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Teacher's Implementation of Play-Based Learning Practices and Barriers Encountered in Kindergarten Classrooms

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Walden University
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Abstract

Teachers' Implementation of Play-Based Learning Practices and Barriers Encountered in

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by

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MA, Touro College, 2009

BS, New York University, 1996

AA, Kingsborough Community College, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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June 2022

Abstract

Play-based learning practices contribute to oral language development, social-emotional development, literacy, and communication skills development in young children. Public schools struggle with the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices to meet culturally diverse students' academic needs. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how kindergarten teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms in a public elementary school in the Northeast United States. The conceptual framework included the situated learning theory and Fullan's educational change theory. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with nine kindergarten teachers who implemented play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for overarching patterns and themes. Findings revealed kindergarten teachers were using structured and unstructured play-based learning activities daily for a specified amount of time. Participants were using unstructured practices to fulfill student needs of exploration, experimentation, collaboration, and negotiation as students worked in partnerships or small group settings. Findings also indicated school administrators were not providing additional professional development training to promote a better understanding of the implementation of play-based learning practices. The results may improve teacher instruction in kindergarten literacy classrooms and kindergarten students' preparation for language and literacy development in elementary and secondary grades.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who supported, encouraged, and guided me throughout this journey, and my dogs, Cara, Riley, and especially Charley, who is no longer with me. Charley sat by my side each night during discussion posts and written assignments, and lives in my heart.

Acknowledgments

I extend my gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Ellen Scales, Dr. Cathryn White, and Dr. Cleveland Hayes for their ongoing support and guidance throughout the entire process of completing this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Play-based learning is defined as an instructional model of enhancing student learning through a variety of learning experiences (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Play-based learning consists of developmentally age-appropriate learning activities, including exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving, to engage with individuals and objects (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018). Teachers who implement play-based learning practices take an active role in guiding students' interactions and, in turn, use student motivation and interest to explore concepts and ideas (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). Through this implementation model, young students receive instruction and acquire and practice important academic skills within a playful context. Researchers have found, however, that teachers have reported challenges in embedding play-based learning practices into their academic instruction (Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018) and emphasized the importance of play in academic learning through collaboration, engagement, negotiation, and self-regulation.

To prepare teachers for effective implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms, teacher education programs in colleges and universities should include courses for implementing play-based learning instruction in kindergarten classrooms (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Public schools struggle with the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices to meet culturally diverse students' academic needs (Love, 2015). Little is known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers

encounter when implementing learning practices in kindergarten classrooms (Principal, personal communication, April 9, 2021). In this basic qualitative study, I attempted to gain a deeper understanding of elementary kindergarten teachers' experiences with planning and implementing play-based learning practices and curricula. The basic qualitative study may contribute to positive social change by providing information about kindergarten teachers' implementation of play-based instructional practices that could lead to improvement in the effective methods in the implementation of play-based practices and curricula for kindergarten students.

In Chapter 1, I provide evidence of the problem regarding the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices for kindergarten classrooms. Teacher preparation programs have courses to address the academic needs of kindergarten students. Teachers are trained to use instructional methods for content areas, but training in the implementation of play-based instructional practice has been limited. The remaining sections of Chapter 1 include (a) problem statement, (b) purpose of the study, (c) research questions, (d) conceptual framework, (e) nature of the study, (f) definitions, (g) assumptions, (h) scope and delimitations, (i) limitations, (j) significance of the study, and (k) summary.

Background of the Study

Kindergarten education has encountered changes in the past few years in the implementation of rigorous educational learning and a shift away from play-based learning practices in early childhood education classrooms (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Play-based learning motivates,

stimulates, and supports young children's oral development of literacy and communication skills (Mraz et al., 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Play-based learning presents students with opportunities to foster positive attitudes and demonstrate awareness of recently learned skills (Cavanaugh et al., 2017; Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018). Play provides opportunities for students to enhance oral language development through the use of complex grammar and increased vocabulary, thereby encouraging comprehension and reading proficiency (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). Play is a significant component in kindergarten curricula because it promotes the student's social-emotional development (Mraz, 2016).

The current problem kindergarten teachers face is teaching academic skills to promote and encourage developmentally age-appropriate practices while implementing play-based pedagogy (Dinnerstein, 2016; Kirk & Jay, 2018; Mraz et al., 2016). Challenges have occurred with the integration of play, as teachers have been faced with implementation of mandated instructional learning and play-based practices to meet the existing curricular demands (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). In addition, teachers have expressed concern with the lack of training in implementing play-based learning practices, with trying to achieve and maintain students' high academic standards, and with insufficient floor space to support play in kindergarten classroom (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Researchers suggested that kindergarten teachers need to acquire an understanding of the value and significance of play and, in addition, be able to manage a balance between the curricular mandates and implementing the necessary play-based

learning practices, which will allow play to be recognized as an acceptable learning method to ensure student academic success (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018).

The current study focused on teachers' experiences in the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. The importance of this focus centered on the effective planning and implementation of play-based instructional strategies and curricula. At the time of the study, there was a gap in the research surrounding the perceptions of kindergarten teachers' implementation of effective play-based pedagogy practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms to support and guide kindergarteners' academic needs. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed.

In this study, I identified the implementation practices and the barriers that were not addressed in professional development meetings and not found in the literature of play-based learning practices in kindergarten. This basic qualitative study was intended to generate a deeper understanding of kindergarten teachers' experiences in the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula to improve effective strategies in planning and implementing play-based pedagogy practices. A deeper insight of teacher experiences with instructional approaches and strategies for kindergarten students may be beneficial because it may inform school leaders' and administrators' efforts to develop and implement effective play-based learning practices to meet kindergarten students' academic needs and improve teachers' planning and delivery of lessons using play-based learning practices. The findings in this basic qualitative study

may lead to the design of professional development that can improve teachers' understanding of how to plan and implement effective play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms.

Problem Statement

At a school district outside of a large metropolitan city in the Northeast United States, little was known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter when implementing learning practices in kindergarten classrooms (Principal, personal communication, April 9, 2021). According to the principal of Meadowbrook Elementary (pseudonym), even though there were ample opportunities for teachers to collaborate, plan, and implement play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms, play-based practices were not being incorporated effectively to enrich student learning (personal communication, April 9, 2018).

Researchers have found that general and special education kindergarten teachers have low self-efficacy in using play-based learning practice (Bandura, 2009; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Nicholson, 2019; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Robertson et al., 2018). Despite ongoing professional development, Meadowbrook Elementary kindergarten teachers reported that they are not receiving the necessary training to plan and implement play-based learning practices to integrate with learning objectives needed to increase mastery of academic skills (Grade level meeting, February 20, 2018; Meeting notes, 2018-2019). Little was known about the barriers the teachers encounter at Meadowbrook Elementary when implementing play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten

classrooms. Researchers have not focused on teachers' perceived barriers and have not documented teachers' experiences in failing to implement play-based learning practices (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

There was a gap in the literature regarding the barriers that impede teachers' ability to integrate play-based instructions that guide inquiry, exploration, and problem solving in the kindergarten classroom. The school principal (personal communication, April 9, 2018) suggested that barriers to implementation of play-based learning practices, once identified, may be addressed in future professional development opportunities when more is known. These barriers included time management, availability of resources, materials, sufficient classroom space, money, meeting the needs of curriculum, and district demands.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to describe and understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. I identified the implementation practices and the barriers that were not addressed in professional development meetings and not found in the literature of play-based learning practices in kindergarten. A deeper insight of teacher experiences with instructional approaches and strategies for kindergarten students may be beneficial because it may

inform school leaders' and administrators' efforts to develop and implement effective play-based learning practices to meet kindergarten students' academic needs and improve teachers' planning and delivery of lessons using play-based learning practices.

Research Questions

Teachers struggle to implement play-based pedagogy learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms at Meadowbrook Elementary due to insufficient training in the implementation of the play-based instructional approach. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to describe the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The following research questions (RQs) were used to guide the study:

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe implementing play-based learning in their instructional design?

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe the barriers to implementing play-based learning in academic instruction?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study is based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory. Situated learning is an instructional approach developed by Lave and Wenger that follows the work of Dewey's (1938) pragmatism and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural cognitivism. Both theorists asserted that students are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the learning experience. Vygotsky found that students are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the guided learning experience based

on a relationship with the guide or teacher. Situated learning creates meaning from the real activities of daily living in which learning occurs within the teaching environment (Lave & Wagner, 1991). Situated learning theory proposes that learning takes place through the relationships between people and connects prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual experiences. Lave (1988) noted the significance of the social construction of learning and how people in groups attain knowledge. In situated learning theory, Lave postulated that learning is social and comes from participating in everyday life and not from an isolated process. Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning applied to the current study because the connection between learning accompanied with play and teaching was one of the overarching concepts of this study and examining this connection in the context of the kindergarten classroom as a community fit the framework of situated learning theory. In this study, I explored how teachers implemented play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encountered as they implemented play-based learning practices.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design to explore how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms to enhance academic learning, and the barriers encountered when implementing play-based learning practices. Basic qualitative studies enable researchers to develop in-depth understanding of people's lives, behaviors, experiences, and feelings, as well as organizational operations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative researchers seek to understand individuals' experiences in

real-life settings and produce findings that come from real-world situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Golafshani, 2003). Quantitative researchers focus on the facets of individuals' behaviors that can be quantified and patterned instead of exploring them and interpreting their meaning (Rahman, 2020). Quantitative researchers use data collection instruments designed to fit experiences into set response categories. Interviews conducted during qualitative studies include open-ended questions, provide detailed understandings of participants' experiences, and produce qualitative data that align with qualitative research methodology (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Researchers use qualitative data collected from interviews to gain insights of the participants' interactions and their subjective interpretations of the experiences and events in the context in which they had firsthand encounters with the topic of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When researchers select a design and methodology for their study, they need to consider the purpose of the research and ensure that there is a relationship between the research questions and the methodology used to address these questions (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

The research questions in this study were analytical in nature and designed with the purpose to delve deeper in the understanding of teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and barriers encountered in kindergarten curricula. Based on the kind of research questions, I conducted a qualitative study in which I used a basic qualitative design. I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with 12 kindergarten teachers in elementary public schools in the Northeast United States. I also used a preinterview questionnaire to determine whether the teachers met the inclusion criteria

for this study. The semistructured interviews allowed the participants to share their experiences in the implementation of play-based learning practices and the barriers they encountered. I used the data collected from semistructured interviews to understand how kindergarten teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula. Teachers have reported facing barriers of time management, availability of resources, materials, insufficient classroom space, and meeting curriculum and district demands. During the interviews, I collected data on the practices that teachers perform when play and learning are compatible (see Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

Definition of Terms

Academic learning: Academic learning occurs in academic classroom activities centered around skills, content, strategies, and concepts focused on content areas (Vogt et al., 2018).

Academic rigor: Academic rigor is a certain standard of excellence that teachers and administrators expect of students. These standards are made clear to students through examples, instructions, and rubrics (Mraz et al., 2016).

Barriers: Barriers are factors that prevent the implementation and integration of play-based learning practices in early childhood education classrooms (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

Child-centered learning: Child-centered learning encourages children to take control of their learning. Child-centered learning enables them to make decisions and solve problems and allows them to develop confidently and independently. Child-

centered learning contributes to self-esteem so children feel comfortable with themselves (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

Gender role: Gender role is the process through which children learn about the social expectations, attitudes, and behaviors associated with boys and girls (Prioletta & Pyle, 2017).

Instructional model: An instructional model is a context for teaching and learning that involves the classroom environment, equipment, and resources that include the organization of learning activities that relate to the structure of the day. An instructional model includes the teaching method, strategies, teacher's disposition, flow of the classroom, and how the students respond to each other (Bautista et al., 2019).

Pedagogy practices: Pedagogy practices are a set of techniques, strategies, or methods teachers use to enable the delivery of content, such as the constructivist model, active learning, and student-centered activities that provide opportunities for the implementation of knowledge, skills, concepts, and attitudes (Pyle & Alaca, 2018).

Play: Play is active, hands-on engagement and personal present-moment experience. Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them (Mraz et al., 2016; Pyle & Alaca, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

Play-based curriculum: Play-based curriculum is an approach to learning that engages the learner through exploration, engagement, and problem solving, while providing instruction in essential academic skills (Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018).

Assumptions

As a qualitative researcher, I understood that the data collection and data interpretation process during this basic qualitative study might be viewed as subjective. Qualitative research "seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspectives and world views of the people involved" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 11). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An assumption of the current study was that kindergarten teachers would respond honestly to the interview questions. Another assumption of this study was that teachers want to use play-based instruction in their classrooms to support the instruction and learning of students in early childhood education programs. I ensured confidentiality of all interviewees' responses and documented how the participants spoke openly. I assured the respondents that their information would not be used to judge them or their schools and that the data would remain confidential.

Scope and Delimitations

The boundaries of this study were kindergarten teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. Play-based learning practices have been described as an instructional method for academic learning in which students collaborate, explore, and learn through experimentation and collaboration; problem solve; and engage with one another (Mraz et al., 2016). The study included 12 kindergarten teachers with 3 or more years of experience in implementing play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. English language learner

teachers, special education teachers, and newly appointed teachers were excluded from the study. These teachers were excluded because specific methodologies are used with students with disabilities and students identified as English language learners. When the study was designed, I decided to narrow the focus to general education kindergarten teachers.

Semistructured interviews were used to explore teachers' descriptions of play-based learning in academic instruction. Teachers were asked to bring a sample lesson plan so they could refer to the document during the interview process. The lesson plan supported the teachers' recall of specific strategies used in their classroom related to play-based instruction. The visual support of the lesson plan document provided scaffolding during the interview process with teachers as the phenomenon of the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula was explored. The lesson plans were not collected.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that I had little control over snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that consists of identifying potential participants, and those participants recruit additional participants to be in the study (Patton, 2015). Through this sampling approach in the current study, additional participants were acquired through participants who had already been interviewed, which provided little control over the sampling method and limited generalizability and transferability of findings. Another limitation was that teachers interviewed taught only kindergarten. The findings could be used to inform the practice of play-based learning

practices of kindergarten teachers at larger public and private educational institutions.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for the field of curriculum and instruction research by exploring how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter when implementing a learning initiative. In the literature, an emphasis has been on the bifurcation of learning and playing (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). In the local setting, teachers indicated difficulty with planning and implementing play-based learning practices (Grade level meeting, January 5, 2019). This study was significant both locally and across the fields of curriculum and instruction because it addressed a problem by focusing on kindergarten teachers' experiences and encounters with barriers when implementing play-based learning practices. Findings may provide school officials with a better understanding of the barriers teachers encounter while implementing play-based learning experiences. The findings may also be used to identify the support teachers need to implement play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The findings of this study may lead to positive social change by encouraging professional development training to enable kindergarten teachers to overcome the barriers and to teach the required content areas to improve foundational skills for first grade readiness.

Summary

The existing academic mandates in early childhood education seem to have caused a shift from a developmentally age-appropriate practice process, which includes the development of the whole child, to a more rigorous academic direct instruction (Mraz

et al, 2016). The changes in the kindergarten play-based learning practices over the last few years have created concerns for early childhood education teachers (Dinnerstein, 2016; Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) argued "development in young children never follows school learning the way a shadow follows the object it casts" (p. 91). Kindergarten teachers in the 21st century must have knowledge of the complexities and advantages of play-based learning practices and understand its impact on real-life experiences because it emphasizes the importance of play in academic learning through collaboration, exploration, experimentation, and problem solving to engage with individuals and objects (Mraz et al., 2016).

Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which includes Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory as the conceptual framework for the current study. I propose the connection between learning with play and teaching as an overarching concept by examining the context of the early childhood education classroom as a community in which students are more motivated to learn by actively participating in the learning experience (see Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). Further, I address how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter when implementing play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. In this study, I identified barriers

that were not addressed in professional development meetings and not found in the

literature of play-based practices in kindergarten.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem at an urban elementary school in the Northeast United States was that little was known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms (Principal, personal communication, April 9, 2018). In recent years, kindergarten education has experienced significant curricular changes, including implementation of a more rigorous academic model and a move away from play-based pedagogy practices in the classroom (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Nicholson, 2019; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Play has a fundamental role in kindergarten classrooms because it emphasizes the significance of teachers nurturing students' social-emotional development (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018). Play-based learning optimizes developmentally age-appropriate learning activities by exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving as the child engages with individuals and objects (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018).

Many teachers have embedded a play-based learning framework into various content areas, such as literacy, using student-guided play (Cavanaugh et al., 2017) by allowing reading and writing activities to include collaboration and discovery using costumes and artwork. Kindergarten teachers have reported they face challenges of balancing traditional instruction and learning while implementing developmentally age-appropriate practices (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Keung & Fung, 2020; Pyle & Danniels, 2018). A movement toward more rigorous teaching and learning based

on state standards and academic accountability has resulted in an increase in instruction on the kindergarten level (Mraz et al, 2016; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). A well-planned written curriculum provides a guide for teachers and administrators. It helps them work together and balance different activities and development. The curriculum includes goals for the content children are learning, planned activities linked to these goals, daily schedules and routines, and materials to be used (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

Teachers implementing play-based learning practices with an emphasis on hip-hop education has resulted in positive instructional outcomes with teaching academic skills. Hip-hop-based education incorporates rap turntablism, break dancing, knowledge of self, fashion, and language (Love, 2015). Hip-hop based education can also be utilized in early childhood education to help young students learn math skills, phonemic awareness, and grammar rules, and acquire historical facts using play-based instructional practices. However, teachers of young learners have been apprehensive to implement the framework because it is viewed as commercial music or being too sexually explicit for young children. The hip-hop-based education method has been integrated in middle and high school education; however, hip-hop-based education for early learners places a focus not only for public school education but also how young learners can be influenced by hip-hop through their culture's music, language, and dance (Wilson, 2007). Expanding on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, hip-hop influences young children's social, emotional, educational, physical, and creative skills.

The hip-hop-based method has been recognized by teachers who consider play and learning to be two different entities, and teachers are challenged when they attempt to implement academic learning and play to meet the current curricular demands (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). In response to greater academic rigor by administrators and district superintendents, teachers have reported that they have been experiencing challenges with integrating play within students' traditional learning practices (Keung & Fung, 2020; Pyle et al., 2017; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Teachers have reported they are faced with the task of implementing both instructional learning and play-based learning practices to meet the current curricular demands; teachers have not yet recognized that play and learning are two entities (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

Researchers reported that students in kindergarten classrooms utilizing play-based learning practices experienced positive growth in many areas, including exploration, dramatic play, and games with rules (Lai et al., 2018; Mraz et al., 2016). Researchers also found that with play, students performed better on problem-solving tasks than students who received direct instruction (Cavanaugh et al, 2017; Lai et al., 2018; Nestor & Moser, 2018). Van Oers and Duijkers (2013) compared classrooms with direct instruction and play-based learning practices that promoted the implementation of literary skills within play. The findings revealed the use of play-based environments strengthens students' literacy development with opportunities to engage and share knowledge with their peers.

Researchers provided evidence of the implementation of play-based learning strategies to support areas of instructional learning (Blair & Raver, 2015; Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Recent studies demonstrated that students in kindergarten classrooms

implementing play-based learning practices performed better on oral language development and literacy skills than students in traditional transmissive classrooms (Stagnitti et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2018). Some teachers support play-based learning practices while other teachers report challenges with implementing play-based learning practices with instructional learning and conceptualize play as a child-directed instruction (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). The challenges teachers reported with implementing play-based learning are lack of training, pressure to ensure students master high academic standards, large classroom sizes, and not having enough time to plan (Bautista et al., 2019). The teachers also noted there was insufficient classroom space to support play (Bubikova et al., 2019).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers implement play-based practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. Researchers have identified the gap in additional challenges in implementing play-based learning practices as teachers' underlying beliefs regarding the importance of direct instruction, the pressure of meeting accountability requirements for curriculum and district demands, insufficient teacher training, time management, availability of resources, materials, inadequate classroom space, lack of monetary funds in implementing play-based learning practices,

and pressure from parents and/or administrators to achieve instructional learning (Aras, 2016; Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Literature Search Strategy

The review of the peer-reviewed literature supported the need for this basic qualitative study to explore how teachers implement play-based practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. Through play-based learning practices, kindergarten students learn and apply the important academic skills within playful contexts (Holmes et al., 2015; Mraz et al., 2016). The progression of play-based learning practices is a significant component for young children to acquire early reading and math skills through developmentally age-appropriate learning activities, which include exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018).

The historical component of the origin of play-based learning practices provides the background foundation (Frost, 2010). In this literature review, I briefly address the historical development of play-based learning practices from its origination to modern times. This review includes current research findings of teachers' inability to implement play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. I used information from databases in the Walden University Library—Sage, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google

Scholar—and Walden's qualitative research resources, textbooks, and the internet. I used

the National Association for the Education of Young Children website to access

information that highlighted relevant literature about children that supported the problem

to be studied. Also, this review includes articles that called for further research in

implementing play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Search terms

included play-based learning practices, barriers to play-based learning, gender roles,

technology in play-based learning classrooms, socioeconomic status, parent expectations,

teacher training, perceptions, teacher expectations, collaboration, assessments, social-

emotional learning, English language learners, academic, and behavior outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was based on Lave and

Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal

development (ZPD). Situated learning is an academic approach developed by Lave and

Wenger that follows the work of Dewey's (1938) instrumentalism (pragmatism) and

Vygotsky's ZPD. In Dewey's theory, education requires building new knowledge from

previous experiences, with experience as the classroom and the social interaction within

the experience designing as the learning environment. Situated learning theory proposes

that learning takes place through relationships between people and connects prior

knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual experiences (Lave

& Wenger, 1991). Lave (1988) noted the significance of the social construction of

learning and how people in groups attain knowledge. In situated learning theory, Lave

postulated that learning is social and comes from participating in everyday life, not from

an isolated process. Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning applied to the current

study because the connection between learning accompanied with play and teaching was

one of the overarching concepts of this study and examining it in the context of the early

childhood education classroom as a community fit the framework of situated learning

theory. Both theorists asserted that students are more inclined to learn by actively

participating in the learning experience (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). Situated

learning creates meaning from real activities of daily living in which learning occurs

within the teaching environment (Lave & Wagner, 1991). Vygotsky's ZPD shows that

students are more inclined to learn by actively participating in the learning experience on

their own with a teacher.

Fullan's (2007) educational change theory was also used for this study. Fullan

found that often teachers are unsure how they can impact students' academic learning,

and many times teaching decisions are made rapidly without the opportunity to reflect or

think through the student's learning process. As kindergarten teachers implement play-

based learning practices, they experience daily challenges such as managing student

behavior, addressing interpersonal conflicts, and dealing with parents, administrators, and

other school personnel inside and outside the classroom (Fullan, 2007). In addition,

teachers face difficulty in administering all the content in the curriculum, teaching

lessons with the appropriate standards, and making an impact on one or two students

daily. Teachers face a variety of barriers such as the pressure of meeting accountability

requirements for curriculum and district demands, insufficient teacher training, time

management, availability of resources, materials, inadequate classroom space, lack of

monetary funds, and pressure from parents and/or administrators to achieve instructional

learning with the implementation of play-based learning practices (Fullan & Stiegelbauer,

1991). In addition, there is little to no opportunity for teachers to acquire new learning

strategies. Besides these day-to-day challenges preventing teachers from implementing

play-based learning practices, many of the strategies focus on class structures,

assessments, interpreting the data, and insufficient professional development training.

Fullan's (2016) educational change theory is a change in practice that consists of

initiation, implementation, and continuation. Teachers who resist all three practices focus

on the initiation of curriculum and the implementation of play. The change in practice

can occur on many levels; for example, a teacher can use new curricular materials and

standards without changing their teaching approach, they can use the materials and

change their teaching strategies, or they can use the materials and change teaching

behaviors without reaching an understanding of the concepts or beliefs underlying the

change (Fullan, 2016). Educational change theory helps teachers focus on the implication

of change that teachers and schools need to make and how it can promote the changes

that will address their students' needs (Ellsworth, 2000).

Alternately, research conducted using sociocultural perspective can be described

as a way of learning and understanding human behavior and personality development

examining social groups in which individuals are members (Perry, 2012). Based on the

sociocultural perspective, learning and development depend on the interaction of students

with the world around them. The sociocultural perspective derives from the combination

of the social environment and cognition. Vygotsky (1978) noted that individuals learn

from the community and culture around them, for example, from teachers, parents, and the overall culture interacting with the child. This theory was significant to the teaching of play-based pedagogy practices because the sociocultural perspective conceptualizes that literacy helps children to understand real-world ways in which individuals interact with real and rich texts, which helps educators make formal literacy instruction more meaningful and relevant for early learners as they learn skills in phonemic awareness, fluency, decoding, and comprehension. Literacy is explained as social practices that can be inferred from events derived from real-world written texts (Perry, 2012). The literacy practices are shaped by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacy is more demanding, noticeable, and powerful than others. In addition, literacy social practices focus on understanding how learners utilize literacy on a day-to-day basis and determine ways to make literacy instruction important and beneficial by allowing students to practice literacy skills using play-based pedagogy learning practices (Perry, 2012).

Love (2015) argued that it is significant to examine hip-hop education as a curricular and academic resource rooted in the principles of culturally relevant teaching. Culturally relevant teaching provides a way for the school environment to acknowledge the home and community culture of the students, and through sensitivity to cultural nuances integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understandings into the teaching and learning environment (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Hooks (1991) further explained that hip-hop-based education helps students develop their awareness of the social and political concerns of their community being central to a democratic society, and, building on this

philosophy, hip-hop-based education uses hip-hop to promote civic education, engagement, critical discussions, and social consciousness. However, many early childhood education teachers are hesitant to implement hip-hop-based education as a pedagogical framework because of how rap music is viewed as being too mature with its sexually explicit language for young kindergarten students. It is true that hip-hop music is based solely on rap music; however, refusal to implement hip-hop-based education marginalizes children's experiences with hip-hop's cultural practices and does not allow upper elementary students to engage in critical dialogue regarding all rap music. Also, the culture of hip-hop is present in the lives of young children beyond the element of rap, which is why hip-hop-based education is important to the education field (Love, 2018). Hip-hop-based education, combined with the values of democratic education, offers a complex space in which to teach from the sociopolitical lives of urban learners. By changing teaching methods used in early childhood education classrooms, teachers can begin to understand that hip-hop can be adapted to include not only children's culture but to their learning potential and their cultural identities (Love, 2015). Equally important is that young kindergarten students see their culture is supported and recognized. Based on Lave and Wenger (1991), situated learning states that learning is essentially a social process, where students participate in situated activities with communities of practitioners working toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of the community. Hip-hop based education, expanding on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning, provides a space of communal learning, which influences children's social, emotional, educational, physical, and creative skills. Children as young as 4 years old raised in a hip-hop

community are developing cognitive skills by participating, observing, and being in physical and digital proximity to hip-hop cultural practitioners and influencers. For these reasons, it is critical that early childhood education and elementary education programs explore the situated learning communities of children who engage in meaningful learning through a hip-hop community of learners.

Play is not regarded as a privilege, but as a right. Even though young children engage in play differently, play is a child's right. Play has been diminished in lieu of academic rigor and explicit instruction, both of which have been used in determining that specific educational mandates are met in early childhood education classrooms, especially in low-income school. When play is considered as a privilege, play is permitted to children who are in a dominant group (wealthier students), while those in non-dominant groups (low-income students) are denied the right to play. The reason for this is because young children in their families are blamed for opportunity gaps, as if they were achievement gaps. Play is valuable but can also provide young children opportunities to develop academic knowledge and concepts through authentic, engaged, participative, and agentive ways (Manning et al., 2017). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005) stated that early childhood education has ethical responsibilities to young children. It claims that childhood is a unique and valuable state in the human life cycle and that it commits to supporting children's development and learning, respects individual differences, and helps young children learn to live, play, and work cooperatively. Play is a powerful medium for learning, and it allows young children to enact friendship, fantasy, and fairness. Young children learn about diversity, engage

with familiar and unfamiliar materials, and share their own perspectives and experiences. In play, young children collaborate, make discoveries, take risks, engage in resistance, and plot subversive actions. Play gives young children an opportunity to practice what they have learned. Play allows them to practice and endorse change by asking questions and to develop community.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In a significant study, Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk (2018) asked teachers to describe their play-based learning practices. The researchers found that teachers were divided by the approach they chose to implement play. One group of teachers embedded play within a lesson's goals and objectives. The other group provided lessons and play time separately. The researchers conducted a qualitative study using observations followed by teacher interviews. Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk saw greater student oral language use and development in the embedded play group; surprisingly, they found that teachers were more engaged with the embedded group and used oral language generously to describe and discuss the lesson with the children. In the traditional group, 50% of the teachers reported direct instruction as a valuable context for addressing the learning of reading and writing skills, and small group learning was emphasized as providing a significant opportunity to focus on early reading skills. Teachers felt that free play was important, but it did not provide the same purpose as small group academic learning. Additionally, teachers found play as far less structured and required more planning than direct instruction. Many of them expressed planning as a source of difficulty in the implementation of play-based learning practices. In the interviews, the researchers found

that both groups did agree that there were challenges in implementing play-based lessons and activities. Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk posited that the challenge for teachers might be the higher demands for student academic achievement and mastery of the same standards for reading and writing.

Jay and Knaus (2018) found similar results in teachers' responses to the challenges and barriers of implementing play in the kindergarten curriculum. Using interviews, followed by teacher meetings, Jay and Knaus conducted a qualitative case study to examine teachers' numerous challenges and barriers to implementing play-based learning practices. Many of the teacher participants found there were challenges and barriers to implementing play-based learning practices, which included the availability of resources. Additional resources were needed to implement play-based learning practices with small groups than was originally anticipated. Other teachers described that in addition to the lack of student resources, there were also insufficient teacher resources to assist with small groups. Another challenging factor for both groups of teachers was the impact of time needed to implement play-based learning. Both groups of teachers specified that more time is required to find, organize, and create play-based learning materials. Several teachers had to use their own money to purchase some of the materials not available in their classrooms. Another issue that arose was the inability to teach everything they were expected to teach, which prevented them from implementing play-based learning practices. Teachers reported that they have not received the necessary training to implement play-based learning program (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

Young children in early childhood education programs students need a rich assortment of child-centered, hands-on, play-based experiences and purposeful teaching in order to develop the early literacy and numeracy skills required for future academic achievement success (Jay et al., 2016). High-quality early childhood education programs are essential for young children to engage in for later academic success to be achieved (Anderson & Thomas, 2021; Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018).

