning and how to maximize benefits from the provision of appropriate pre-primary education.

The presence of private schools may be another issue influencing the teachers. I believe the teachers in the public schools feel challenged to meet the demands of the parents for two reasons. First, parents might decide to move their children to private

schools (for those who can afford the costs) if they are not satisfied. While it could be argued this action would reduce the high numbers of children they teach, and therefore could be seen as a benefit, it would also be understood to reflect negatively on the quality of their teaching. Secondly, teachers may feel challenged to prove they also can provide for the children what is regarded to be of a high standard. I want to emphasize that these are my speculations and more research needs to be conducted concerning the role of play in the provision of education in private schools.

Overall, it seemed that class size and parents' demands have a major influence on the teachers' choice of teaching and learning activities. Although these teachers demonstrated limited competence in providing a variety of playful activities in the classroom, the factors described above limit possibility for using the minimal knowledge and capabilities they have.

Community institutional plane.

To review, the community institutional plane focuses on the beliefs and culture of the school and the society, and considers how these impact the beliefs and actions of participants. In this section I examine how teachers' perspectives on play are informed or shaped by the curriculum as the blueprint for what happens in the school, the school environment, and the society in general.

A focus on curriculum.

While the findings reflected the importance of play for children, its place in school was debatable because school is viewed as a formal institution for content learning. Findings revealed that the teachers valued the contribution of play in teaching and regarded providing time for free play as important for children's well-being. The

teachers largely separated play from actual academic work. Hence, in the school context, emphasis was on academic work, focusing on “the acquisition of correct subject matter knowledge,” and learning was understood to result from “the direct transmission of information coming from outside the individual to the inside through the senses” (DeVries, 2002, pp. 14-15). DeVries regards this traditional, behaviourist view of learning, which is embedded in the history of elementary education, as leaving very little room for play. In her analysis of the integration of play in the early education curriculum in the US, she distinguished a category of classrooms with this emphasis on academics, from those that focused on promoting children’s development through play and social interaction. These latter types of classrooms have their roots in the early history of early education.

Pre-primary education in the Tanzanian educational system seems to be founded on the behaviourist view of education. As the pre-primary level of education was formalized when the primary and higher levels were already in place, it is likely that the foundation of pre-primary followed the trend of placing the emphasis foremost on academics. In the syllabus the main aim for pre-primary education is stated as “to provide children with comprehension and develop elementary skills for primary school subjects” (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2005, p. iii). With the main focus on school subjects, there seems to be very little or no emphasis at all on the development of other aspects of the child, which could largely be promoted by play. Furthermore, there is pressure for ensuring earlier acquisition of subject contents prescribed in the syllabus, which heightens pressure on the teachers to use direct/didactic teaching methods, leaving no room for the integration of play into teaching. As argued by Anning (2015), the focus

on a prescribed curriculum and the formality of schools as institutions would restrict provision for play in elementary levels of school. Play, therefore, is restricted to an instrumental role in activating/motivating the attention of children to teachers' instructions.

The society and school environment.

Both the society's perception and the actual school environment are likely to be influencing factors for the value accorded to play. The teachers belong to the community where these children live and in most cases children's play is regarded as non-important. The school system provides limited room for play and when provided it is controlled by an adult to avoid misbehaviour. As revealed by the findings, in a school setting, when play is not supervised it is believed to lead to children's aggressive behaviour. Due to the large number of children, the teachers showed concern about losing control and worried that some children might become violent when playing, hence leading to aggression. This aggressive behaviour during play might however be caused by the children's limited opportunity to play due to the unfavourable play environment. Additionally, the teaching and learning environment provided minimal room for the development of social skills expected to be promoted by play. The classroom environment restricted children's opportunities to experience play that would enable them to acquire social and cognitive capabilities including "social competence and empathy, language and communication, self-regulation, and acquisition of knowledge" (Hickman, 2014, p. 63). These skills are beneficial in facilitating children's learning in the current level and in later years (Lillemyr, 2013).

Similar elements were noted by Shavega, Brugman and Van Tuijl (2014) who found that teachers considered play to lead to aggression. From their findings, Shavega and colleagues argued that even though the teachers were aware of some developmental benefits of play, mainly enhancing of social skills, they did not believe that it should be promoted in the classroom. In my opinion, rather than being criticized for giving play less attention, these teachers should be commended for navigating the difficult teaching environment they experience, and for recognizing the constraints that their circumstances necessitate. I concur with the opinion of Shavega et al. that the large number of children and limited space and facilities restrict the use of play activities in the class. However, according to the teachers in my study, play remains instrumental as a motivation for children's participation into lessons.

Singing as play.

The prevalence given to singing as the main means for integrating play into the classrooms in this study is likely attributed to the influence of the teachers' childhood experiences. In the teachers' descriptions of their childhood play, they pointed out singing as the activity they enjoyed participating in. Singing is one of the 'verbal arts' described as play activity in traditional African society both by and for children (Finnegan, 2014). The experiences of play through listening to songs as early as infancy stages, as described by Finnegan, would have been common to the educators participating in this study, and likely one reason for the prevalence given to singing in the data.

The singing I observed mainly accompanied actions and created positive responses to school. The children seemed to experience joy in this activity and so, according to the teachers, were motivated to attend school and learn despite the

situational challenges they experience. While opportunities for child/child and teacher/child interactions were constrained by the large class sizes, singing seemed the most feasible way to engage all of the children in class and the teachers seemed to make good use of it. In my opinion, the teachers should be commended for successfully exploiting what seemed to work well in their challenging situation.

In addition to the actions, the local songs are believed to be providing beneficial play experiences because of their meaningfulness to children. With singing being a cultural activity as described above, the local community/environment would be the source for teachers to draw from, to realize the potential benefits of the activity. As expressed by teachers, the songs were enjoyable because they were in the local language and/or they spoke about familiar issues. However, the use of songs seems to be diminishing as it was described more in terms of the teachers' own childhood experiences than with respect to their experiences as teachers. It is very likely that societal cultural changes due to urbanization and intermarriages as well as colonial legacy, have led to diminishing tribal languages and the promoting of colonial languages, in the case of Tanzania English language. The diminishing attention to local languages was also noted in Zambia. There are efforts to revitalise the Zambian local languages as described by Kalinde and Vermeulen (2016) where singing and music in the mother tongue languages featuring play as part of the activities were found to have some educational benefits.

Using the local context.

The local environment is another avenue where teachers can obtain teaching resources. The participating teachers described the challenge of scarcity of play materials in relation to the number of students. However, it was not evident in the data how these

teachers have relevantly exploited the local environment. It is probable that the teachers are influenced by the community held preference for manufactured play items rather than the locally made ones. It is also likely they have limited knowledge and skills on how to effectively make use of the local context as this topic did not appear to be given much attention in their teacher education programs. The data featured references to local songs and locally made play items, which are believed to be providing beneficial play experiences because of their meaningfulness to children. However, these local songs and play items were described more in terms of the teachers' own childhood experiences than with respect to their experiences as teachers as described above.