The impact of formalization of rigorous instruction in the primary years of school has contributed pressure on schools to improve and enhance early literacy and numeracy outcomes and has resulted in the deficiency of time in the early years' timetable for young children to learn in more active and creative ways (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022; Jay et al., 2016). As a result, in some early childhood classrooms, district and administrative demands are narrowing the curriculum in the early years in order to *teach to the test*, mistaking the value of play-based learning for young children, using long block of formal teaching in early years of school, and misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the meaning of *high-quality* early childhood programs by some educators and professional development providers (Jay et al., 2016; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Play is a child's natural dominant learning approach and contributes to their knowledge and skill development consisting of cognitive, social-emotional, create and physical while also providing a solid foundation for future learning (Jay et al., 2016; Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018; Souto-Manning, 2017). Teachers and young children create learning through play activities, making a bridge between play and more complex learning. It is essential that

early childhood education classrooms retain learning centers and activities that offer ample opportunities to engage in meaningful play-based learning experiences.

Pyle and Danniels (2018) explored teachers' implementation of play-based learning using a basic qualitative study that included interviews with kindergarten classroom teachers. The teachers were grouped into years of teaching experience and various stages of implementing play-based learning practices. One group included teachers who had experience of implementing play-based teaching and learning, and the other group did not have training in play-based pedagogy practices. In their observations, Pyle and Danniels found that teachers realized play is an activity that engages students without the guidance or support of teachers, which impacted the student's social-emotional development. However, the group who did not have sufficient training in teaching play-based learning practices stated there were challenges that prevented kindergarten teachers in determining a balance between meeting academic standards and implementing developmentally age-appropriate practices. A major challenge and barrier the teachers experienced was the role of the teacher during play-based learning and how to teach play-based learning practices in a child-led environment. The most experienced group of teachers recognized play as both a developmentally age-appropriate activity and one that was able to support learning of academic skills other than direct instruction (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

Keung and Fung (2020) encountered similar findings in teachers' responses to the challenges and barriers of implementing a play-based learning program in kindergarten. The researchers used an interpretivist approach to investigate kindergarten teachers'

pedagogy content knowledge in implementing play-based learning practices. Through the teachers' observations and interviews, the researchers found that teachers expressed that play-based learning knowledge and skills play an important role in the implementation of play-based learning practices (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Classroom environments are essential in determining how pedagogical content knowledge shapes teaching practices (Bennett et al., 1997; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2011). Keung and Fung found that pedagogy content knowledge had a significant role in teaching play-based learning practices and involved both pedagogical understanding and practice representation in classroom environments.

In one study, researchers asked teachers to examine the effect of challenges and barriers in the implementation of play-based learning practices with two kindergarten teachers (Fung, 2009; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). The researchers conducted a qualitative approach using an interpretivist theory, along with individual and group interviews and observations. The interviews urged teachers to discuss challenges and barriers they found in the implementation of play-based learning practices. One teacher had a number of years of experience teaching kindergarten and the other teacher had been teaching for two years. The school selected the play-based learning approach, both teachers believed in the importance of play in guiding student academic learning, and both teachers were willing to implement the practice in each of their classrooms. In their observations, Nolan and Paatsch (2018) found that the teachers experienced challenges and barriers with accountability and specifically in the implementation of play-based learning practices. Accountability was shown by focusing on all the content areas, as dictated in the

curriculum. The next challenge/barrier was not having the other members of the school community value the play-based learning approach as an authentic method of teaching and learning, and it was not completely understood by the other teachers, therefore, creating doubts of the significance for the instructional approach (Pyle & Kapler, 2014). In addition, the lack of the understanding and respect of their colleagues made both teachers feel they could not implement the play-based learning practices effectively (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018).

History and Evolution of Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning originated in Germany in 1837. Friedrich Froebel, a philosopher and educator, coined the term *kindergarten* in 1840 and renamed his school where he taught children ages 3 to 7 (Allen, 2006; Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Fromberg, 2006; Reinhold et al., 2017). The term kindergarten means *garden of children*. Froebel described his philosophy of kindergarten as teaching the body, the mind, and the soul through play, outdoor experiences, music, art, movement, creativity, and independence (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Mraz et al., 2016). Froebel stated the purpose of play-based learning was to exert influence over the child in correspondence with the child's nature; to strengthen their bodily capabilities; to exercise their senses through experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving; to engage the awakening of the mind through individuals and objects; and to become acquainted with nature (Bryant & Clifford, 2011; Chervenak, 1992). Froebel wrote music, plays, stories, riddles, and created games. He developed the first play-based learning curriculum, which consisted of a series of 10 objects and exercises that he called gifts. The gifts were inserted into a

number of learning activities, and teachers were urged to direct students in recreating the geometrical arrangements (Reinhold et al., 2017). Gift one included six balls made with different materials to teach similarity, discriminations, and perception. Gift two included a variety of solids (wooden sphere, cube, and cylinder) to teach time, space, shape, and motion. Gifts three, four, five, and six represented the concept of decomposing the cube into small cubes, small cuboids/rectangular prisms, or triangular prisms of different sizes (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Reinhold et al., 2017). His play-based learning approach consisted of finger play, songs, dances, and games taken from German folklore. This model recognizes that young children can learn through the manipulation of a variety of physical and playful activities. Utilizing Pestalozzi's framework, Froebel believed children achieved a deeper understanding of the world around them when academic opportunities are provided to interact with individuals and objects through concrete activities, comprised of manipulating available hands-on materials. Froebel emphasized that children's play fosters a significant role in their social-emotional development.

In 1856, Margarethe Schurz utilized Froebel's play-based learning model classroom in the United States (Fromberg, 2006). However, she taught the play-based curriculum in German for her own children, family, and friends through games, songs, and group activities. She included the Froebelian practice of circle time, which has continued to present-day play-based learning classrooms (Fromberg, 2006). Elizabeth Peabody conducted the first English-speaking play-based learning classroom in Boston (Fromberg, 2006). Through these Froebelian-influenced play-based learning instructions, mainly serving middle-class families utilizing half-day programs, the Froebelian method

quickly went from child-centered to a more teacher directness approach to teaching and learning (Swiniarski, 2017). Play-based learning programs continued to be introduced by the St. Louis Public School District for 5 years. These play-based learning classes were led by Susan Blow, who provided a rigorous academic instruction to kindergarten children (Fromberg, 2006). The students' parents paid a fee if they wanted their children to attend kindergarten. At this time, the play-based learning programs were privately supported until the middle of the 20th century.

Social Reform Movement and Progressive Education

In the late 19th century, the Dewey educational philosophy was shaped by the progressive education movement, which allowed him to reject the traditional approaches of early childhood education students (Castle, 2018). The progressive education philosophy indicates that teachers should teach early learners to think critically instead of depending on rote memorization. Dewey argued that the process of learning by doing was at the heart of this type of academic learning. The concept is known as experiential learning and uses hands-on projects that allow students to learn by actively engaging in activities that put their knowledge to use (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). Dewey argued that by using a traditional form of academic instruction, students would become empty passive learners. He thought that education should be a journey of experiences, building upon each other to help students create and understand experiences. Dewey did not agree that education should be based solely on emotions and idealization of the learning and felt this type of education allowed students to choose what they wanted to learn (Williams, 2017). Dewey felt that this type of learning did not allow early learners ongoing experiences in

solving real-life experiences, and once the problem outcomes are determined, subsequent solutions to the same corresponding problems can be developed in student's habits and intelligence (Castle, 2018; Pavlis & Gkiosos, 2017). Dewey's theory of learning by doing focused on students as naturally active, curious, and exploring learners. The instruction needs to be sensitive to learners and guide in a manner to increase their participation in diverse ways. Like Aristole, Dewey believed that the role of education is to encourage, inspire, impact, and guide early learners to foster self-regulation, collaboration, inquiry, exploration, creativity, and autonomy (Leshkovska & Spaseva, 2016). Dewey emphasized that providing the appropriate classroom environment evokes and cultivates learning habits.

Maria Montessori created numerous play-based learning activities for young children that focused on the development of their initiative and natural abilities, specifically through natural play (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). This type of learning allowed children to grow at their own pace and provided teachers with a new understanding of child development. Teachers arranged special classroom settings to meet the needs of students in three developmentally age groups: 2 years to 2.5 years, 2.5 years to 6 years, and 6 years to 12 years. The students were allowed to choose their own learning activities and worked on them independently. These activities involved exploration, manipulation, order, repetition, abstraction, and communication. Young children were encouraged in the first two age groups to use their senses to explore and manipulate materials in their natural environment. The children in the older age group considered abstract concepts using reasoning, imagination, and creativity. Montessori continued her methodology and

her model of human development as she expanded her pedagogy work and extended it to older children (Thayer-Bacon, 2012).

20th Century Models of Play-Based Learning

The Reggio Emilia approach is an instructional philosophy and pedagogy developed by Loris Malaguzzi and focused on preschool and primary education. This approach is a student-centered and constructivist, self-guided curriculum that uses self-directed, experiential learning in relationship-driven settings (Hewett, 2001). The method is based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and community through exploration, discovery, and play. At the core of this philosophy is an assumption that young children form their personality during the early years of development and that they are endowed with "a hundred languages," through which they can express their ideas (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 237). The goal of the Reggio Emilia approach is to teach children how to use symbolic languages, for example, painting, sculpting, and drama, in everyday life (Gandini, 1993).

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is based on the premise that young children should have control over the direction of their learning; learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, and observing; have a relationship with other children and with material items in the world they are allowed to explore; and have endless ways and opportunities to express themselves (Albrecht, 1996). The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching young children puts the natural development of children, as well as the close relationships they share, with their environment at the center of its philosophy (Gandini, 1993). Reggio Emilia's foundation is centered around the uniqueness of the child, which

fosters education in the young learners to promote the best possible integration among children's 100 languages (Edwards et al., 1993). In the Reggio Emilia approach, there is a belief that children have rights and should be given opportunities to develop their potential and are considered as "knowledge bearers" (Edwards et al., 1993, p. 96) Children are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas to bring meaning to knowledge, and their understanding depends on themselves, others, and the social context (Dodd-Nufrio et al., 1993; Hewett, 2001). Motivated by this belief, children are regarded as powerful, competent, creative, and curious. The instruction at Reggio Emilia schools takes place in the form of projects with opportunities to explore, observe, hypothesize, question, discuss, and clarify understanding (Gandini, 1993). Children are also seen as social beings, and a focus is made on the child in relation to other children, families, teachers, and the community, rather than on each child in isolation. One of the most challenging characteristics of the Reggio Emilia method is the solicitation of diverse perspectives regarding young children's needs, interests, and abilities, with the continued confidence of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, which contributes in a meaningful way to the determination of school experiences (Edwards et al., 1993).

Language Acquisition and Sociocultural Approaches

The whole language model is an instructional philosophy for teaching and learning started by early childhood education teachers, with its foundations in scientific research and theory (Goodman, 1986; Huang, 2014). It is based on a constructivist learning theory and is considered a top-down model. The top-down model comprises the concept of whole language based on a belief that the system should be seen as a whole

and not as an assortment of parts. The whole language model is strongly associated with the work of Kenneth Goodman. Reading and writing involves students learning in any social context that enables them to develop literacy before they start formal school instruction (Goodman, 1986). It is described as a concept that embodies both a philosophy of language development, as well as the instructional approaches. The whole language movement placed an emphasis on making meaning in both reading and writing, utilizing a variety of constructivist methods to learn literacy skills and concepts (Goodman, 1986). The whole language concept focuses on the student's understanding through high-quality and culturally diverse literature. The student expresses their written ideas through essays, exploratory narratives, or daily journal writing, and integrates literacy into other content areas, specifically math, science, and social studies (Goodman, 1986; Huang, 2014; LeDoux, 2007). An important component of the instructional method is that learning is driven by high-quality content, participation, and student engagement.

One significant problem with whole language is how teachers interpret the meaning, its components, and how it should be implemented (Kiran, 2020). Another important feature to whole language is that the approach should not be considered a technique or a series of activities, but a philosophy that impacts teachers' academic choices (Goodman, 1986; Huang, 2014; LeDoux, 2007). In using the whole language approach in teaching literacy skills, it is important that the teacher presents students with the appropriate level of activity intensity to be successful (Huang, 2014). In whole language classrooms, teachers set up learning centers around previously taught skills and concepts and thematic units and facilitate the integration of language processes

(Goodman, 1986). Specific writing or book centers are prepared with ongoing units, as well as general topics. Students are given choices to ensure resources are available and activities are completed. Materials for whole language can include literature programs, big books, predictable books, discussion groups, authentic stories instead of basal readers, acceptance of adaptive spelling, and emphasis in the writing process. In addition, rules are made up for receiving and returning materials, submitting completed work, and moving around the room, and teachers circulate, observe, conference, and ensure everyone follows the rules and completes assignments (Goodman, 1986).

21st Century Learner-Centered Instruction

In recent years, learner-centered instruction as an approach for teaching and learning has become extremely popular and encouraged in education (Cullen et al., 2012; Weimer, 2013). This is a technique that has influenced several diverse types of instructional methods that changed the teacher's role from the presentation of skills and concepts to becoming more facilitators in student learning. In the past, teachers focused on their teaching rather than on student learning. Learner-centered instruction is a vast instructional approach based on foundational changes in curriculum planning and pedagogy in the 1970s and 1980s (Darsih, 2018). Learner-centered instruction is a method in which students take an active role in the learning process (Cullen et al., 2012; Darsih, 2018; Weimer, 2013). Using the learner-centered approach to learning, teachers work as facilitators of learning instead of lecturers. The teacher's role in the learner-centered classroom is to create a climate of optimal learning, demonstrate adequate student behavior, influence student-to-student learning, and offer immediate feedback

during the learning process. Additionally, it promotes in-depth learning and converts

students into independent learners (Cullen et al., 2012).

Learner-centered instruction consists of methods that concentrate on the needs of

the learner, objectives, and goals; methods that allow students to assume control of their

learning; curriculum that includes teacher feedback and student discussions; and

approaches that allow for creativity and innovation that strengthen students' competence

and self-worth (Hanewicz et al., 2017). The learner-centered method also provides

sufficient space for students to learn based on their interests, abilities, and learning styles.

Throughout student learning, the teacher and the students learn how to write, study,

summarize the text, and work effectively with other students. The students learn that the

individual content area is not only the responsibility of the teacher but also the

responsibility of the student. Students are required to learn effectively, and teachers need

to create an environment in which there is interaction between the teachers and the

students (Hanewicz et al., 2017).

Theory and Pedagogy of Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning is described as an effective academic pedagogy of enhancing

student learning through hands-on learning experiences (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Play-

based learning incorporates developmentally age-appropriate learning activities that

include exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving, as

the child engages with themselves, individuals, and objects (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor &

Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018).

Teachers who implement play-based learning practices take an active role in guiding

students' interactions and in increasing students' motivation and interest to explore concepts and ideas (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018). Through this academic model, young students acquire and practice important academic skills within a playful context. Researchers have found, however, that teachers reported challenges in embedding play-based pedagogy practices into their academic instruction in kindergarten classrooms. (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018).

Assessment

Kindergarten teachers are faced with a tremendous amount of teaching and assessing daily. Current academic reforms throughout the United States have given rise to fundamental shifts in kindergarten classrooms (Pyle et al., 2017). There has been a significant growth in academic outcomes expected of students by the time they begin first grade. Due to the ever-increasing accountability in early childhood education, the shift has been most optimized with kindergarten teachers, who are required to utilize a diverse set of tests, such as diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, to measure and monitor student growth (Gullo, 2006). From 2016 to present, assessment has taken a greater focus in math and literacy academic practice, specifically regarding academic learning targets, with a focus on standards-based measures occurring throughout formative and summative learning periods (Martlew et al., 2011; Pyle et al., 2020). The growth of monitoring student achievement and development through assessments, along with the effective use of formative assessments to support student learning, has increasingly become significant in early childhood education (Deluca et al., 2020). Significantly, this shift has amplified academic outcomes in kindergarten students;

although, it has not replaced previous and long-standing social and personal development. Academic standards have been added to curriculum expectations, requiring teachers to use assess-driven teaching to support both academic and socio-personal learning outcomes in their classroom (Danniels et al., 2020).

Play and Gender

Research has shown that girls and boys tend to play independently; however, they tend to play in different areas and with different objects (Prioletta & Pyle, 2017). In most cases, it is unlikely for kindergarten girls to play with blocks, while boys seem to be more engaged with building activities, such as, towers, tall buildings, car garages, or airplanes. Girls are more inclined to play in the dramatic play center, often set up with kitchen sets and dolls, dressing up in costumes, or in the drawing area (Cavanaugh et al., 2017). Gendered play is often considered as girls and boys playing independently and having environmental and instinctive selections (Cavanaugh et al., 2017). Prioletta and Pyle (2017) highlighted that families, schools, and pop culture influence girls' and boys' play preferences, with their preferences based on their gender. Based on parent-child interactions, Cavanaugh et al. (2017) found that girls tended to select cooperative activities, such as playing dress up or in the kitchen area, and boys were most likely to engage in more physical activities.

Socioeconomic Status

Low socioeconomic students are more likely to initiate their schooling with limited literacy, oral and written language, and socialization skills without the benefit of play-based learning practices (Cavanaugh et al., 2017). Student development is facilitated

by playing, including cognitive and oral development, as well as literacy and social skills through play-learning skills. With play-based learning practices, low socioeconomic students are able to significantly increase their test scores in academic content areas and in their socialization abilities (Muijs & Reynolds, 2017). During pretend play, students have shown an improvement in cognitive thinking, where they can think flexibly and divergently, problem solve, sequence their thoughts, and develop concepts (Mraz et al., 2016). Elaborate play scores also indicate that students can pre-plan their own play, and these cognitive skills are vital in assisting children's learning throughout their schooling related to language and narrative competence (Mraz et al., 2016).

Technology

The role of technology in supporting kindergarten teachers' assessment of learning practices is crucial as they are faced with curricular mandates to ensure that academic and developmental goals are focused on the context of play (Danniels et al., 2020). Play activities do not necessarily produce concrete results that can be assessed by teachers; therefore, visual methods of assessment through the use of technology can help to capture the learning processes that occur when children engage in play-based pedagogy learning activities (DeLuca et al., 2020; Pyle et al, 2020). Digital instruments support the curricular shifts in play-based kindergarten towards assessing the learning process rather than physical products of learning. Visual methods can help to capture the learning skills of children through the recording of children's learning experiences in order to gain insight into young children's capabilities (Danniels et al., 2020).

Social-Emotional Development

Academic achievement in the primary years is based on the foundation of children's social and emotional skills and strategies. Kindergarten teachers regard social-emotional skills and motivation to be key areas of importance in the development of young children (Kirk & Jay, 2018). Play-based learning provides the best environment in guiding young children's social and emotional development. This has become an important factor in child development, because through play, children learn self-assertion, negotiation, collaboration, self-regulation, and compromise (Dinnerstein, 2016; Mraz et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Students learn how to present their case and come as close as possible to the desired outcome without displeasing their partner. In addition, play enables children to develop coping strategies and contributes to their emotional understanding, emotional health, socialization skills, and cognitive linguistic capabilities, which emerge in the early years as indicators of successful outcomes later in life (Kirk & Jay, 2018).

Teacher Perception

Guiding young children's development is a central factor for kindergarten teachers. Many teachers report that play contributes to children's holistic development, as well as to specific developmental areas, such as social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). In addition, play lays the foundation for learning and provides a connection between play and learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Mraz et al., 2016). However, teachers have experienced challenges and barriers to implementing play-based learning. These challenges and barriers are compounded by policy mandates

and curricular concerns, parental attitudes and beliefs, teacher training, peer pressure from other teachers, structural challenges, and student characteristics (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018).

Challenges and Barriers

Play has been identified as a unique process for children to handle stress (Mraz et al., 2016). Many researchers have emphasized the importance of play in dealing with daily emotions and encouraging children's resilience and wellbeing during difficult times, for example, COVID-19 (Capurso & Ragni, 2016; Jensen et al., 2019; Marcelo & Yates, 2014; Russ, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 2009; Whitebread et al., 2012). For those who are experiencing conflict and crisis, play offers a beneficial release during times of turmoil, providing a sense of normality and routine (UNICEF, 2018). Play provides students to process vents in an accessible manner, acting as a protective safeguard during times of hardship and grief (Berson & Baggerly, 2009; Chatterjee, 2018). In addition, researchers have stressed the role of play in enabling the expression of emotions within a safe context (Rao, 2020; Rao & Gibson, 2019). Play offers a natural medium that gives students a way to express their emotions, anxieties, and fears that they may not be able to communicate (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

There is increasing evidence that play has a significant role in the development of oral language, early literacy, and academic learning (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Although some teachers support play-based learning practices as an instrument of teaching and learning, many have averted to using direct instruction for teaching early academic skills. Teachers have reported challenges in trying to implement play-based

learning practices within the context of play and learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

Tensions between academic and developmental perspectives towards learning and play

have been reported among teachers, revealing some disagreement between mandated

standards and preferred instructional practices (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

A decade ago, Howard (2010) conducted a study in which the findings revealed

that 77% of teachers reported the leading barriers to play-based learning practices

resulted from insufficient opportunities for students to engage in play-based learning

activities. Forty-two percent of teachers responded that the barriers resulted from

availability of resources and from students' differing play ability or inability to play.

Johnson (1994) and Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004) have argued structural and

psychological barriers prevent successful implementation of play-based learning

practices. On the structural level, researchers have found that there has been a reduction

of licensed teachers, creating a shortage of the classroom teacher-to-child ratio, thereby

affecting the accessibility of high-quality physical resources in the form of teacher-

student engagement and interactions (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Most importantly,

a lack of monetary resources has prevented teachers the ability to provide and use the

necessary materials to implement play-based learning practices effectively. A recent

change in the development of new curriculum demands for students in early childhood

classrooms has presented demands focused on mastering learning objectives and

curriculum standards that has significantly affected the student role in student learning

(Mraz et al., 2016).

Another challenge is psychological barriers, including, but not limited to the teacher's content knowledge of and understanding of play-based learning practices and teachers' attitudes towards play and related feelings of inadequacy (Keung & Fung, 2020). Play-based learning practices have been indicative of the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges faced by teachers who described that they needed to integrate theoretical understanding and pedagogical ideas, most often under administrative, curriculum initiatives, and resource limitations (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). In another study, focusing on Hong Kong's teacher implementation of play-based learning practices, there has been a pedagogical shift reflecting more on theoretical understanding of curriculum targeted objectives and an acceptance on the need for flexibility in the implementation of play-based learning that is essential in successful engagement of early childhood students (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004).

From the viewpoint of teacher training and theoretical understanding, while it is expected for teachers to serve as play professionals, it has been found that the level of training is insufficient compared to the training received by other play professionals, such as play therapists and hospital play specialists (Fung, 2009; Howard, 2010). Even though there have been positive attitudes towards play and learning, teachers have reported that they have been unsure of their role within play and have adopted a watch and see approach (Bautista et al., 2019).

It was noted, a small proportion of teachers do not receive the necessary training that will help them to implement play-based pedagogy practices in kindergarten classrooms (Winton et al., 2015). Without the sufficient training and preparation, teachers

will turn to rigorous instruction to meet the needs of academic learning and achievement

(Gronlund & Rendon, 2017). Forty-two percent of teachers described the inability of

implementing play-based learning practices resulting from the readiness of resources.

Play-based curriculum will promote children's flexibility to learning and autonomous

thinking, unlike rigorous instruction, which will hinder a teacher's ability to foster critical

and analytical thinking (Kiran, 2020; Mraz, et al, 2016).

It is important to understand that teachers with a stronger knowledge of play-

based learning practices, sufficient time, and the appropriate space can function

effectively and achieve a sense of empowerment (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Play-

based curriculum will promote children's flexibility to learning and autonomous thinking,

unlike rigorous instruction, which will hinder a teacher's ability to foster critical and

analytical thinking (Kiran, 2020; Mraz et al., 2016). Even though teachers were able to

overcome the challenges and implement more play-based learning practices, they felt

pressure from administration, parents, and other teachers for more rigorous instruction

(Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Howard, 2010). With the added pressures being placed on

teachers from different sources, it is likely that there would be a lack of consistency in

when, how, and what extent play-based learning practices should be used in kindergarten

classrooms. Ninety-one percent of teachers who participated in the Fesseha and Pyle

(2016) study acknowledged that play was an integral part of the kindergarten classroom;

however, only 19% of the teachers indicated that play-based learning was still being used

in their classrooms. The study's findings demonstrated that teachers' understanding of

play and play-based learning was derived from diverse constructs that require different

pedagogical methods. In order to support the development of a kindergarten program that implements play-based learning, 71% of the teachers expressed having little to no training in play-based learning practices (Bautista, 2019). Both of these studies are not current in what is happening kindergarten classrooms today, how changes are taking place, and how teachers are reacting during the year of the pandemic.

Play-based learning has assumed a pivotal role in sustaining students' development and learning during the COVID-19 crisis due to the addition of remote learning in most schools across the city and the country (Egan et al., 2020). At the Centre for the Developing Child conference, Jack Shonkoff described play as the best significant method where students can be encouraged during the pandemic to reduce stress and build resilience during times of uncertainty (Schindler et al., 2019). During the pandemic, play has taken an unprecedented role in helping students make sense of what is happening in their lives, especially since there has been a surplus of student absences in schools. The United Nations noted that while children were not affected by the pandemic, they risked being among the biggest victims in terms of the potentially profound effects on their wellbeing (UNESCO, 2020). Egan et al.'s (2020) study revealed that most children missed their friends, playing with other children, and routines and structure of early childhood education and care due to the closure of their setting and other schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents described the negative effect of the school closures in these settings on their children's social and emotional wellbeing, which resulted in tantrums, anxiety, clinginess, boredom, and under stimulation (Egan et al., 2020).

English Language Learners

Learning through play is a common teaching and learning method in early childhood education environments. It is considered a natural and heathy activity for young children. Researchers have highlighted the significance of teaching literacy skills through play-based learning practices to young children. However, English language learners have often not performed well on academic achievement tests, compared to general education students (Banerjee et al., 2016). Also, English language learners are consistently at risk for communication and language delays, which are fundamental components in the foundation of early literacy skills.

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Summary and Conclusion

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In this literature review, I emphasized the significance of the implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. In providing this academic model, teachers can implement developmentally age-appropriate learning activities and can take an active part in supporting students' interactions, motivation, and engagement in learning key literacy skills. A major challenge in the implementation of play-based learning practices in the kindergarten classroom is the lack of teacher training in universities and college teacher education that provides teachers the knowledge to implement play-based pedagogy learning practices.

Over 50 journal articles were used containing the findings of studies from researchers who examined the implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms (Aras, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2016; Bautista et al., 2019; Bubikova-Moan, et al., 2019; Danniels & Pyle, 2018). The researchers demonstrated that

play is an important component and highly valued as an academic model in enhancing student learning through a variety of learning experiences, exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving for general education students, English language learner students, and low socioeconomics students (Blair & Raver, 2015). The researchers emphasized the significance of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The researchers concluded that four of the most common challenges in the implementation of play and literacy learning included using direct instruction, implementing less structured learning strategies, having difficulty in planning, and having feelings of uncertainty in implementing properly designed play-based learning in the classroom (Pyle & Alaca, 2018). In this literature review, I examined the gap in the literature that specifically focused on the challenges that prevent teachers' ability to integrate play-based instruction in order to guide inquiry, exploration, and problem solving in kindergarten classrooms (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Nicholson, 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2018; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018)

The problem addressed in this study is that in an urban elementary school in the Northeastern United States little is known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter when implementing play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Furthermore, this research study provided insights that guided play helps to enhance the practice of play-based learning pedagogies for kindergarten students and provides the training teachers need to effectively implement play-based pedagogy practices.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed discussion for the methodology used in this research study to explore kindergarten teachers' strategies in the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. As a kindergarten teacher, implementing play-based learning practices has been difficult in meeting the needs of the curriculum and district demands. To compensate the mandated rigorous instruction along with these demands, I implemented structured-based play-learning practices in specific content areas. The required skills learned through play-based instructional practices allows students to explore, experiment, engage, and collaborate, rather than trying to master the skills that are not developmentally age-appropriate. Even though there have been numerous research studies on play-based learning, there are limited studies that provide an in-depth understanding on the implementation of play-based learning practices and the curricula of kindergarten classrooms.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Kindergarten teachers' ability to overcome the barriers or challenges in the implementation of play-based learning practices impacts academic learning in primary grades. The problem addressed in this study was that little was known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms in a community school district outside a large metropolitan city in the Northeast United States. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how kindergarten teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and understand the barriers to implementation in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. In this study, I explored how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula and how teachers described the barriers of time constraints, availability of classroom space, materials, administrative and curricular demands, and sufficient training encountered when implementing play-based learning practices. Chapter 3 includes a description of (a) the research design; (b) my role as the researcher; (c) the methodology approach as it related to the participant selection, instrumentation, and data collection; and (d) transparency and ethical procedures for this study.

In the literature review, I identified the problem that little was known about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. Kindergarten education has experienced dramatic curricular changes in

recent years, specifically implementing rigorous academic learning and a shift away from play-based learning practices (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Teachers have considered play and learning as two separate components, and a major obstacle has been trying to implement academic learning and play to meet the current administration and curricular demands (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Researchers have agreed that play-based learning practices play an integral role in kindergarten education (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2018). Developmentally age-appropriate practices are enhanced through exploration, experimentation, engagement, and collaboration (Dinnerstein, 2016; Mraz et al., 2016). Kindergarten teachers reported challenges in balancing traditional instruction and play-based learning practices for effective student learning (Keung & Fung, 2020). Based on state standards and academic accountability, an increase in rigorous instruction has resulted in less implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten. (Pyle et al, 2018; Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). Implementation of play-based learning practices demonstrated that kindergarten students performed significantly better on oral language development and literacy than students in traditional transmissive classrooms (Stagnitti et al, 2015; Vogt al., 2018). The barriers teachers reported are insufficient training, administration, and curricular demands to ensure students master high academic standards, large classroom capacity, and lack of time to effectively support play (Bautista, 2019). Kindergarten teachers are faced with implementing instructional learning and play-based learning practices to meet the current curricular demands (Pyle & Danniels, 2018).