Hickman (2014) argued that in South Africa, the formality of policies and practices has led to a disregard of the local play activities that are of interest to children. In Tanzania, Mutahabwa (2009) found that the focus of policy documents is primarily on knowledge and skills while no attention is given to the local cultural norms and values. This observation highlights the need to identify the relevant local ways and values and the possible modalities that would enable their incorporation into children's play activities. Additionally, teachers need to be encouraged to make use of the rich repertoire of resources and materials in the African environment, and to adapt them to social, intellectual, emotional, and moral contexts, so that through them, the children can benefit from play experiences that incorporate them (Awopegba et al., 2013). The New Zealand ECE curriculum (Te Whariki) is a model worth considering, as it offers a compelling demonstration of how policy and practice reflect the 'Maori' local values. In the curriculum the links between home and the local environment in general, and school, are emphasized and valued (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 18). Content in the curriculum

emphasizes open-ended exploration and opportunities for play, and conveys active respect for the community and cultural values and environment in which the child is learning and growing.

Thus, when considering the community institutional plane, teachers' views on the role of play have been described to be influenced by the structure of the curriculum, as well as the perception of play both within the school environment and the society in general.

Reflection on my Assumptions

In light of the findings of this study, I believe it useful to reflect on my assumptions which I stated in Chapter 1. The assumptions were based on my background and experiences, myself being a native of the community where the study was conducted and hence familiar with the context. My main assumption was that play is not taken seriously as it is a children's activity. Play activities, according to my assumptions, were just for amusement and did not have any role at all in promoting development and education of the children. This assumption partly held true as revealed in the findings. Although all participants acknowledged play as important for children, no consideration for play provision in the public education system was evident. Teachers legitimately pointed to the lack of adequate play facilities and materials in the schools with large numbers of young children admitted into pre-primary classes. The written curriculum demonstrates little, if any, focus on play in the recommended activities for children. Furthermore, play receives next to no attention in the education of the pre-primary teachers. However, different from my assumptions, the teachers described the 'indirect' role of play in enhancing education. Although they largely expressed the impossibility of

integrating play into teaching, they recognized that play was instrumental in motivating and attracting the attention of the children to their lessons within a difficult learning environment. Consequently, they believe play has a crucial role in encouraging children's attendance and hence creating positive response to school. I had not expected this outcome.

Contributions of the Research, Implications, and Recommendations

The findings of the study have extended empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical knowledge. In the following sub-sections I discuss the knowledge gained, its implications, and recommendations for practice and for future research.

Empirical knowledge contribution.

This research, to my knowledge, is the first study conducted to explore the beliefs of pre-primary educators in Tanzania about play. My study provides information about how the educators responsible for the lowest level of the Tanzanian school system view play and its role in education. The findings of the study shed light on the place of this important element of childhood (play) in the pre-primary school context specifically in Tanzania. The research provides information about how a select group of educators in Tanzania understand play and their belief about the potential benefits of play for the young children. Further, the findings provide insights into how these educators view the possibilities and constraints of integrating play in teaching. As revealed in the findings, the beliefs of these teachers are founded in their experiences at different stages of their lives.

Methodological advantage of the use of interviews and videos.

The methodology used in the study was instrumental in securing a wealth of data. The use of the three-phase-interview as well as video for recall, helped in uncovering the educators' beliefs about play, revealing the key issues in response to the research questions. The three stages of the interview process enabled coverage of a wide set of questions and provided the teachers with time to build trust, and time to express their opinions. I believe the data gathered would not have been as rich nor as informative had only a single interview been conducted with the teachers. With the head-teachers, I used a single interview mainly because of the pressures on their time due to administrative responsibilities. Although the single interview proved informative and enabled me to capture the information I required, on reflection, an additional follow-up interview would have permitted me to gain further insights about the Head Teachers' awareness of the issues identified by the teachers, and their capacity to address those issues. I recommend incorporating such follow-up interviews in future studies.

The use of video for recall was another approach to data collection. Similar to this approach is the 'photovoice' strategy used with Tanzanian children during a study that explored children's views on their experiences with play (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009). It is likely that the use of video provides an expansion of the photovoice strategy from the use of still photos to the use of videos for recall and reflection, and researchers can draw from the two approaches and adopt/adapt them in future studies. The opportunity to try out the viability of the interview with video method in the context of this study proved it to be a fruitful combination. The use of video made it possible to have more informative data as the teachers had an opportunity to reflect on their own

practices. I believe the videos provided the teachers with opportunities to give more explanation and examples to elaborate what they had expressed in responding to other questions. The videos also facilitated the recall of the practices and made it easy for each teacher to talk about their pedagogy when viewing the videos. Furthermore, reflections on the videos during the interview process appeared to not only enhance the reflective skills of the teachers but also to enrich them with new understanding on how to improve their practices for better outcomes.

I believe conducting the interviews in Swahili, the local language, clearly removed a barrier that an ‘outside researcher’ using English would have had to confront as a limitation. As a native speaker of the language, I could easily relate with the participants, the advantage that would not be enjoyed by someone using an interpreter. However, together with some experience I had in translation, I found the process of transcription from Swahili to English more challenging than anticipated. The challenge was mainly because the two activities (transcription and translation) were being performed at the same time. Although it was more intellectually demanding to do it this way, it shortened the time required and my sense is that it rendered a more accurate account. Additionally, although in my situation I was simultaneously an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ due to spending four years outside the country for academic study before returning to gather data, I recognize that as an ‘insider’ I risked not always being alert to things that an outsider might notice.

Theoretical contribution.

A sociocultural perspective guided the study in exploring the beliefs of educators with a focus on a particular cultural context. I adopted the three planes of the

sociocultural theory (Fleer, 2002) to frame the interpretation of the findings in establishing the influences that set the foundation for the content of the educators' beliefs. I found the theory to be helpful as it enabled me to interpret the underlying meaning of the views given by participants. As I interpreted the data, the theory guided my focus from being judgmental about what was revealed in the findings, to focusing on contextual influences that led to the beliefs and practices. A judgmental perspective, inadvertently perpetuating the colonial bias, would lead to devaluing the perspectives of the participants through comparison with findings from other studies conducted in different contexts. Analysis of the data through the personal plane, the interpersonal plane, and the community plane increased the likelihood that I captured the influencing aspects within each participant, as well as those arising from his/her relation to other people as well as the surrounding community.

The study's findings contribute to addressing the absence of research information on play and its potential role in education from countries in the majority world, which has led to a biased or non-representative research database and professional discourse. The study contributes in acknowledging the diverse views and knowledges from multiple contexts (Canella, 1997). The research adds to the existing literature by providing information from sociocultural contexts that are scarcely represented in the discourse on ECE. The understanding gained from contextual perspectives with regard to the role of play as revealed in my study highlights factors that need to be given serious consideration in redesigning curriculum for pre-primary and teacher education. This provision of understanding a particular sociocultural context is an opportunity to reflect on challenges and possible models that can work best in Tanzania considering the contextual situation.

Practical implications.

The findings reveal how perceptions of play vary depending on the context. Recognizing the different ways play is viewed and the differences in the perceived benefits accorded to play to children's education, I recommend further exploration of the kinds of play activities deemed relevant to particular settings.

The narrow conception of play as revealed in the findings limits the possibility for the teachers to see its potential benefits and its potential place in the classroom. If the teachers better understood this relationship then they would be in a better position to argue for the place of play in the classroom. Various initiatives like professional development workshops, and explicit discussions in the text and materials used in teacher training would help to bring out the relation between play and its benefits for teachers to realize the possibility for use in their classrooms. I am not suggesting that teachers be directly instructed what to do, but rather that they develop their knowledge base and be guided so that through reflection, they may generate relevant activities that the children will find enjoyable. It is crucial, though, that such workshops and educational materials take into account the challenging conditions in which these teachers work, so that the advocated strategies and activities are practical and can be meaningfully incorporated into their practices. The interviewed teachers expressed interest in engaging in workshops on play as a teaching strategy as a follow-up to their participation in the research. As larger scale professional development for teachers would demand more resources, I recommend small-scale in-school or inter-school teacher meetings that encourage reflection on their teaching experiences with the aim of enhancing the teachers' competence through sharing of ideas.