The conceptual framework for this study was based on situated learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Situated learning theory is an academic method that follows the work of Dewey's (1978) pragmatism and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural cognitivism. Dewey and Vygotsky agreed students learn by actively participating in the learning experiences. Situated learning proposes that learning takes place through personal relationships between people and connects prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave (1988) observed the importance of the social construction of learning and how individuals in groups attain knowledge. Through the social learning theory, Lave proposed that learning is social and comes from participating in daily activities, not from an isolated process.

The educational change theory developed by Fullan (2007) was also used for this study. Fullan found that teachers are unsure of how they can impact student learning, and often teaching decisions are made quickly without the opportunity to reflect or think about the student's learning process. The educational change theory is a change in practice that consists of initiation, implementation, and continuation. The theory helps teachers focus on the implication of change that teachers and schools need to make and how it can promote the changes that will address the students' needs.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to describe and understand the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter

when implementing play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The RQs that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe play-based learning practices in their instructional design?

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe the barriers to implementing play-based learning in academic instruction?

In this basic qualitative study, I explored how teachers implement play-based practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The study provided a significant analysis of how play-based learning practices and curricula can enhance academic learning in kindergarten classrooms.

In this basic qualitative study, the subjective view and method were essential to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers in the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in their classrooms (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, the focus is on process, meaning, and understanding, where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis that it is inductive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This basic qualitative study included in-depth interviewing. Teachers' lesson plans were used as a scaffolding support during the interview process to guide participants in recalling and describing their perceptions of the barriers regarding the implementation of play-based learning practices. The lesson plans were not analyzed.

I considered other methodologies. Quantitative methodology is used to test or confirm existing theories or assumptions and involves a large number of participants. Quantitative research focuses on the facets of individuals' behaviors that can be quantified and patterned instead of exploring them and interpreting their meaning (Rahman, 2020). The qualitative method was appropriate for current study because it had the potential to offer in-depth information about the topic of the study while using a small number of participants. The use of quantitative methods is appropriate for researchers who aim to investigate relationships between the variables within the phenomenon of the study based on numerical and statistical data. Quantitative research usually includes a large number of participants and often uses survey methods with a predetermined set of closed-ended questions for the data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The quantitative method was not best suited for the current study because it focuses on statistical measurements using polls and surveys with closed-ended questions. Predetermined closed-ended questions leave no room to probe for answers to gain more insights about the phenomenon of the research (Rahman, 2020). According to Miles et al. (2014), when analyzing quantitative data qualitatively, interpreting conflicting results can be difficult; therefore, mixed-methods research was not best suited for this study. For instance, participants may have rated a strategy highly on a numerical scale but had negative opinions about the strategy when probed further during an individual interview. Mixed-methods research requires the researcher to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Miles et al., 2014). Mixed-methods research tends to be time-consuming and challenging to conduct, especially if qualitative and quantitative methods

are carried out simultaneously (Almalki, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The mixed-methods approach was not chosen because there was no need to collect quantitative data based on the focus of this study.

Role of the Researcher

As the basic qualitative researcher, my responsibility was to be a nonbiased observer and listener to ensure accurate documentation of each participant's experiences and perspectives. My role as a basic qualitative study researcher required attentiveness to the documentation of interviews and journal notes (see Creswell, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). My relationship with the participants was as the researcher. I did not include any participants with whom I had previously or currently worked; therefore, I minimized bias and supported the validity of the data collected in this study. Basic qualitative studies represent participants' perspectives, and the researcher should have knowledge of and address the subjective nature of the study to ensure the data are analyzed so that the researcher's bias is minimized. Inclusion of direct quotations from in-depth interviews, descriptive observations of explicit document notations, authentic reflective and reflexive journaling, and regular debriefing with the participants provided substantiated evidence for credible data collection, the analytic process, and the attentiveness to elements of bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The authenticity and credibility of data collection and analysis informed the current research on the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices in kindergarten classrooms (see Maxwell, 1992).

Methodology

In this basic qualitative study, I used an analytic lens to examine the participants' personal, theoretical, and empirical extensions of play-based pedagogical practices. I explored how teachers implement play-based practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The participants were selected because they understood the need for play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. This study helped them articulate their ideas and provided in-depth analysis of the phenomenon from the kindergarten teachers' perspectives. The study may provide further insight and understanding of the implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms.

Participant Selection

I used a snowball sampling strategy. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that consists of the researcher accessing potential participants through contact information provided by other participants in the study (Marcus et al., 2017; Noy, 2008). This technique repeats itself as the participants refer the researcher to other participants who are contacted by the researcher (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling is considered a generally accepted form of sampling in qualitative studies through many disciplines in the social sciences. This type of sampling is used to access potential participants in a qualitative study when other ways of contacting participants are not available (Marcus et al., 2017). Given the use of snowball sampling in the current study, superintendents' and principals' approvals to conduct research were not required because

the study was not district related but rather district supported. However, school principals were informed that this study would involve their teachers as the study's participants outside of school hours. The study was conducted as social science research by an independent researcher, as opposed to participating in the school district and the school itself. Research flyers were sent out through my school's email to kindergarten teachers, and the first kindergarten teacher to respond was my first snowball participant. The first participant was given the flyer and invitation. The flyers were given to other kindergarten teachers, and I followed up with an email asking if everyone had received the flyer. These steps were repeated until the desired sample size was reached. Through this sampling strategy, the selection of kindergarten teachers was guided by the following criteria: (a) be a kindergarten teacher of 3 or more years, (b) use play-based learning practices in their kindergarten classroom, and (c) possess knowledge of play-based pedagogy practices.

The sample size of 12 kindergarten teachers was selected because it would provide the study with greater depth of the phenomenon of interest, and participants would provide information-rich responses due to the small sample size. For this study, each participant presented their perspective of the barriers related to the implementation of play-based learning practices. The target sample of kindergarten teacher participants meeting the inclusion criteria supported the collection of information pertaining to participants' perceptions and allowed for those insights to refine the understanding of the implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The

interview guide provided structured guidance for the participants' responses and my thinking processes throughout the study.

Instrumentation

The interview guide provided the semistructured outline of framed open-ended questions that aligned with the purpose and research questions. The design of each question was intended to provide in-depth insights from the kindergarten teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices (see Patton, 2015). This basic qualitative study provided information to gain insight and understanding of the phenomenon with an iterative in-depth interview process. The interviews included well-designed questions that produced data-aligned responses from experienced kindergarten teachers regarding implementation of play-based instruction (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview guide was a framework for an informal discussion to elicit teachers' experiences of implementing play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms.

The inquiry concepts of play-based learning practices, as they related to academic instruction, were embedded in each question and in the perceptions of how seasoned kindergarten teachers experienced the implementation of play-based learning instruction. The interview guide consisted of the following play-based terminology: academic learning, academic rigor, barriers, child-centered learning, gender role, instructional model, pedagogy practices, play, and play-based curriculum. Using exact terminology of play-based learning practices provided validity to the study. In addition, multiple probe questions were included in the interview guide that, depending on the participant's

response to the initial question, determined the path of the conversation to probe further for the in-depth understanding. The in-depth interview process provided for follow-up interviews and interactions to clarify research concepts and to develop credibility to the study (see Patton, 2015).

The interview guide included a checklist of legal and ethical procedures reviewed at the beginning and end of each interview. I used this checklist to ensure that all procedures were followed and met researcher standards (see Patton, 2015). The procedures included confidentiality, transcript approval, risk-free interviews and interactions, informed consent, and the reminder that the interview was strictly voluntary throughout the process.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This basic qualitative study interviews and document collection during the interview process with kindergarten teachers occurred in one video conferencing meeting for 2 months, according to the implementation timeline.

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Time frame	Data collection task
Weeks 1–2	Research flyers sent out through my school's email to kindergarten teachers. The first kindergarten teacher to respond was my first snowball participant. The first snowball participant was given the flyers and invitations. The flyers were given to the kindergarten teachers and followed up with an email asking if everyone had received the flyer and if there was anyone interested to be a participant in the study.
	Sent out letters of invitations to formalize the snowball sampling.
Weeks 3–4	Collected informed consent/demographic questionnaire forms and scheduled of interviews.
	Continuation of recruitment of study participants.
Weeks 5–7	Interviews through video format.
Week 8	Data analysis.
	Debriefed and closure with participants, reminding each of the data privacy, confidential participation in the research analysis, and reporting and security.
	Shred all documents, along with the data collection, after completion.
	An electronic Amazon $25 gift voucher was given to each participant to show the researcher's gratitude for their time and effort in supporting this study.

Since COVID-19 caused dramatic difficulties in finding participants from the desired school districts, I used a snowball sampling strategy for this study. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that consists of the researcher accessing potential participants through contact information provided by other participants in the study (Marcus et al., 2017; Noy, 2008). This technique repeated itself as the participants refer the researcher to other participants who were contacted by the researcher and then, in turn, refers her or him to other participants (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling is considered a generally accepted form of sampling in qualitative studies through many

disciplines in social sciences. Primarily, this type of sampling is used to access possible participants in a qualitative study when other means of contacting participants are not available (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the snowball sampling did not require the study participants to be associated with a school within a specific school district in the Northeastern area of the United States. There were no unusual circumstances during the data collection process.

Although, I planned to do the interviews face-to-face, due to the current COVID-19 situation affecting academic learning, the interviews were conducted through video conferencing, with day and time determined by participant preference. With the use of snowball sampling in this study, superintendents', and principals' approvals to conduct research were not required for this study, because it is not district related but rather district supported. The research study flyer was provided to each prospective participant to inform potential participants of the research study. When a participant expressed participation interest, I sent an electronic invitation to each potential kindergarten teacher, which contained a link to the notice consent, followed by the preinterview questionnaire. The consent form provided an ethical and procedural process for each potential participant. The preinterview questionnaire followed the Notice of Informed Consent that the participant returned to indicate they had read and understood the consent and agreed to participate in the study. The preinterview questionnaire confirmed nonwork preferred contact information or preferred email for communication and confirmed the inclusion criteria for the participant was met. The immediate follow-up and scheduling for interview occurred by email upon receipt of the participant's returned notice of

consent/preinterview questionnaire. If after one week, I had not secured at least 10

participants, I would have resent the notice of consent/preinterview questionnaire. If this

process did not provide the saturation of proposed participants, I contacted additional

kindergarten teachers and repeated the process. After one more week, if I have not

secured at least 10 participants, after sending the consent/preinterview questionnaire a

second time, I would had posted a recruitment flyer to social media sites (Facebook,

Instagram, and LinkedIn,) and Walden's participation pool to recruit participants who

may have met the criteria for the study. I included at the bottom of the notice of

consent/preinterview questionnaire that all participants may either print or save a copy of

their signed notice of consent for those participants selected from the snowball sampling

strategy.

The alignment of research questions, interview questions, and interview responses

was an essential step to inform the insights of this study. The use of the interview guide

as the data collection through data analysis promoted an in-depth understanding of each

kindergarten teacher's perspectives and experiences in the implementation of play-based

learning practices. Prior to the start of the study, participants a demographic questionnaire

to determine if each of the participants met the criteria of the research study.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers

implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classroom and to

understand the barriers teachers encounter when implementing play-based learning

practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers

to greater implementation will help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they may want to do once the barriers are removed. In understanding the barriers, the collection of these data provided information on teachers' perceptions of the barriers when implementing play-based learning strategies in the classroom. Through the descriptive data analysis, this study sought to answer the research questions of how kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based learning practices and curricula in academic instruction and how kindergarten teachers describe the barriers to implementing play-based learning practices in academic instruction.

Teachers brought a sample lesson plan using play-based instruction as a support for the interview protocol and process. This visual and concrete support of the lesson plan helped the participant in describing how they implement play-based learning practices in their instructional design. The discussion of the instructional design for play-based learning was a component of the interview protocol. The use of a lesson plan example served as a scaffold in the interview process to support the participant in demonstrating their knowledge, extending their perceptions with examples in connection to the implementation of play-based learning practices for the lesson. In basic qualitative studies, these research questions are embedded in open-ended interview questions and provide the framework to identify the patterns and to distinguish categories and themes (see Saldana, 2016).

Open Coding

After collecting the data from the demographic questionnaires and interview questions, the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In qualitative studies,

descriptive analysis ensures that emergent themes from the data are clear, accurate, and meaningful. As I reviewed the interview transcripts, the first phase of coding, open coding, was used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldana, 2016). I used Dedoose, a qualitative data software program to support the process of open coding. In open coding, I looked for patterns and descriptions in the data from the interviews and coded the words and phrases that repeated across and within interviews. I further collapsed the identified codes into a smaller group of codes by examining which codes appeared to be similar or those that could belong in the same category. After identifying the categories, I identified themes to support the responses and information provided by the participants (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Saldana, 2016) from the participants' responses.

In the second phase of coding, I examined the codes assigned in round one of open coding and reread all the transcripts, examining the codes assigned. I looked for similarities in the codes that could be combined. Therefore, I reviewed the transcripts and assigned codes line by line, looking for concepts that were similar and different to further distinguish the codes that resulted in combining codes from round one, so that I had fewer codes when I completed round two of coding. Next, I examined the second round of coding for categories and patterns that could further encapsulate categories of codes that were similar. The line-by-line coding fostered an understanding of the descriptive analysis of the data. The interview transcripts were reviewed, along with my field notes and code book, as I assigned the categories and themes that emerged from the coding process, to complete the cycle of coding. Manual codes were used for round one and round two of open coding. I carefully examined the words and phrases the participants

shared in order to distill the codes into distinct categories and proceeded to consider the emerging themes. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Themes are summary statements and explanations of what was going on" (p. 202). The descriptive analysis was used to understand the responses from the participants in the sample of this research. This analysis supported the researchers' journal entries that document the information and thoughts teachers perceive regarding barriers encountered when implementing play-based pedagogy practices.

Theoretical Saturation

The theoretical participant saturation of exploring teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula of kindergarten classrooms was achieved through the layers of descriptive data analysis to discern kindergarten teacher's perceptions in implementing play-based pedagogy practices. The data analysis was conducted manually until no further themes or patterns emerged, and until the data collection demonstrated balance and thoroughness to answer the research questions (Patton, 2015, Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Through this basic qualitative study, I proposed to develop further understanding of the phenomenon with in-depth interviewing and document review during the interview process to inform, support, and extend understanding in the analysis (Maxwell, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Qualitative research should provide explicit evidence and document the process and practice to yield trustworthy findings. Basic qualitative studies allow for thorough interviews with well-detailed descriptions, which provide ample

details of the participants' experiences and understanding of the phenomenon. The data

document collection ensured authenticity, credibility, and representativeness provided by

the participants. The transparent documentation of participant selection, in-depth

interviews, document collection, reflexive memos, journal notes, and descriptive analysis

provides evidence of dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). It is important to note that in

order for research to establish confirmability, it must also have achieved credibility,

dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016;

Patton, 2015). These components allow the researcher to conceptualize, engage with, and

plan for various aspects of validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Credibility

In regard to credibility, as I collected data from the participants' interviews,

thoughtful understandings developed within the criterion outlined in this study. As

descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative data transpire through the participants'

statements about teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula,

probable conclusions or the existence of possible threats were identified in this research

(see Maxwell, 2012; see Miles et al., 2014; see Patton, 2015). I identified any discrepant

data and addressed conflicting explanations in the participants' interviews as they

discussed implementation of play-based instructional practices and curricula in their

kindergarten classrooms. The patterns and themes developed from the descriptive and

interpretive evidence allowed me to make positive conclusions in this research process

(see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; see Saldana, 2016).

I sent the draft findings of the study to participants for member checking. Member checking was conducted to determine if the participants perceived my interpretation of the draft findings aligned with their responses in the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process of member checking served to build trust between me and the participants. I made myself available by phone or email during member checking and integrated feedback provided by the participants (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative studies refers to a study's findings being able to be applied to other studies (Cope, 2014). Transferability is met when the results of the study have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and can associate the results with their own experiences (Cope, 2014). To address transferability, participants' rich, thick descriptions of their experiences provided and included adequate details of the participants' stories so readers can obtain a vivid depiction of the study. According to Cope (2014), researchers should provide sufficient information on the participants, and context of the research findings are capable of being transferable. In addition, providing a clear description of the research, participant experience, and data collection process will help the audience reflect on the results of the study and be able to transfer or apply the findings to their own situations. The data collected in this study were used as reference from the participants' lesson plans during the interview process in how they implement play-based learning practices and curricula, which may be transferable to other contexts and in kindergarten classrooms. These data may be transferable because I have described the participants, settings, and procedures in detail to enable kindergarten teachers in other

school settings to determine whether the findings can be transferable (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). The situation will also be up to the reader to determine transferability out of the bounds of this research.

Dependability

Dependability entails the study's participants evaluating the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study to ensure that they support the data in the study (Anney, 2014). In addressing the issue of dependability in this study, I used interview transcripts, researcher's notes, audit trails, code-recode strategy, and stepwise replication. Stepwise replication is a data evaluation procedure where two or more researchers analyze the same data separately and compare the results. Any inconsistencies that develop from the individual analyses were addressed in order to improve the dependability of the study, and if the results are similar, then dependability is achieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Analysis and review of the data were ongoing to ensure the validity of the findings of this research (Miles et al., 2014).

Confirmability

I exercised reflection and reflexivity throughout the collection and analysis to check for confirmability of data (Maxwell, 2012). Confirmability refers to the degree in which the results of the study can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the data and interpretations of the findings are clearly derived from the data (Anney, 2014). During the interviews, I remained objective while considering the participants' responses of how they implement play-based instructional practices and curricula in their kindergarten classrooms. I

reviewed the interview notes, transcripts, and the documents during the interview process to determine how participants plan and implement play-based learning practices and curricula in their kindergarten classrooms. I reviewed the data for discrepancies and the transcripts to ensure validation of interpretations as I processed and analyzed these data (Patton, 2015). I met with the participants to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. Once my study was completed, I met again with the participants to express my appreciation for their participation and interest in the research study. During this session, I provided details to allow applicability to other settings should someone else be interested in repeating my study (transferability). A printed summary of my findings, along with my contact information, was provided to the participants and interested attendees, if additional information is needed for replication. Before the meeting adjournment, I expressed thanks to all those who were involved and personally delivered a hand-written note to show appreciation to all participants.

Ethical Procedures

I am aware of the participants' privacy, protecting the schools' identity, and other ethical issues of confidentiality that could have surfaced during the collection and storage of data. I used Walden University's application of consent procedures and policies, using the necessary consent forms to gain access to the participants, as well as the applicable permission to access and examine documents for this research. I followed Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to include the appropriate permissions involved for approval of this research. The teacher electronic invitation to participate, participant consent form, superintendent permission form, and principal permission

provided an audit trail of ethical procedures. The study's participants emailed the informed consent form to my school email. The participants identities maintained with strict confidentiality, with the practice of password-protected documents and the use of confidential pseudonyms in data collection, data analysis, and report documentation throughout the research study. In this study, I used a snowball sampling strategy, and institutional permission was not required to conduct the study. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where research participants recruit other participants for a study. Snowball sampling consists of identifying potential participants and those participants recruit additional participants to be in the study. These steps are repeated until the desired sample size is reached.

Individuals in similar situations may be able to determine the extent to which the findings could be applied (transferred) to other settings. Ethical guidance surrounding the procedure for participation was given to the participants. Participants were ensured of the tenets of confidentiality and assured ethical protection. I ensured that the data collected and analyzed were protected and stored properly, and I will destroy the data after five years. I gained knowledge about the amount of time that would be required to collect, analyze, and present the information for this research. I endeavored to manage my time wisely so that satisfactory achievements may be attained while executing my roles and responsibilities at work and completing this research.

I informed the participants about the purpose of the study, as well as my written guarantee to protect their confidentiality (see Creswell, 2012; Creswell, & Poth, 2017; Maxwell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I informed the participants they could

withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I continued to adhere to my chair's, my committee members', the University Research Reviewer's, and the IRB instructions. I stored the participants' data and demographic information in password-protected documents to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality agreements were signed and maintained by anyone who may view the data throughout the process of this research study. I will maintain storage of participant data for a minimum of 5 years, which adhered to the Walden University's requirements. IRB approval was obtained for the completion of the dissertation.

Summary

Through this basic qualitative study, I explored how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. The transparent attention to each part of the study transpired through the steps of the collection. I provided frequent attention to the alignment of each research question within the interview guide and the document collection process. During the recruitment procedure, I informed the participants of the research study and collected the informed consent forms and preinterview questionnaire. I maintained and secured the consent and preinterview questionnaire to protect each participant's privacy. In addition, throughout the iterative interviewing, coding, journaling, and debriefing processes, I carefully formatted and documented the protocols. The component of the research collection process provided a transparent audit trail to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the research study. A focus on the details of the research study

provided an in-depth analysis of the implementation of play-based learning practices and

curricula in kindergarten classrooms from the kindergarten teachers' perspectives and

will further the understanding of play-based pedagogy practices.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers

implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to

describe and understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-

based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation

and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers to become more aware of

what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed.

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was that at a community school

district outside a large metropolitan city in the Northeast United States, little was known

about how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten

classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter when implementing learning practices in

kindergarten classrooms.

In recent years, kindergarten education has experienced curricular changes,

including implementation of more rigorous academic learning and a move away from

play-based pedagogy in kindergarten classrooms (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Mraz et al.,

2016; Nicholson, 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Play has a prominent role in

kindergarten classrooms because it emphasizes the significance of teachers nurturing

students' social-emotional development (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Nolan & Paatsch,

2018; Pyle, Poliszcuk, & Danniels, 2018). Play-based learning optimizes

developmentally age-appropriate learning activities by exploration, experimentation,

engagement, collaboration, and solving real-world problems as the student engages with

peers and objects (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018;

Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018). The current study addressed the gap in the literature and the barriers that impede teachers' ability to integrate play-based learning instruction that guides inquiry, exploration, and real-world problem solving in kindergarten classrooms.

Research Questions

Teachers struggled to implement play-based pedagogy learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms at Meadowbrook Elementary. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the implementation and the barriers to greater implementation may help teachers become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed. The study was guided by the following RQs:

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe implementing play-based learning in their instructional design?

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe the barriers to implementing play-based learning in academic instruction?

In Chapter 4, I described the data collection and analysis process and the study results. First, I discussed the setting of this study and demographics. Then I discussed the data collection process and analysis process. I also reviewed the trustworthiness of the data collected in this study, and finally I described the results.

Setting

The setting for the study was in a Northeast U.S. state in an urban elementary school. I received approval from Walden IRB and proceeded to use a snowball sampling strategy. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that consists of the researcher accessing potential participants through contact information that is provided by other participants in the study (Marcus et al., 2017; Noy, 2008). This technique was repeated as the participants referred me to other participants. With snowball sampling, superintendents' and principals' requests to conduct research were not required because the study was not district related but rather district supported. All steps and communication in the recruitment and data collection process were completed during the first 3 weeks of July. My goal was for recruitment of 12 participants. I recruited the participants through snowball sampling. I obtained a total of nine participants for the study because many prospective participants did not have sufficient knowledge of play-based learning practices to be part of the study. The nine participants who implemented play-based learning practices in the Northeast U.S. state consented, completed the preinterview questionnaire, participated in individual semistructured interviews, and agreed to confirm the accuracy of the collected data through member checking. The other prospective participants experienced not having sufficient knowledge of play-based learning practices that impeded them from participating in the study. Due to the pandemic, it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews. The individual semistructured interviews were conducted through Zoom. The participants were asked to choose a day and time that was convenient for them to be interviewed. Once the day and

time were selected, the participants received a meeting code and password to use. I

collected data through preinterview questionnaires and established pseudonyms to ensure

the confidentiality of the participants.

Demographics

The participants were experienced teachers with 3 or more years of implementing

play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms. Table 2 provides

a summary of the participants' years of teaching experience and the number of years

implementing play-based learning practices and curricula. The range in years of teaching

experience was 6 to 26 years, and the range in years of implementing play-based learning

practices and curricula was 3 to 26 years.

Table 2

Pseudonyms and Participant Descriptors

Participant	Teaching experience	Experience implementing play-based learning practices and curricula
P1	26 years	26 years
P2	13 years	13 years
P3	18 years	8 years
P4	13 years	4 years
P5	24 years	8 years
P6	22 years	5 years
P7	22 years	8 years
P8	23 years	23 years
P9	6 years	3 years

Data Collection

Upon obtaining Walden University's IRB approval, I initiated the recruitment

process with a goal of 12 participants. I started recruiting the study participants using a

snowball sampling strategy. I obtained a total of nine participants for the study because other teachers did not have adequate knowledge of play-based learning practices and curricula to be part of the study. I emailed a letter to each potential participant inviting them to participate in the study. All nine potential participants met the inclusion criteria for the study, indicating experience implementing play-based learning practices.

I provided a link to the preinterview questionnaire on the invitation for each participant. To recruit participants, I emailed an inquiry invitation to nine experienced kindergarten teachers who met the study's inclusion criteria. I received the confirmed interest of the first four participants and provided the study consent form to each. I invited 12 potential participants to participate in this study and recruited nine participants who met the inclusion criteria. All nine participants returned the consent form, completed the preinterview questionnaire, participated in one-to-one semistructured interviews, and agreed to confirm the credibility of the collected data through member checking. Using snowball sampling, I obtained three additional potential participant names from the first four participants recruited. I emailed the inquiry invitation to the three potential participants to obtain the snowball sample and received two additional consent forms, thereby recruiting two more participants for a total of nine participants. The participants chose a day and time for an interview that accommodated their schedule. Due to the lack of knowledge of play-based learning practices and curricula among other recruited teachers, only nine participants were selected. I collected data from nine kindergarten teachers who implement play-based learning practices in the Northeast United States.

Upon receipt of each participant's consent, I scheduled individual interviews at a time and day that accommodated each participant's schedule. The individual semistructured interviews were conducted for 30 minutes via Zoom at the participant's preferred location and were completed using the interview guide that listed 10 questions aligned to the two research questions (see Appendix D).

Preinterview Questionnaire

The preinterview questionnaire consisted of the following: (a) Describe how the participant implements play-based learning strategies into their instructional design, (b) describe how the participant plays for play-based learning practices, (c) describe how play-based learning instruction helps students master specific learning targets, (d) identify and describe the barriers the participants encountered in the implementation of play-based learning practices, and (e) share ways the participant assesses effectiveness of their play-based strategies. The preinterview questionnaire allowed the participants to share their thoughts about their implementation of play-based learning practices and barriers encountered (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I asked the participants to return the preinterview within 5 days to my nonwork email. I collected the preinterview questionnaires and analyzed them before meeting with each participant. I collected data from the preinterview questionnaire through SurveyMonkey and exported the questionnaire into a Word document. I collected and recorded the data from the nine individual semistructured interviews using Zoom and then manually transcribed the data into a Word document. I used the data from the preinterview questionnaire to personalize the interview questions to get more detailed information about the participants'

experiences in the implementation of play-based learning practices. I prepared for the participant interviews by practicing the interviewing process with individuals who were not directly involved in the study and by reading Rubin and Rubin's (2012) recommendations.

Interviews

The virtual interview settings were quiet, and there were no interruptions during each interview. I conducted the interviews from July 19, 2021, to August 16, 2021. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. I initiated the interview with an introduction and an informal conversation to establish a positive rapport with each participant. Building participant rapport is significant to put them at ease before the interview begins (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During each interview, I listened carefully to each participant and wrote journal notes on the interview protocol to capture important elements of the interview. Reflective listening and note-taking help the researcher developed ideas about the relationship between the researcher and participants to ensure understanding of the participant's perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Attentive and reflective listening helped me ensure the accuracy of the data collection. The data accuracy was confirmed by all study participants by employing virtual member checking. Member checking means checking with the study participants to determine whether they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (see Patton, 2015). The study participants agreed with my interpretation of the data.

I confirmed the accuracy of the transcriptions by comparing them with the recorded interviews using playback. The playback was clear, and there were no barriers

to confirming the accuracy of the interview transcripts. I stored all of the collected data from the preinterview questionnaires and individual interviews electronically with password-required access in a secured location and will maintain the records for the next 5 years. According to Walden University's policy, all collected data will remain confidential until it is destroyed in 5 years. As the researcher, I will be the only person who will have access to the data.

I used the preinterview questionnaires and individual semistructured interviews to collect data, and I used Dedoose to analyze the data. After I collected, recorded, and checked the data for accuracy, I read the preinterview questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts several times to familiarize myself with the data. Reviewing the collected data more than once is necessary during the data analysis because it helps with data familiarity and in identifying initial patterns (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2016). After reading and reviewing the collected data several times, I started the first cycle of the coding process.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how teachers implement play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten classrooms and to understand the barriers teachers encounter when implementing play-based learning practices. The findings may inform stakeholders regarding decision making with greater implementation that may help them become more aware of what teachers might be doing currently and what they want to do when the barriers are removed with the implementation of play-based learning practices and curricula in kindergarten

classrooms. Data collection provided information on teachers' perceptions of the barriers when implementing play-based learning strategies in the classroom. Through descriptive analysis, I sought to answer the research questions regarding how kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based learning practices and curricula in academic instruction and the barriers to implementing play-based learning practices in academic instruction. Teachers described a sample lesson plan used in implementing play-based instruction as a support for the interview protocol and process. This visual and concrete support of the lesson plan helped the participant describe how they implement play-based learning practices in their instructional design. Discussion of the instructional design for play-based learning was a component of the interview protocol. The lesson plan served to scaffold the interview process to support the participant in demonstrating their knowledge and extending their perceptions with examples in connection to the implementation of play-based learning practices for the lesson. In basic qualitative studies, the research questions are embedded in open-ended interview questions and provide the framework to identify the patterns and to distinguish categories and themes (Saldana, 2016). I reached saturation after the eighth interview when words and phrases were repeated from several previous interviews and no additional information was being provided (see Saldana, 2016).

I used preinterview questionnaires and individual semistructured interviews to collect data in this basic qualitative study. After I collected, recorded, and checked the data for accuracy, I read the preinterview questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts several times to familiarize myself with the information shared by the

participants. Reviewing the collected data more than once is necessary during the data analysis because it helps with data familiarity and in identifying initial patterns (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2016). After reading and reviewing the collected data several times, I conducted the first cycle of the open coding process. The process of transitioning from codes to categories and themes is displayed in Table 3 and Table 4. I provide a detailed description of the collected data to support each theme in the results section.