Singing, one of the main aspects that came up from the teachers' description of play, can be fully exploited to provide learning and developmental benefits to pre-primary children. A playful approach to literacy instruction can be employed using songs in exposing the children to the core content of the language and literacy education. Play songs can contribute to the development of the language and literacy components including oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness (Vukelich & Christie, 2009). Although according to the teachers the songs were mostly used to activate and motivate the children, and minimally for literacy teaching, these songs can be carefully analyzed to identify how they can be of more benefit for the learning and development of the children. Through professional development, these teachers can be guided in identifying and creating songs that tap into what is familiar and appealing to the children, and in exploring many different ways of benefiting from them.

While pretend play was given very little emphasis by the teachers as revealed in the findings, some did describe having the children act out short scenarios to model particular behaviours. Even though rudimentary, this use of pretense could be built upon by suggesting that additional opportunities for facilitating learning through incorporating pretend play should be encouraged. Pretense which is founded on imaginary thinking, leads to development of abstract thought which consequently positively impact the development of literacy (Bellin & Singer, 2006; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2009). The abstract thinking acquired in pretend play helps in enhancing recognition of letters and numbers as preparation for reading and writing. These opportunities could include providing professional development about ways to usefully

include role plays in their teaching, for example, in having the children act out their interpretations of scenes and events from stories read or told to them, or imagining how they would respond to a described situation. These activities could be done as a whole class, with each child participating individually ‘in their own space,’ even with the large numbers of children in the classroom.

Furthermore, I want to stress on the importance of teacher development programs both in teacher preparation and professional development sessions in addressing the role of play in teaching and learning. I also recommend that attention should be given to value of playfulness/playful attitude on the part of the teacher. A playful attitude, which can be demonstrated by the teacher and/or created for the children to experience playfulness, is encouraged by several scholars as educationally beneficial (Howard, 2010; Howard & McKinnes, 2012; Hutt, 1979; Wood, 2013). This playful attitude warrants addressing in teachers’ workshops as it can make an enormous difference to the class atmosphere leading to better learning outcomes.

Additionally, Co-operative teaching may help to alleviate the problem of large class size. Different modes of implementation of co-teaching can be explored and a contextually relevant modality could potentially be a useful initiative for the current situation in Tanzania. Ideally, hiring two teachers instead of one per class would be an effective way of reducing the teachers’ workload and creating a better environment for children’s learning. However, the initiative will require additional expense to the government in hiring more teachers. In the class described above, no additional expenses were available because the two teachers had two classes in one, relatively larger room. In view of the scarcity of resources allocated which limit hiring of more teachers, where

large classroom space is available, the modality observed in the current study could be adopted and enhanced for even better outcomes.

Another important aspect is the involvement of teachers in designing curriculum for the pre-primary children. Although it is quite likely that a few teacher representatives were on the design team, I still recommend teachers be given a more meaningful role. I have learned from my study that most of these teachers are just implementers of what is prescribed by policy makers, some of whom appear to have a very limited idea of the actual situation experienced by the teachers. The main complaint of the teachers was the unrealistic academic load of the syllabus. I suggest there should be a mechanism to enable teachers to participate fully in designing the curriculum so that they can be aware of the contents, and have some voice in what is appropriate, practical, and desirable at the level they teach. I suggest that at a certain stage during the designing process, the curriculum draft be shared with a larger number of teacher representatives selected from various locations throughout the country for their inputs. This modality of involvement of the teachers will more likely ensure their concerns are taken into consideration. When the process is complete, a mechanism should be in place to orient the teachers to the new curriculum that involves all teachers, and they should be made aware that input from their representatives has been incorporated.

Additionally, head teachers should also be involved in curriculum designing because of their role as supervisors. They should be involved from the input stage to the orientation (described above) because of their roles in the schools. It is likely they might have useful inputs during the designing process. They also need to be well informed about it when the process is complete. For example, in their particular schools, they

appear to have some role in sanctioning a more flexible approach to the timetable, so that it is not so rigidly partitioned into 'subject lessons' and in ensuring appropriate time is allocated for free play breaks. I believe that meaningful involvement of the teachers and the head teachers in the curriculum designing process will contribute to enhanced provision of education through the best strategies for optimal results.

Parents of the children in school are another group that needs to be sensitized about the use of play activities. The findings revealed that parents' preferences largely influence teachers' beliefs on the use of play in the classroom. The teachers' perceptions that parents were of the opinion that written work is the only evidence of learning, restricted teachers from using other activities. Therefore, programs need to be developed that will sensitize parents, and develop their awareness of age-appropriate aspects in the education of young children. The best way would be to start with parents' representatives on the school boards. School parents' meetings would also be a good avenue to educate parents on matters related to the education of their children. The contribution of play to many aspects of child development could be one of the topics presented.

As stated previously, the main aim of the study was to extend understanding of play, as it is perceived by educators in the context studied. The aim was not to be judgmental leading to imposing recommendations of the 'right' way to understand or integrate play. Although the findings certainly revealed challenges hindering the integration of play into teaching, analysis of the data also revealed some aspects that seemed to work well in the midst of those challenges.

Limitations

The study featured some limiting conditions, and inadvertent biases, which I discuss in this section. The major limitation was that the research sample was small, and was restricted to public schools in an urban setting. These schools are located on the outskirts of the capital city of Tanzania and they differ in terms of provision of facilities from those found in the extreme rural areas of the country. Challenging as they are, the learning conditions in the sample schools are relatively better than in many other schools in the country. This variation is likely to affect transferability of the findings to other pre-primary schools in Tanzania. In consideration of this fact, I provided a detailed description of the background and context in which the sampled schools operate so that readers can determine for themselves the applicability of the findings reported to their own situations.

Furthermore, the composition of the sample was limited to only teachers and head teachers of the selected schools. Although the study was focused on children's activity, I sought to understand only the teachers' beliefs because of their role in the teaching and caring for the children. However, inclusion of the children in the interviews would enrich the data by portraying a broader picture. It is very likely that the children's beliefs differ from those of the teachers' and so information from children would enrich the findings by providing an opportunity for comparison and/or complementing of the information gained.

Another limitation concerns the language used in collecting data for the study. In gathering information for this study (through interviews), I used the Swahili language which is the language of instruction for pre-primary level. Swahili is also the national

language and a lingua franca in a country of about 125 native languages. The use of a language other than English made it necessary for me to translate all the transcripts into English. Although I did my best to retain the meaning in the translation, it is also possible that because of human error in some cases I failed to transfer the meaning intended by participants, which then may have affected the findings. However, to strengthen the credibility of the findings, I carefully proofread the transcripts while listening to the interview recordings to make sure that the complete meaning was transferred in the translations.

The current study's focus was confined to only pre-primary classes in the public formal education system in Tanzania. However, it is likely that inclusion of private schools would enrich the findings of the study. Although the majority of the parents in the country send their children to public schools, a significant number of children attend private schools. These private schools are relatively better equipped with facilities and resources compared to public schools. For the case of pre-primary level, it is assumed the teachers in the private schools have more relevant qualifications than their counterparts in public schools because the privately funded schools attract and competitively remunerate the better-qualified teachers. Therefore, it is probable that the educational background and experiences of these teachers will be different as well as their views with regard to play.