Coded Initials for Interviews

Marginal remarks were used to label and identify the participants' pseudonyms at the Meadowbrook Elementary School, represented as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P9. The data were coded for the participants. Then line by line, the data were color-coded to organize and categorized (Saldana, 2016). The responses for the preinterview questionnaire and interview questions were assigned codes so categories and themes would emerge. The pseudonyms were used as tags and labels, and units of mean were applied to describe the data that were colored-coded. The data were chunked into words, sentences, and phrases to analyze and infer meanings, pulling together the different categories of data and presenting it with a greater understanding through inductive analysis, drawing conclusions and making recommendations for social change (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

After the interviews with the participants began, I started with the initial coding, checking for words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs with similar meanings. I went through the transcribed documents from the interviews of the nine teachers, as well as the journal notes, and printed the interview transcripts line by line and color-coded to

organize and categorize the information from the respondents. While reviewing the transcripts of the interview notes, I was impartial and tried to capture the participants' responses correctly. The transcripts were supported by the teachers' descriptions of their lesson plans. The lesson plans gave details about how teachers implement play-based learning practices; strategies, methods, and content used in their lessons; and the activities they gave to the students to learn specific skills or concepts. I repeated the process several times to ground the main themes.

I also used marginal notes, and memos to remind me of the codes, patterns, and themes for greater focus (see Maxwell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin 2014). I used Saldana (2016) to guide my views, as I tried to connect different aspects of the data into recognizable clusters that showed how the data related to the general concept, which was an important task of the analysis. The process was repeated numerous times until a printed copy was made with highlighted color codes for the responses. In cycle one, the interview questions were coded first, then the responses were categorized into themes from the research questions. I generated the codes from the data and not from the literature, because the data analysis needed to be an inductive process, where I explored how the teachers' expectations were implemented through play-based learning practices and the barriers they encountered in kindergarten curricula.

In the second cycle of the data analysis, I reviewed the color codes collected from the preinterview questionnaires, interviews, and the document review to reduce the information into frequencies, similarities, and differences to highlight and summarize the data. During this process, I was surprised because I realized teachers were implementing

play-based learning practices, but I found that teachers were not implementing the instructional practices in the way they should have been implementing play-based learning practices. In addition, I was able to identify the emerging patterns and themes more accurately. As I continued coding, on chart paper, I wrote out the categories and codes; on post it notes, I labelled the teachers' pseudonyms and placed the notes next to each code when the participant identified with the emerging themes (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3

Summative Coding RQ1

Inductive code	Open code	Category	Theme	Interview excerpt
Time management	Duration and frequency	Structure of play-based learning - practices	Teachers used play-based learning practices throughout the day,	"I have been using play-based learning practices for 8 years in centers for 15 minutes and when the timer rings they move to the next center."
Developing effective learning objectives	Planning and organization	Play-based pedagogy strategies	Teachers used play-based learning strategies to plan and organize a combination of previously taught skill for students to explore on their own.	"When I am planning, the activities focused on student interest."
Flexible instructional groupings	Varying different levels of student learning	Instructional strategies	Teachers have incorporated differentiated instruction to meet the needs of different levels of student learning.	"Play-based learning activities should address the different instructional levels."

Table 4

Summative Coding RQ2

Inductive code	Open code	Category	Theme	Interview excerpt
Curricular challenges	Administration demands	Barriers encountered	Teachers have encountered multiple barriers when implementing play-based learning practices.	"The main barriers I have encountered are storage and the amount of money I have to spend on available resources."
Teacher training	Insufficient professional development	Training	Teachers have not received adequate training to implement play-based learning practices effectively.	"The school did not provide any professional development. I did my own research."
Meeting administrators' demands	Administration in favor of rigorous instruction	Administration support	Teachers have incorporated unstructured play-based learning practices with structured play-based learning to meet the needs of administrative curricula demands.	"I plan both structured and unstructured activities. It is both unstructured instructional practices because my principal wants to see activities that are structured and systematic."

Coding is a procedure of constructing meaning to data using significant words and phrases that justify or describe what is evident in the data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2016). The process of open coding is analytical, empirical and comprises preliminary summaries of parts of the data followed by organizing them into categories and themes (Saldana, 2016). There are many types of coding used, however, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are some types used by qualitative researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Saldana, 2016). I uploaded the transcripts into Dedoose and identified words and phrases that repeated within and across interviews. I used Dedoose to support my coding process, as the program is designed to analyze the collected data. I used open coding to identify meanings using central words and phrases to justify and describe what I perceived to convey the participants' descriptions of significance in the data collection. As I continued reading, reviewing, and analyzing both preinterview questionnaires and the interview transcripts line by line, I developed the initial codes that arose in the data analysis process. I used the research questions as a reference during the coding process because the core of the research questions determined the coding choices (Saldana, 2016). After reviewing the frequency and commonalities of the initial codes, I created a table with the evolving codes, categories, themes, and interview excerpts. As I continuously reviewed the data, I added codes to the table. I conducted two rounds of open coding and identified 30 codes. Table 5 shows the codes and excerpts of text that I associated with the codes.

Table 5

Round 1: Open Codes and Interview Excerpts

Open code	Interview excerpt
Structure of play-based practices	
Duration and frequency	P1 stated, "I have implemented play-based learning practices on Friday afternoon for a period of 30 minutes."
Exploration and experimentation	P3 reported, "During center time, the students have the opportunity to do hand-on learning with skills we have previously taught during the day."
Monitoring and assessment	P6 said, "As the students were working independently, I had teacher to student discussions in which I questioned certain things they did to get them to think critically."
Planning and organization	P7 replied, "I created activities that students are working with partners or in small groups enabling them to have student-to-student discussions, and as a summation, students are presenting or sharing the work as a whole group."
Student engagement	P1 responded "As I assessed, I saw how motivated they were each time they went into a specific center. I noticed how excited students became when they interacted with the other students."
Professional development	P9 replied, "At the beginning of the year we go to professional development as a district, but also, we go to weekly professional development from reading and math specialists. We share ideas and both reading and math specialists bring things to use that we can implement in the classrooms, as well."
Availability of resources	P2 stated, "Administrators provide limited resources to implement play-based learning practices." P2 responded, "We have to use online resources, for example, teachers pay teachers, reading rockets, or other educational websites."
Play-based instructional practices	
Differentiation of instruction	P6 reported, "I want the play-based learning activities to address the different levels students are at (struggling learners, on level, and advanced learners.) It influences the delivery of the lesson because it makes connection between the lesson previously taught to the whole group and the center activity."
Teacher and student discussion	P9 responded, "As students are playing and exploring with the materials before the lesson, they can touch, build, and discuss with their partner what it felt like, and what they made with them and then they are ready to move on with the lesson."
Guided modeling and gradual release	P7 said, "Students watch me as I extended a pattern and model extending the pattern. Then students were instructed to choose a pattern from the story and extend the pattern."
Types of play-based learning practices	
Guided play	P4 stated, "As students were completing independent work, they are allowed to go to centers to continue working on skills previously taught."
Role play	P5 said, "After the money lesson was taught, students were given different amounts of money in bags of dimes, nickels, and pennies. In the math center, a basket of items was created and students bought those items."
Free play	P2 reported, "During center time, the students have the opportunities to do hands-on learning with the skills we have previously taught during the day."
Guided play and free play	P1 responded, "Guided play was assigned during the day after the mini lesson was taught and free play was given in the afternoon for a period of 15-20 minutes."
Social skills	P8 found, "Through play-based learning practices, students learn to play fairly, take turns, collaboration, and self-regulation."
Student engagement	P4 responded, "As I monitor their learning, students were engaged in conversations, asking questions, agreeing or disagreeing with each other."
Administrator demands	P3 reported, "Due to administrator's demands, play-based learning practices has not been implemented as much as they would like in kindergarten classroom."
Only adult in the classroom	P2 stated, "Being the only adult in the classroom, it is difficult implementing play-based learning practices due to being the only adult in the classrooms."

I started the data analysis with the first coding cycle that consisted of initial classification of inductive codes, followed by open coding. Inductive codes are emergent concepts from raw data analysis, developed as the data are analyzed (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Saldana, 2016). I continued with open coding. Open coding allows qualitative researchers to identify initial codes by interpreting the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Open coding helped me to reduce the collected information to a condensed size by coding the data collected from the preinterview questionnaires and the interview transcripts (see Table 6 and Table 7).

Table 6

Round 2: Pattern Coding

Open code	Pattern coding
Structure of play-based practices	
Duration and frequency	Time management
Exploration and experimentation	Incidental learning
Monitoring and assessment	Academic accountability
Planning and organization	Constructing learning opportunities
Student engagement	Increased student motivation
Professional development	Teacher support
Availability of resources	Curriculum materials
Play-based instructional practices	
Differentiated instruction	Ability grouping
Teacher and student discussions	Structured collaborative dialogues
Guided modeling and gradual release	Instructional strategies
Types of play-based learning practices	
Guided play	Directed play
Role play	Engage real-life situations
Free play	Creative play
Guided play and free play	Structured and unstructured play
Dramatic play	Symbolic play
Constructive play	Manipulation of objects
Social skills	Developing empathy
Barriers encountered	Challenges
Overcoming barriers	Solutions

Table 7

Categories to Themes

Category	Theme
Duration and frequency	Structure of play-based learning practices
Monitoring and assessment	Evaluating student learning
Differentiated instruction	Different levels of student learning
Planning and organization	Implementation of play-based instructional practices
Student engagement	Student motivation in whole and small groups
Teacher training	Insufficient support provided for teachers
Availability of teaching and learning materials	Lack of resources
Lack of buy-in to play-based learning approach	Administrator's resistance to curriculum change
Guided modeling and gradual release	Increased professional development and training to support teachers
Peer discussions	Cooperating learning

When all the codes were selected, I progressed to the second coding cycle, which consisted of identifying categories and themes by using axial coding. The goal of axial coding is to determine which codes in the research are the prevailing ones, which codes are the least important ones, to reorganize the dataset: synonyms are crossed out, unnecessary ones are removed, and the best demonstrative codes are chosen. I identified the categories by grouping codes that were created during the first coding cycle. Saldana (2016) stated that grouping similar codes reduces the number of the selected preliminary codes and helps to organize them into categories. For example, all codes related to the implementation of play-based learning practices were placed in the category of instructional strategies. All codes for planning and organization were placed in the category of structure of play-based learning practices. Table 8 includes the interview questions and their relationship to the research questions.

Table 8

RQ1 and Interview Questions

Interview question	Participant's response
How long have you been implementing play-based learning practices in your instructional design?	P4 stated, "I have been implementing play-based learning practices in my instructional design for 3 years."
Can you tell me when you implement play-based learning practices in your instructional design, is it implemented daily, mornings, afternoons, or a few times during the week?	P5 remarked, "Through the use of centers, play-based learning practices are implemented at least more than 3 times a week."
What play-based learning practices are implemented in your instructional design?	P8 added, "Play-based practices implemented in my instructional design are creativity, developing students' imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive and areas of social-emotional."
When you implement play-based learning practices, is it combined with previously taught skills or concepts or is it unstructured that students are allowed to explore and experiment on their own?	P9 answered, "The play-based learning practices are based on the skills they have learned previously. It is both structured and unstructured. Structured, if we are learning patterns, and then the play-based activities reinforced those strategies the students learned during the whole group lesson."
How do/did you include play-based learning practices in your instructional design to meet the needs of specific content area standards?	P6 stated, "During play-based learning instructional time, I selected the center activity on the specific learning standards with it was sorting, counting, identifying patters, or form the correct letter formation. Every play-based learning activity had its learning objective, as well as its standards. Students had ample opportunities to participate and engage in the activity that would improve or enhance their learning based on the whole group learning target."
From the lesson you described, what were some of your successes for this specific lesson?	P2 replied, "Using oversized dice in which students were able to count to roll the dice, they have the visual of counting the dots inside of counting on their fingers on the dice to find the sum of the two addends. They are able to move from counting on their fingers to actually visually numbers and counting up."
What are the resources you used to implement play-based learning practices in your instructional design?	P8 mentioned, "Teacher blogs, reading rockets, YouTube, ABC Kids, Education Galaxy, and Go Noodle."

Table 9

RQ2 and Interview Questions

Interview question	Participant's response
Can you discuss the possible barriers in the implementation of play-based learning practices?	P8 stated, "Overall, it is costly to get materials. I did a lot of donors choose. I do spend a lot of my own money. Another barrier is time management and also managing all of the students. I would say classroom and time management, storing of materials, and cost."
In what ways have these barriers been overcome?	P6 responded, "As I mentioned earlier, I invited my administrators to my classroom during the time the students were engaged in play-based learning. I wanted them to see that even though the students were playing, they were also learning the concept or the skill."
What professional development training have you had to support the implementation of play-based learning practices?	P9 said, "I've used Tara West. She has play-based learning activities on Teacher Pay Teachers, where she provides curriculum and different resources that implements centers on play-based learning. She is a huge resource. Also, Kindergarten Smorgasbord, that provides a lot of different ideas."
Besides the professional development training, could you recommend some resources that you used to overcome the barriers?	P2 expressed, "I have used teacher pay teacher, Pinterest, and Instagram. I follow 4 or 5 Montessori schools."

After I identified the categories, I continued using the axial coding to create

themes. According to Saldana (2016), a theme is an extended phrase or sentence that

identifies what a unit of data is about or what it means. In addition, axial coding helps the

researcher to determine how the categories can be grouped into themes (Ravitch & Carl,

2019). I merged the categories to establish themes that conceptualized the findings of this

basic qualitative study. For example, I started with the category play-based learning

strategies and merged it further into the category of planning and organization strategies.

Then, I created the theme *teachers select the appropriate play-based learning strategies*

to plan and organize with a combination of previously taught skill or concept to allow students explore on their own. I continued merging categories based on their relation to each other. For example, I merged play-based learning strategies and planning and organization because they both were covered by the participants when they talked about selecting strategies in the implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms.

I examined the data collected numerous times to identify categories and themes, which helped me reach data saturation. "Data saturation occurs when no new information or insights emerges the data collected" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199). Saldana (2016) suggested having a smaller number of themes as the data is reanalyzed, and I was able to identify six themes. The themes were applied in developing the results of this basic qualitative study by aligning each theme to the corresponding research question. I organized the themes based on the aligned research questions. Additional description of the identified themes, codes one and two, and its alignment to the research questions are provided in the results section.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant case refers to data that appear to challenge evolving themes during the qualitative data analysis (Patton, 2015). I used the process of member checking to develop an accurate account of the participants' responses and to identify any discrepant cases. There were no discrepant cases discovered during the data collection process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research studies signifies the level of rigor and includes concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). The researcher's main goal is to maintain trustworthiness and credibility throughout the study by using different strategies (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I implemented several strategies during this basic qualitative study to verify its trustworthiness.

Credibility

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers must do their best to ensure the credibility and reliability of the research study. I ensured credibility by using reflexivity and member checking. Reflexivity refers to thoughtful self-awareness of his/her experiences and reasoning and reduces or lessens possible biases (Patton, 2015). I certified that my perceptions about the way the kindergarten teachers implemented play-based learning practices and barriers encountered did not interfere with the study. I accomplished this by remaining impartial reading and reviewing the preinterview questionnaires, asking the same questions to the participants during the interviews, and relying solely on the information collected during the data analysis process. In addition, I used detailed descriptions when I analyzed and compared the data from the participants of the study. Comparing similar experiences between the participants of the study helps to evaluate its credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since these data were collected virtually and I was not able to observe teachers in their environment, I used member checking instead of prolonged contact to ensure

credibility. Member checking involves checking back with the participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). During member checking, all study participants had an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations of the data collected and make changes if necessary. The study's participants agreed to the accuracy of the data.