Furthermore, I acknowledge the bias that can be identified in the interview questions. My prior assumptions that observable play would likely exist in the pre-primary classrooms have led to some biased questions in the interview schedule. I recognise that, prior to formulating my research proposal, had I spent time observing in

pre-primary classrooms in the public schools in Tanzania I would have gained insight into the nature of the instruction and learning environments actually provided for the children, and have been better positioned to frame questions that would have more closely reflected the constraints and realities operating. However, during the interviews, in such instances where the interview questions seemed too ‘academic’ and not sufficiently ‘practitioner-friendly’, I did my best to rephrase the questions to suit the particular situation. I nevertheless acknowledge my potential bias in forming the interview questions. It is feasible that the value I see in play as beneficial to learning embedded that bias or assumptions within the questions used.

I would also admit that there might be a value bias in the descriptions I give about teachers in the context section in chapter four. I would like to acknowledge that the account of the teachers’ noticed behaviours and traits is based entirely on my observation of that particular situation and might be regarded differently by a different observer.

Lastly, it is likely that the gathering of multiple sources of data and their triangulation has led to an impression that the aim was to evaluate the educators’ beliefs and practices, and to check their word against their practice. The data have revealed some discrepancies between the beliefs and practices reported by the teachers and the data resulting from the observations. The reporting of these discrepancies could be seen to reveal an emergent bias that I had not previously realized. I would therefore like to emphasize that, while my aim was not to be judgemental but rather to understand as fully as possible within the constraints of this study what was actually happening in the classrooms, and how the teachers understood their practice, some inherent evaluation may have been present. Additionally, some of the interview questions that I used with the

video clips might have resulted in the teachers feeling evaluated, especially due to the difference in professional status between the teachers and the interviewer.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the above discussion, I offer the following recommendations to be considered for future studies.

In consideration of the complexity of the context studied, I recommend future research that will widen the scope to include schools from the rural parts of Tanzania, which are relatively different cultural settings. Inclusion of a variety of settings will increase the possibility for transferability of findings to a wider population both within the country as well as to other similar contexts. I also recommend a comparative study of the beliefs of teachers in public schools and private schools.

Future research should also include more ECE practitioners. Views of policy makers such as ministry officials, curriculum designers, school inspectors, and teacher educators would provide more insights on the topic of play. These people are influential in shaping the prescribed curriculum the teachers have to follow, as well as the preparatory education required for teacher certification.

The curriculum design process is another area that needs to be further explored. As curriculum is the basis for guiding teaching and learning, a thorough exploration of the pre-primary curriculum design process needs to occur in order to uncover the foundation for curriculum objectives and the theories employed in designing the content and pedagogical strategies. I think it is important to examine the relevance of the foundational theories to the cultural context in the country, as it will also provide insights into the place of play and the reasons for issues emerging with regard to the role of play

in education in this context. Additionally, traditional notions of play and its role in learning deserve further exploration. It would be of interest to explore the children's play/singing experiences at home and school to identify those that are contextually relevant that can be incorporated into teaching.

Future studies directly involving parents and their views and values with respect to the role of play and its place in learning and schooling could make an important contribution, particularly as the findings of this study reveal that teachers' perceptions of parental perspectives and educational priorities serve to constrain the nature of the instruction they feel able to provide.

Future research is also needed to explore the impact of the content and the emphases given to different aspects of recommended practice of teacher education programs for pre-primary teachers. As revealed from the findings, teachers who participated in this study experienced different teacher training programs. It would be worthwhile to explore the curriculum of the available programs to understand how play is addressed in each. It would also be useful to further explore if and how teachers' beliefs and practices are impacted by the kind of teacher education program they experience. The impact, if any, of their own experiences as pre-primary and primary students themselves on their teaching practices would also be worth consideration as conventional wisdom acknowledges the power of the models learners are exposed to, and suggests teachers tend to teach as they have been taught.

Lastly, I acknowledge that I unwittingly fell back on theoretical frameworks that derive from and are relevant to the Western context. Findings of the study have showed that the teachers' perspectives are not directly related to some of the categories presented

in the framework of analysis. The categories do not seem to adequately capture some of the aspects of playful behaviour found important to the teachers (like drama and songs). I would suggest further reconsideration of these aspects in future studies. I recommend the design and implementation of studies that employ a more open-ended approach to the conceptualization of play and that use broader interpretative frameworks which might be better able to tease out values and beliefs about play that derive from the local cultural context.

Summary

The purpose of my multiple case study was to explore the beliefs and practices of a sample of Tanzanian pre-primary educators with regard to the role of play in early childhood education. In conducting the study, I was guided by an overall research question and five sub-questions. To review, below I present a summary of how the findings directly addressed the five research sub-questions:

- What do teachers in selected pre-primary schools believe constitutes play?

The selected teachers recognized play to be mainly pleasurable, physical activities including predominantly physical actions by children like running around, clapping and singing as well as physical sports and games. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that pretence (as identified in role-plays), voluntariness, and freedom were other criteria that characterized play. From the teachers' point of view, play in any of these senses cannot be part of formal classroom teaching. I argue that the wide meaning ascribed to play as conceptualized in the local language likely influenced the perspectives of the teachers.

- Do these pre-primary teachers believe play to have any benefits for children's learning, and if so, what benefits?

The teachers perceived play to benefit learning indirectly through encouraging children's active engagement in the lessons. The teachers expressed how the pleasure experienced during play helps to create a positive response to school and hence encourage attendance, especially for the pre-primary children who are in their first year of formal schooling. The teachers further acknowledged the use of play as practice/review activities that enhance memory of the content learned.

- Do these teachers integrate play into teaching and learning activities, and if so, how?

With regard to incorporating play into classroom activities, the findings revealed mixed views from the teachers. On the one hand, the teachers acknowledged some playful activities (and minimally the teachers' playful mood/character) they integrate into their teaching to enhance motivation, attention, and memory retention. Role-play and songs with actions were described by the teachers to be the most common play activities that can easily be integrated into teaching and learning. On the other hand, the teachers emphasized the necessity of separating play from formal teaching and learning. Worth noting is the teachers' concern with regard to their perceived limited competence with respect to incorporating play into teaching at the pre-primary level.

- To what extent and in what ways, if any, are the home/family/community experiences of children considered by the teacher in any provision made to support play at school? If such provisions are made, what do the teachers identify as the possible contribution to learning made by connecting home/ family/community experiences to children's play?

The teachers' views indicated that the link between play and local experiences is seen only in the use of local songs in schools. The teachers shared how during their own childhood, the use of the local songs in their schools motivated them to attend school

regularly because of the pleasure they experienced singing the songs in their own languages. However, this connection did not feature in their comments about their own provision of playful experiences and songs in their classrooms for their own students. The few opportunities for play provision in teaching that were observed were specifically structured to focus on the content as prescribed by the syllabus.

- What factors do these teachers believe both support and impede integration of play into teaching practice?

The following four main factors were identified from the findings as having an effect on integration of play into teaching:

- **Class size:** Findings reveal the teachers' concern about the large number of children in the class. The number of registered children in a pre-primary class with one teacher ranged from 80–90. Another combined class, where two teachers were co-teaching, had 132 registered children. The large number of children and the very limited provision of the resources needed to support their teaching were clearly identified by the participating teachers as hindrances which limited the play opportunities they offered to students.
- **Parents demands:** Findings revealed that the teachers believe parents want their children to read and write as soon as they start school, and expect written work as tangible evidence that their children are learning. According to the teachers, these expectations serve to inhibit the incorporation of play activities in the classroom as they fail to provide what parents would accept as required evidence for learning.

- Curriculum requirements: Findings also revealed how the focus on academic content in the syllabus puts pressure on the teachers, and shapes their view that the use of various play activities would compete with the time needed to have the children reach the required curricular outcomes.
- Teacher characteristics: Findings suggested that the teachers' background, their preparatory educational program, and personal attributes contributed in shaping the teacher as person and professional, and therefore likely impact teacher practices and the provision of play in the classroom. Findings revealed marked differences in the playful atmosphere between the classes observed, likely attributable to differences in the personal characteristics of the teachers.

Additionally, the teachers expressed the desire and willingness to incorporate play activities if they had the knowledge and competence to do so.

Finally, as noted previously, this study was mainly exploratory in nature, aiming to investigate an element – play – which has rarely been studied in this particular context. While the findings provide broad coverage of the topics identified, further studies are needed that examine in-depth the different aspects and issues highlighted in this study. I hope my study will be just the first of many to paint a rich picture of, and support for, the development of pre-primary education in Tanzania.

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Appendix A

Research Ethics Approval Certificate



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
 Administrative Services Building Rm 8202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
 T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Subilaga Kejo	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER 15-248
UVic STATUS: Ph.D. Student	Minimal Risk Review - Delegated
UVic DEPARTMENT: EDCI	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 14-Aug-15
SUPERVISOR: Dr. Alison Preece	APPROVED ON: 14-Aug-15
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 13-Aug-16
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring play in early education in Tanzania: Beliefs and practices of pre-primary teachers	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL	
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p>Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p>Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p>Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>	
Certification	
<p>This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.</p>	
 <hr/> <p>Dr. Rachael Scarth Acting Associate Vice-President, Research</p>	

Certificate Issued On: 17-Aug-15

15-248
Kejo, Subilaga

Appendix B

Research Clearance Request Letter

Subilaga M Kejo
 Department of Curriculum
 and Instruction.
 University of Victoria,
 Canada
 4th August 2015

The Vice Chancellor
 University of Dar es Salaam
 P.O.BOX 35091
 Dar es Salaam
 Tanzania

Dear Sir,

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

My name is Subilaga M Kejo, I am an assistant lecturer at the Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE). I am currently pursuing my PhD studies at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

The purpose of this letter is to request research clearance from your office to allow me collect data for my dissertation research as part of the PhD program requirement. My study is titled **EXPLORING PLAY IN EARLY EDUCATION IN TANZANIA: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS**. The study seeks to answer the main question: *What are the reported beliefs of Tanzanian pre-primary educators from four urban schools about play and how it relates to learning, and how are these beliefs reflected in their practices?* This research will involve classroom observations as well as interviews with teachers of pre-primary classes and head teachers of those schools. The number of schools required is four and permission for data collection is sought for the period from July 2015 to December 2015.

With this letter I am attaching a brief description of the study's objectives, its design and its potential contribution. I am also attaching copies of the consent forms that will be signed by participants upon agreement to participate. I hope my request will be considered to facilitate achievement of my research objectives.

Thank you
 Kind regards,

Subilaga M Kejo

Appendix D

Research Permit 1

KINONDONI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

ALL CORRESPONDENCES TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR

Tel: 2170173
Fax: 2172606

In reply please quote:

Ref. KMC/R.18/1



MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR
KINONDONI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
P. O. BOX 31902
2 MOROGORO ROAD
14883 DAR ES SALAAM

Date 25/08/2015

Ms. Subilaga M. Kejo,
University of Dar es salaam,
P.O. Box 35091,
DAR ES SALAAM.

RE: **RESEARCH PERMIT**

Refer to the above heading.

I am pleased to inform you that your above request has been considered by the Municipal Director, and has offered you a place to research.

Upon receipt of this letter, please report to **Municipal Education Officer (Primary)** for commencement of your research.

Hoping to see you soon.


A. B. MUSA

For: **THE MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR**
KINONDONI

Copy: Vice -Chancellor,
University Of Dar es salaam
P.O. Bx 35091,
DAR ES SALAAM.

Appendix F

Recruitment Materials

Invitation letter to Head Teachers

Dear head teacher,

I would like to extend an invitation for your school to participate in a study entitled *Exploring Play In Early Education In Tanzania: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Teachers In Selected Schools*. My name is **Subilaga Kejo** and I am a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a **PhD** (Doctorate) degree in Educational Studies. The study is being conducted under the supervision of **Dr. Alison Preece**. You may contact my supervisor at or Please note this study has received approval from the Human Research Ethics Office of the University of Victoria (+1250 472 4545 or ethics@uvic.ca), as well as clearance from the University of Dar es Salaam (+255-22-2410700 or vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz) as indicated in the permission letter submitted.

The purpose of this research is to explore pre-primary teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to play for young children. The study will focus on a small group of pre-primary teachers from selected schools to provide a better understanding of the teachers' beliefs about play, its integration in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practices. The study is specifically aimed at providing a better understanding of how these teachers perceive play, its role in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practice. The information you and other teachers provide will contribute in addressing the shortage of research information from non Western countries, which has led to a biased research database and discourse that disregards the multiple varied information from around the world. Additionally, your thinking and beliefs shared in this study are potentially a significant input in improving policies and curricula related to Early Childhood Education.

Participation in this study will involve interviews with you and the teachers responsible for pre-primary class, and observations of five pre-primary class sessions. Two of the classroom sessions (chosen by the teacher) will be video recorded and the video will be used for recall of events on the second interview with the teacher. For the head teacher, your participation will include one audiotaped interview of approximately one hour. Although you will be known to the researcher and other teachers at the school, measures will be taken to protect your anonymity on the transcribed data, audio interview clips, and research report. Code names will be assigned and used in place of the real names and the key to the coded names will be stored separately from the data.

I would request you to extend my invitation to the teacher (invitation letter attached), and if you both agree to participate on the study, please call me on the phone number given below. I will then ask both of you to sign consent forms giving me permission to conduct the interviews and observations. I will further request you to send information letters to the parents of the pre-primary children, informing them of my presence in the class for observation, a copy of which I attach with this letter. Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or explanation. I would like to thank you for your time and consideration. If the project is of interest to you, it would be my pleasure to meet with you and answer any questions you may have. You may contact me at

Invitation letter to teachers

Dear teacher,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Exploring Play In Early Education In Tanzania: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Teachers In Selected Schools*. My name is **Subilaga Kejo** and I am a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD (Doctorate) degree in Educational Studies. The study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Alison Preece. You may contact my supervisor at... or Please note this study has received approval from the Human Research Ethics Office of the University of Victoria (+1250 472 4545 or ethics@uvic.ca), as well as clearance from the University of Dar es Salaam (+255-22-2410700 or vc@admin.udsm.ac.tz) as indicated in the permission letter submitted.

The purpose of this research is to explore pre-primary teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to play. The study will focus on a small group of pre-primary teachers from selected schools to provide a better understanding of the teachers' beliefs about play, its integration in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practices. The study is specifically aimed at providing a better understanding of how these teachers perceive play, its role in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practice. The information you and other teachers provide will contribute in addressing the shortage of research information from non Western countries, which has led to a biased research database and discourse that disregards the multiple varied information from around the world. Additionally, your thinking and beliefs shared in this study are potentially a significant input in improving policies and curricula related to Early Childhood Education.

Your participation will include two audiotaped interviews of approximately one hour each, as well as granting the researcher permission to observe five of your classroom sessions of 20 – 40 minutes each, which will be selected by you. Two of these observed sessions (of your choice) will be video recorded and will be used in the second interview to help recall of various practices and activities carried out in the class. The researcher will further use the video data during data analysis, but not be for dissemination. In this case, no one else will see the videos other than you and me, the researcher. Although you will be known by the researcher, measures will be taken to protect your anonymity on the transcribed data, audio interview clips, and research report. Code names will be assigned and used in place of the real names and the key to the coded names will be stored separately from the data.

If you agree to participate on the study I will ask you to sign a consent form giving me permission to interview you on two occasions as well as observe your classroom sessions. I will further request you to send information letters to the parents of the pre-primary children, informing them of my presence in the class for observation, a copy of which I attach with this letter. You will also be given a token compensation of Tanzanian shillings 10,000 on the days of the interviews to cover for transportation cost, as you will have to stay extra hours at school. Once given this compensation will not be claimed from you if you decide to withdraw from the study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or explanation.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration. If the project is of interest to you, it would be my pleasure to meet or speak with you and answer any questions you may have. You may contact me at ... or

Sincerely,

Subilaga M Kejo

Appendix G

Consent Letters

Individual interview participant consent for Head teachers

EXPLORING PLAY IN EARLY EDUCATION IN TANZANIA: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Exploring Play In Early Education In Tanzania: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Teachers In Selected Schools*. My name is Subilaga Kejo and I am a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a **PhD (Doctorate)** degree in **Educational Studies**. The study is being conducted under the supervision of **Dr. Alison Preece**. You may contact my supervisor at...or

Purpose and Objective of the Research:

The purpose of this research is to explore pre-primary teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to play. The study will focus on a small group of pre-primary teachers from selected schools to provide a better understanding of the teachers' beliefs about play, its integration in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practices. The study is specifically aimed at providing a better understanding of how these teachers perceive play, its role in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practice

This Research is Important because:

- It will give voice to teachers through presenting their perspectives with regard to play and approaches used in providing play opportunities for children.
- It will contribute to the teachers' learning through encouraging them to reflect on their practices.
- It will add into the existing literature by addressing the omission of research information on play and its potential role in education from countries in the majority world
- The thinking and beliefs of teachers sought by the study are potentially a significant input in improving policies and curricula related to Early Childhood Education.

Participants Selection

- You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a head teacher of a primary school with pre-primary class(es) attached to the school. Due to your role and involvement in teaching and/or administering pre-primary children classes, your contribution is highly valued. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary

What is involved in Participation

- If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include one audiotaped interview of approximately one hour, with the researcher, named above. The interview will take place at your school, and transcriptions will be made after each recording. These transcriptions will be shared with you and you will be asked to confirm and/or clarify your responses.
- You may also be asked follow-up questions for clarification and review of your interview transcript by email or by phone up to six months after the interview.

Inconvenience

- Participation in this study should not cause any inconvenience to you, other than your time to participate in the interview.

Risks

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

- Participation in this research will enable you to think about the beliefs you have about play and about how these beliefs are reflected in your practice. This thinking could help inform the effectiveness of some of your classroom practices.
- The information you will provide will shed light on the place of this important element of childhood, play, in the preschool context.

- The information provided by you will also contribute new insights on teaching practices for pre-primary teacher education programs both pre and in-service.

Voluntary Participation

- Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or explanation. For classroom observations, you may withdraw by informing the researcher to cancel the plan or stop the observation any time before or during the observation. Should you withdraw from the study you will be asked for your permission to have the data you have contributed remain part of the analysis. If you do not agree to this, all data associated with you will be erased and destroyed without any consequences and explanation on your part.

Anonymity

- You will be known to the researcher. It is also likely that other teachers in the school will know of your participation in the research.
- In terms of protecting your anonymity your name will not be recorded on the transcribed data, interview tapes, or research report. A code name of your choice will be assigned and used in place of your name and a key to the coded names and signed consent letters, all will be stored separately from the data.

Confidentiality

- Your confidentiality will be protected by storing data (including audio clips, video clips and the written materials) in soft form in the password protected personal computer of the researcher. Data in the hard form including written notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in the study room of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to all the data.

Dissemination of Results

- The findings will be communicated to participants in different phases. Initial stage will involve verification of the scripts while in the later stage report will be summarized and presented in information sessions like seminars which will also include other in-service teachers, and professionals responsible for pre primary teacher education and policy making.
- The results of the study will be used in writing a dissertation that will be presented to the committee of the researcher's supervisors for approval.
- The results will later be published as a journal article or book chapter for the scholarly community.

Storage and Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be stored safely. All hand written notes will be typed and soft copies of video clips, transcripts and field notes will be stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's personal computer. Two years from the approval of the final draft of the dissertation, soft copy of the data will be deleted. Papers for field notes and other handwritings will be shredded.

Contacts

- Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:
 - The researcher: Subilaga M Kejo at Phone ...or email:
 - Supervisor: Please refer to the information at the beginning of this form
- In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Individual interview and observation: participant consent for teachers

EXPLORING PLAY IN EARLY EDUCATION IN TANZANIA: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Exploring Play In Early Education In Tanzania: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Teachers In Selected Schools*. My name is Subilaga Kejo and I am a graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a **PhD (Doctorate)** degree in **Educational Studies**. The study is being conducted under the supervision of **Dr. Alison Preece**. You may contact my supervisor at ... or

Purpose and Objective of the Research:

The purpose of this research is to explore pre-primary teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to play. The study will focus on a small group of pre-primary teachers from selected schools to provide a better understanding of the teachers' beliefs about play, its integration in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practices. The study is specifically aimed at providing a better understanding of how these teachers perceive play, its role in teaching and learning, and how they see their beliefs reflected in practice

This Research is Important because:

- It will give voice to teachers through presenting their perspectives with regard to play and approaches used in providing play opportunities for children.
- It will contribute to the teachers' learning through encouraging them to reflect on their practices.
- It will add into the existing literature by addressing the omission of research information on play and its potential role in education from countries in the majority world
- The thinking and beliefs of teachers sought by the study are potentially a significant input in improving policies and curricula related to Early Childhood Education.

Participants Selection

- You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher at pre primary level (or head teacher of a primary school with pre-primary class(es) attached to the school). Due to your role and involvement in teaching and/or administering pre-primary children classes, your contribution is highly valued. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary

What is involved in Participation

- If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include two audiotaped interviews, of approximately one hour each, with the researcher, named above. The interviews will be conducted in two different phases of the study. Your participation will also involve granting the researcher permission to observe five of your classroom sessions, which will be selected by you. Two of these observed sessions (of your choice) will be video recorded and will be used in the second interview to help recall of various practices and activities carried out in the class. Written notes also will be taken during the observations. The interviews will take place at your school, and transcriptions will be made after each recording. These transcriptions will be shared with you and you will be asked to confirm and/or clarify your responses.
- You may also be asked follow-up questions for clarification and review of your interview transcript by email or by phone up to six months after the interview.
- You will also be given a token compensation of Tanzanian shillings 10,000 on the days of the interviews to cover for transportation cost, as you will have to stay extra hours at school. Once given, this compensation will not be claimed from you if you decide to withdraw from the study.

Inconvenience

- Participation in this study should not cause any inconvenience to you, other than your time to participate in the interview.

Risks

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

- Participation in this research will enable you to think about the beliefs you have about play and about how these beliefs are reflected in your practice. This thinking could help inform the effectiveness of some of your classroom practices.
- The information you will provide will shed light on the place of this important element of childhood, play, in the preschool context.
- The information provided by you will also contribute new insights on teaching practices for pre-primary teacher education programs both pre and in-service.

Voluntary Participation

- Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or explanation. For classroom observations, you may withdraw by informing the researcher to cancel the plan or stop the observation any time before or during the observation. Should you withdraw from the study you will be asked for your permission to have the data you have contributed remain part of the analysis. If you do not agree to this, all data associated with you will be erased and destroyed without any consequences and explanation on your part.

On-going Consent

- To confirm your continued consent to participate in this research, I will request oral consent from you as well as initial (sign) in the copy of consent form before each subsequent interview/observation session.

Anonymity

- You will be known to the researcher. It is also likely that other teachers in the school will know of your participation in the research.
- In terms of protecting your anonymity your name will not be recorded on the transcribed data, interview tapes, or research report. A code name of your choice will be assigned and used in place of your name and a key to the coded names and signed consent letters, all will be stored separately from the data. The video clips will be used during the interview process and data analysis and so they will not appear in the research report.

Confidentiality

- Your confidentiality will be protected by storing data (including audio clips, video clips and the written materials) in soft form in the password protected personal computer of the researcher. Data in the hard form including written notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in the study room of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to all the data.

Dissemination of Results

- The findings will be communicated to participants in different phases. Initial stage will involve verification of the scripts while in the later stage report will be summarized and presented in information sessions like seminars which will also include other in-service teachers, and professionals responsible for pre primary teacher education and policy making.
- The results of the study will be used in writing a dissertation that will be presented to the committee of the researcher's supervisors for approval.
- The results will later be published as a journal article or book chapter for the scholarly community.

Storage and Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be stored safely. All hand written notes will be typed and soft copies of video clips, transcripts and field notes will be stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's personal computer. Two years from the approval of the final draft of the dissertation, soft copy of the data will be deleted. Papers for field notes and other handwritings will be shredded.

Contacts

- Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

The researcher: Subilaga M Kejo at Phone ... or email:

Supervisor: Please refer to the information at the beginning of this form

- In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix H

Interview Guides for Head Teachers

This interview is being conducted as part of the study that seeks to explore your beliefs about play and its place in the preschool classroom. You have signed a consent form, which indicates you consent to this interview. The interview will be recorded to ensure an accurate record of your comments.

1. First, I would like to know briefly about you.
 - a. Please tell me about your background and how you came to be a teacher.
 - b. What teacher education program did you go through and for how long?
2. Some people have a lot to say about their play experiences during childhood, and others do not.
 - a. What was your childhood experience like with regard to play?
 - b. Can you recall of your school/classroom experience?
 - c. What experiences (up to grade 3) bring good memories to you?
 - d. What activities did you enjoy at school and in class?
 - e. Can you recall of any objects, activities and events that were used by your teacher and that you liked or made you enjoy your school experience?
 - f. Which of these experiences would you classify as play? Why?
 - g. How would you define play then?
3. What criteria would you use to classify an activity as child play in the community/home?
4. Do you remember learning about play in your pre-service or in-service courses?
 - a. If 'yes': Which points or ideas did you find most important/useful?
 - b. If 'no' : Do you think there is a need to include such topic? Why?
5. How would you describe the role of children's play to a parent?
6. How do children engage in play in your school?
 - a. Is there any provision for play in the school timetable?
 - b. What types of play do are allowed as per school regulations, in the classrooms, around the school?
 - c. How does your school provide for resources that children can play with in school/class?
 - d. What are the ages, gender of the children in relation their engagement in play?
 - e. How do you think play in the school would differ from home environment?
7. Where does play usually occur, inside, outside of the class or both? What kinds of play are commonly seen?
8. What role do you think (if any) play should have in:
 - a. the education of young children?
 - b. the curriculum/syllabus for pre-primary education?

9. How do you think teachers attempt to make provision for and integrate play in the school/classroom? Please describe any play experience you have observed in a pre-primary class, please give examples.
10. What does the education policy/syllabus say about play? What is your opinion about that?
 - a. If play features in the syllabus, do you think it is adequately addressed?
 - b. If play does not feature at all, do you think it should?
11. How do you think play may be useful in enhancing children's learning?
12. How would you define play as a grown up? (after teacher training, becoming a parent if applicable) Do you perceive it differently? Please explain.
13. What factors do you think:
 - a. support your efforts to integrate play into teaching?
 - b. make it challenging to integrate play into teaching?
14. What would you like to see happen regarding play?
15. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share with me to help me understand how you perceive play? Anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix I

Interview Guides for Teachers

INTERVIEW 1

This interview is being conducted as part of the study that seeks to explore your beliefs about play and its place in the preschool classroom. You have signed a consent form, which indicates you consent to this interview. The interview will be recorded to ensure an accurate record of your comments.

1. First, I would like to know briefly about you.
 - a. Please tell me about your background and how you came to be a teacher.
 - b. What teacher education program did you go through and for how long?
2. Some people have a lot to say about their play experiences during childhood, and others do not. What was your childhood experience like with regard to play?
3. Can you recall of your school/classroom experience?
 - a. What experiences (up to grade 3) bring good memories to you?
 - b. What did you enjoy doing at school and in class?
 - c. Can you recall of any objects, activities and events that were used by your teacher and that you liked or made you enjoy your school experience?
4. Which of these experiences would you classify as play? Why?
5. How would you define play then?

INTERVIEW 2

Interview two was conducted after classroom observation. Since the interviews was assisted by video-recall of activities in the classroom the questions were emerging over the course of data collection. The following were guiding questions that will be modified accordingly:

1. Please describe your play experience with the class you teach.
2. Did you actively attempt (do you think teachers attempt) to make provision for and integrate play in the school/classroom? How?
3. How do you provide for resources that children can play with in school/class?
4. How do you make use of the locally available and familiar items to encourage play in learning?
5. What factors do you think:
 - c. support your efforts to integrate play into your teaching?
 - d. make it challenging for you to integrate play into teaching?

The following are examples of some probes that will be used during interview 2

From the video recording of a lesson you taught:

- Can you tell me about what you see happening here?
- What are the children doing here?
- What made you decide to set out that activity?
- What do you think went well?
- What might you change?

INTERVIEW 3

1. Do you remember learning about play in your pre-service or in-service courses?
 - a. If 'yes': Which points or ideas did you find most important/useful?
 - b. If 'no' : Do you think there is a need to include such topic? Why?
2. How would you define play as a grown up? (after teacher training, becoming a parent if applicable) Do you perceive it differently? Please explain.
3. How do you think other factors have impacted your understanding and view of play over time?
4. What does the education policy/syllabus say about play? What is your opinion about that?
 - a. If play features in the syllabus, do you think it is adequately addressed?
 - b. If play does not feature at all, do you think it should?
5. To what extent do you think the activities provided as guidance in the syllabus are related to children's play experiences outside the school?
6. To what extent do you think school regulations promote or hinder play activities for children?
7. How would you describe the role of children's play to a parent?
8. In the school context familiar to you, how do children engage in play? What types of play do you see? What are the ages, gender of the children in relation their engagement in play?
9. Where does play usually occur, inside, outside of the class or both? What kinds of play are commonly seen?
10. What role do you think play should have in:
 - a. the education of young children?
 - b. the curriculum/syllabus for pre-primary education?
11. How do you think play may be useful in enhancing children's learning?
12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share with me to help me understand how you perceive play? Anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix J

Observation Guide

TEACHER'S NAME: _____ CLASS: _____

TEACHER/CHILD RATIO: _____

SETTING: _____

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

The following aspects will be observed and the researcher will take note of how play is featured, supported and/or constrained by considering the 6 criteria of play - (voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, rule-governed, pleasurable and episodic) as identified by Wood (2014)

1. Environment (how teacher creates learning experiences using space – indoor and outdoor)

2. Resources available (consideration of the use of locally available materials)

3. Explicit rules and stated values of the teacher (observe how they are reflected in the learning experiences)

4. Teacher practices (to note in the table below):

PLAY CUE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY OBSERVED (to note teacher and student involvement on activity)	Affect. The activity seems fun or serious	Space and constraints. Location in the classroom where the activity occurs	Adult presence. Whether the teacher is present or not when the activity is carried out	Activity type. Type of materials involved whether play or academic material
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

NOTE: This is a guiding framework for observation. Activities to be observed are expected to fall under the cues above, adapted from Howard (2010). However, the matrix above will not limit the researcher from taking note of other cues observed.

Appendix K

Category Identification Process

Preliminary codes identified from the interview guide

1. Background information
2. Own play experience
 - a. Home environment
 - b. School, teacher education
3. Criteria for play activity – play/non-play (play definition)
4. Role of play
5. Parents view of play – support or not
 - a. Play in general
 - b. Play integrated in teaching
6. Play engagement in school – how children engage in play in the schools
7. Play in the policy/curriculum/syllabus
8. Influences on beliefs on play
9. Integrating play into teaching
 - a. Factors to support
 - b. Challenges faced
10. Identifying play, non-play teaching techniques
11. Using the local context

Appendix L

Sample of NVIVO Extract of Quotations for Category 3

Play is peripheral to academic work

Internals\Interviews\Kabula 1 - § 5 references coded [8.97% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.21% Coverage

so when we were in class may be in the beginning when he comes, we would start to sing the usual songs and jump around, after that may be the last periods, he would start to tell you stories, on hare and hyena, may be the hyena was stingy, after that he would ask questions you see, so many of us would want to respond, 'teacher me, teacher me' wanting to be picked to respond. And then there was a sukuma tribal song before we would be dismissed so he would sing the song and you sing with him and you enjoy! And you run to go home. The following morning you just remember and you want to go so the teacher can sing for you the song.

Reference 2 - 1.64% Coverage

It is when the teacher begins to teach, you see, for example it was, as soon as he enters the class, we just knew as soon as he enters, we would greet him and start singing, we would play, there were action songs when we would jump, but when he is done and tell you ok sit down, when he begins to teach, there is no more play

Reference 3 - 1.73% Coverage

It was like a timetable and we knew it. We would just see him changing, so if we see him saying ok sit down and starts to write the date, if he hears anyone still talking or playing, he would come and punish you, and tell us, " I don't want anyone to talk, keep quiet as this is time to read". So you just know that there is no more playing now.

References 4 - 2.39% Coverage

For me, I usually do this in the morning as I teach Maths activities, as soon as I enter the class, I let them stand, and we sing, but because there is another class close by they have to sing in low volume, so because I know that if they jump around they become active, I make them stand, there are songs they like that make them jump, I have them do some physical exercises, you see, after that then I tell them to sit down and be attentive because it is time to learn.

Internals\Interviews\Kabula 2 - § 2 references coded [5.51% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.88% Coverage

In class I think play helps children, although here we don't provide play opportunities much, like in other places you may find children are provided with play items and they play in the class, but here we don't have those things so what we just do is sing songs that will make them jump around in the class just to make them feel well.

Reference 2 - 3.63% Coverage

When you come to class and find them playing freely, even if you want them to listen to you they will not hear, but when they are doing something together, they are playing together, oohhh! they are singing together when they are done and you tell them ok listen, as they were all focusing on you they were doing one common thing, you had pulled to you their focus and it was all to you, they listen to you, they look at you, what is the teacher doing now! They do something together which they are enjoying, different from when each one is playing on his own and you come to tell them ok listen, nothing, you will find others still talking, playing!

Internals\Interviews\Lawi - § 3 references coded [3.04% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.79% Coverage

On play activities issues, mainly like the one I have told you, parade for the children, I found it very useful

before going into class, a child should be made active, he should do the parade after that it means the body is already active so when he goes to class he will be ready to receive what he is taught.

Reference 2 - 0.39% Coverage

Mostly I have noted on singing, yes singing, reading by singing, counting by singing, clapping hands, their play activities, I have observed that

Reference 3 - 1.86% Coverage

Response depends on each teacher's competence/ability, there are some teachers as I told you in the beginning there are people who don't like to play so even teaching through play for a person like that might be hard, but those who like to teach through play you will notice them even when he goes to class before presenting his topic he starts with a song, a science subject song you will hear children singing loudly may be 'what is body/mouth cleanliness' they sing well, counting numbers one to ... he sings for you. So you find for some teachers it is in him, but there are others who cannot, that is how they are, there are others who even if you encourage them they won't do it, they just go to class and teach and go

Internals\Interviews\Maggy 2 - § 1 reference coded [4.62% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.62% Coverage

For me my chance to use play is at the introduction. On introduction..., children will enter the class, when I come in they will greet me, or I might start to greet them and they would respond after that I might... for example if its science session I might ask about their parts of the body, they may name them. Or I would show a game, for example in Maths, in arithmetics, that song they sang, 'the bird song', I would be having a subtraction sum on the board, and I will start the song but they should show the actions, that the first jumped, and they jump, the second and up to the last so the whole class would jump – that is play.

But in the middle there I cannot bring in any play, in the middle of numbers/arithmetics, in the middle of reading, in the middle of writing, I cannot, but in the beginning at the introduction.

Internals\Interviews\May and Nay 1 - § 1 reference coded [2.00% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.00% Coverage

There are instructions, for boys, you know boys like to play with the ball, we group them into teams, two teams, so I take the group of boys and the other teacher takes the girls, so the girls will be have their game (READY...) and the boys will be playing soccer so we supervise them, you know this young children without supervision, they might run to the road where cars are passing (laugh) yes we use that field on Fridays it is the day for games

Internals\Interviews\May and Nay 2 - § 2 references coded [1.48% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.75% Coverage

yes I started with the singing, because it just depends on how you begin, if you don't start with singing and playing, most of them will not rise up, there are those who will never rise up,

Reference 2 - 0.73% Coverage

These songs, yes there is something to say, as we sing these songs they just know that the teacher, wants us to start reading, yes they know that now it is Swahili lesson that follows

Internals\Interviews\Neema - § 1 reference coded [1.07% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.07% Coverage

There was another one, he used to be a sports teacher, and I think he wanted us to be sly. He used to make us run/jog everyday even when he is not on duty and we really liked him. It is something that is not common these days, I wish the you teachers could do the same now.