Transferability

Transferability relates to the extent to which qualitative research findings can be transferred to different settings with other participants (Patton, 2015). I used a rich, thick description to ensure the transferability of this basic qualitative study. Thick description is an important aspect in increasing the complexity of the research by thoroughly and clearly describing the study's contextual factors, participants, and experiences, so as to produce complex interpretations and findings, which then allows participants to make more contextualized meaning of your findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview audio recordings were transcribed and checked for accuracy by using playback. I added detailed quotations from the participants when describing data analysis and study findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I utilized member checking to strengthen the dependability of the results of the study. Member checking supported dependability and involved checking back with the study's participants to determine if they have any additional comments or questions about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). All nine participants

contributed to virtual member checking and had an opportunity to confirm that the data collected were interpreted correctly or to make revision, if necessary. In addition, I kept detailed journal notes about the data collection and data management available for the review.

Conformability

Conformability refers to the impartiality of the research findings. Conformability is focused on confirming that the interpretation of the data collected is not based on the researcher's thoughts or feelings, but based mainly on what the data revealed (Patton, 2015). I used reflexivity and member checking to ensure the conformability of the research findings. Member checking involves checking back with the participants to determine if they have any comments or questions about the data interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). All participants had an opportunity to confirm that the collected data were interpreted correctly and to make revisions, if necessary. Reflexivity refers to thoughtful self-awareness of his/her experiences and reasoning and reduces or lessens possible biases (Patton, 2015). Using reflexivity helped to lessen possible biases and to ensure the neutrality of the results. I accomplish this by continuing to remain impartial throughout the interviews, asking the same questions, and relying solely on the data collected during the process of the data analysis.

The following sections present the study's findings I found from the data for this study. The findings outline details from the responses to the preinterview questionnaire and the interview questions from each teacher participant and information about the way they implement play-based learning practices and the barriers encountered in

kindergarten curricula during the interview process. The findings are presented in a manner that responded to each of the research questions. The teacher's verbatim responses are highlighted throughout the presentation of the findings for the implementation of play-based learning instructional practices.

The data to support RQ1 (How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based pedagogy practices instructional design?) came from the responses to the preinterview questionnaire items one, two, three, and five, in addition to the interview process items one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven (see Appendix D); interview notes; and review of lesson plans during the interview process. The ideas, concepts, meanings, patterns, and themes came from how the kindergarten teachers explained how they implement play-based learning practices and the barriers they encounter in kindergarten curricula.

I used first-level coding to summarize the segments of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldana, 2016). I then placed the interview responses into the codes of duration and frequency, since this was common to all the participants' responses. Structure of play-based learning practices was the next marginal code that emerged. Play-based instructional practices emerged because the kindergarten teachers gave information about their interactions with the students and what they expect them to learn in the process. The participants also reported on how they assist students who are behind in teaching and learning environment through differentiated instruction. The participants also outlined the resources they used in the implementation of play-based learning practices. The barriers emerged as the participants' expectations were impacted by these

barriers. The aim of the interview responses was to see the emerging themes so that the data could be highlighted and analyzed. Table 10 summarizes the research questions, the interview questions, and the themes that emerged from the data.

The data to support RQ2 (How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers implementing play-based learning practices instructional design?) came from the participants' responses to the preinterview questionnaire 4 and the interview questions 8, 9, and 10; interview notes; and the lesson plan review during the interview process.

Table 10

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research question	Preinterview questions	Interview questions	Interview notes	Document review
RQ1. How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based learning practices instructional design?	1, 2, 3, 5	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	X	
RQ2. How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers implementing play-based learning practices instructional design?	5	8, 9, 10	X	X

The themes that emerged for RQ1 were (a) play-based learning practices are implemented every day for a specific amount of time during the mornings and the afternoons; (b) planning and organization are used to teach a combination of previously learned skill or concept, allowing students to explore on their own; and (c) differentiated instructions is used to meet the needs of different levels of student learning.

The themes that emerged for RQ2 were (a) barriers that impact the implementation of play-based learning practices, (b) insufficient training to implement play-based learning practices effectively, and (c) utilizing structured and unstructured play-based learning practices to meet administrative and curricula demands.

The participants shared they believed students learn best through firsthand experiences, and play motivates, stimulates, and supports young children in their development of skills, concepts, oral development, communication, and concentration. During play, young children use all their senses, convey their thoughts and emotions, explore their environment, and connect to what they already know with new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Therefore, play-based learning practices build on this motivation using it as a context for learning where they can explore, experiment, discover, and problem solve in imaginative and playful ways.

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based pedagogy practices instructional design? The data analysis related to the first research question revealed three themes (see Figure 1). All research participants responded that play-based learning practices were implemented every day after the whole group lesson for a period of at least 30 minutes in their instructional design.

Figure 1

RQ1 Emerging Themes

Research Question 1
How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based learning practices instructional design?

| Theme 1: Play-based learning practices are implemented every day for a specific amount of time during the mornings and the afternoons. | Theme 2: Planning and organization are used to teach a combination of previously learned skill or concept allowing students to explore on their own. | Theme 3: Differentiated instructions is used during play-based learning practices to meet the needs of different levels of student learning. |

Theme 1: Teachers Select to Utilize Play-Based Learning Practices Every Day

The participants selected to implement play-based learning practices every day. All teachers reported, even though there are administration and curricula demand, they have infused play-based instructional practices throughout the day. P1 stated,

I have always done it. I've implemented mainly in the mornings. I always found a day to use play-based practices, the students enjoy it and we connect as human beings, so whatever we do, it is done in terms of rehearsal or practice or guidance. I find it very successful, so I've always used it.

P2 reported,

I have been implementing play-based practices for 8 years. I feel that play-based learning practices should be implemented every day for 30 minutes.

Unfortunately, that is not the case, because of district and administrative demand, in my case it is only implemented daily in the afternoons.

P3 responded,

I have been using play-based learning practices in my instructional design for 8 years everyday using of centers for 15 minutes and when the timer rings they move to the next center. Initially, the children are allowed to choose a center that they want to work. The centers are structured, and the students are aware of how many students are able to be in a center. During the center time, students have the opportunities to do hands-on learning with the skills we have previously taught during the whole group lesson.

P4 stated,

I used play-learning practices in my instructional design for 3 years. It is implemented throughout the day during center time. As students complete their independent work, they were allowed to go to centers to start a new activity or complete their previous activities that were not completed.

While P6 responded,

I have implemented play-based instructional practices in my instructional design for 9 years. I incorporated the instructional design throughout the day for specific components of the lesson that I was doing. So, if I was teaching a lesson in literacy, there would be times set for students to go to centers for additional practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading (fluency), comprehension, and vocabulary, and writing.

P7 reported,

> I have been implementing play-based learning practices for 22 years. It has been a part of my instructional design daily and throughout the day. Students work independently, with partners, or in small groups, enabling them to have student-to-student discussions.

P8 replied,

> I have implemented play-based learning practices for 23 years, every day, and throughout the day. Students need social interaction and the conversation they have with one another. So, it was mornings, usually after lunch, recess, and at end of day. In the mornings when they come in, it starts with morning tubs on their tables, example, Play-Doh, building blocks, puzzles, and activities are rotated around so that they have something different for each day.

Along with P2, P9 stated, "I implement play-based practices afternoons with 20-minute blocks. They move around the center that enables them to get to all the centers each day."

This theme aligns with the previous research included in the literature review section, which states that students in kindergarten classrooms utilizing play-based learning practices for a significant amount of time each day experienced positive growth in areas of exploration, experimentation, social skills, student engagement, and constructive, dramatic, and guided play (Lai et al. 2018; Mraz et al, 2016). It also aligns with the conceptual framework of situated learning theory, where learning takes place through relationships between people and connects prior knowledge with authentic, informal and often unintended contextual (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It also aligns with this

conceptual framework because the connection between learning accompanied with play and teaching is one of the overarching concepts and examines it in the context of early childhood education classroom. In addition, it also connects through the ZPD because students are more inclined to learn through a variety of learning experiences on their own and with their peers than through passive listening.

Theme 2: Teachers Used Play-Based Learning Strategies to Plan and Organize a Combination of Activities to Reinforce Previously Taught Skills or Concepts

All participants reported that they plan to implement various play-based learning practices and academic strategies in the implementation of play-based learning practices. Six kindergarten teachers stated using modeling through counters, cube, number cubes, body language, money, and unifix cubes to teach counting through play-based instructional practices. One teacher stated, they incorporate creating, extending, and reading patterns through a variety of materials and objects. Two teachers used fiction books to teach imaginative writing with pictures. All nine teachers shared that they select play-based instructional strategies based on what the students will learn, the cognitive ability of the students to complete the activity, how the hands-on activities meet the lesson objective, and what will be the purpose of the lesson. Based on these components, teachers reflect on the type of activities.

P1 stated,

In order to meet the needs of the purpose of lesson, I make sure that statements specifically address what the students are learning. The play-based standards address the means to achieve it. For example, the goal of the math lesson was for

students to identify and categorize numbers using the dice as manipulatives. The students threw the dice and it landed on the number 2. The students jump 2 times to show what the number 2 means. Students are playing, but at the same time are doing the word to meet the lesson's goal.

P7 replied,

I used a book called Patterns written by Samantha Burger and Daniel Montell and briefly reviewed patterns with students. They watched as I extended a pattern and model extending the pattern by choosing one of the examples in the book. I asked them did you notice how I look at a pattern, chose the shape that I needed to extend it and model another pattern, and then pair share to share with each other what would come next and why that shape should be next.

P9 noted,

I did a lesson on counting objects. I wrote the 4 on the board. Each student was given animal counters and had to count out the counters to represent the number 4 and they had to draw counters to show the number and write what was the number.

P3 emphasized,

I planned a lesson on magnets. The materials I used were magnetic letters, pictures, other magnetic objects. The objects of the lesson were to have students look at the magnetic letters and have them identify there were magnets on the back of the letters that were holding up the letters. In the centers students were to

explore and experiment with different objects and identify what objects attract the

magnets.

P3 and P7 stated, "I incorporate academic language into my whole group lesson and

when students are working independently or with partners, they are to use the academic

language in peer discussions." P2 noted,

When I plan a math lesson, I utilize oversized cubes. I feel that students are able

to use one-to-one correspondence and see the dots much more clearly as they are

counting the dots on the cube rather than using their fingers to find the sum of the

two addends. They can move from counting on their fingers to visually seeing the

number as they count up.

P5 responded,

I plan a lesson with money. I used a poem to introduce the unit of money. We

counted money by 10's, 5's, and 1's. Students were given different amounts based

on dimes, nickels, and pennies from money bags. They were asked to take out the

coins and they were introduced to the value of each of the coins. As a class we

counted and wrote the amount of money on tablets.

This theme aligns with the previous research and the findings in the literature

review section that state play-based learning optimizes developmentally age-appropriate

learning activities by exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and

solving problems (Dinnerstein, 2016; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2018;

Rendon & Gronlund, 2018; Yogman et al., 2018). Cavanaugh (2017) found teachers

embedded a play-based learning framework into various content areas, such as literacy,

using student-guided play, for example, allowing reading and writing activities to include

collaboration and discovery using costumes and art work. It also aligns with the learner-

centered approach to learning, in which teachers work as facilitators of learning instead

of lecturers (Weimer, 2013). The teacher's role in the learner-centered classroom is to

create a climate of optimal learning, demonstrate adequate student behavior, influence

student-to-student learning, and offer feedback during the learning process. Additionally,

it promotes in-depth learning and changes the students into independent learners (Cullen

et al., 2012).

Theme 3: Teachers Used Incorporated Differentiated Instruction to Meet the Needs of Varying Levels of Student Learning

Under this theme, all nine participants shared that they plan to differentiate

instruction based on the student's academic ability, for example, advance learners,

learners who are on level, and a reteach for struggling learners. Teachers have adapted

instruction through planning to meet the needs of high performance or struggling students

based on the assessment on the previous completed assignments. The adaptation of

instruction requires that teachers involve careful assessment and planning for all students

in the classroom, as well as the ability to select from a range of strategies to find the

optimal match to the context (Stronge, 2007). In addition, effective adaptation entails

teachers to design strategic instructional designs, conduct regular assessment, and make

adjustments in a timely manner to retain students' continued engagement.

Nine participants reported that they used the curriculum to guide their planning

for differentiated instruction. P2 said,

I differentiate students' instruction based on their academic ability, for example, advance learners, learners who are on level, and reteach struggling learners. With play-based learning practices during center time, students can either do enrichment, on level, or intervention for struggling learners. Students work independently on their level. For example, students who are advance learners work on more challenging activities, students who are on level work on activities based on the lesson objectives, and students who are struggling learners are assigned activities using counters, cubes, or pictures.

P3 shared, "I differentiate student's instruction because it gives each student the opportunity to be successful and comes into their own ability." P4 acknowledged, "During the independent practice, I use aggressive monitoring sheets as students complete guided practice assignment. After the whole group lesson, based on the data on the assessment sheet, centers are provided with play-based learning activities based on their abilities." P5 responded,

The lesson I did on money, I introduced the unit on money through a money poem. Then students were given different amounts of money based on dimes, nickels, and pennies. They counted and wrote out how much money they had as a guided practice assignment. As a differentiated instruction for advance learners, they would create a store ad, on level students would draw pictures of different things, and struggling students would complete a money sheet with denominations of dimes, nickels, and pennies.

P6 reported,

> Play-based learning activities should address the different levels students are at
> (struggling learners, on level, and advanced learners). I believe that differentiated
> instruction influences the delivery of the lesson because it makes a connection
> between the lesson previously taught to the whole group and the center activity.

P7 agreed with P6, "I found that not all students learn on the same academic level and play-based learning activities need to be differentiated. Many of the activities are geared for advanced learners, on level, and struggling students." P8 shared, "For me, the better you know your students, the better you can teach them, and you can tailor the instruction to the academic ability." P9 stressed,

> As students work independently, I walk around writing notes on their discussions
> with their partner, how they counted, and how did they know the number they
> counted was right. As they write the number, I noted who was writing the number
> correctly and who needed more number writing practice. As they move into their
> centers, students who needed extra practice will focus more on number writing
> activities.

This theme aligns with the previous research included in the literature review section, which states that differentiated instruction provides teachers significant ways of meeting the needs of students academic learning through adjusting the curriculum and instruction for various groups of students. It is an approach to curriculum and instruction that systemically takes student differences into account in designing opportunities for each student to engage with information and ideas and to develop essential skills.

According to Tomlinson and Jarvis (2009), "Differentiation provides a framework for responding to differences in students' current levels and developmental levels of readiness, their learning profiles, and their interests to optimize the match between students and learning opportunities" p. 599). In addition, it also aligns with Fullan's (2007) educational change theory, which is a change in practice that consists of initiation, implementation, and continuation so teachers who differentiate their instruction are responding to the individual learners' needs in the way the content is presented (initiation), the way content is learned (implementation), and the ways the individual responds to the content (continuation). The educational change theory helps teachers focus on the implication of change those teachers need to make that will promote the changes that address a student's academic needs (Ellsworth, 2000).

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers implementing play-based pedagogy practices in instructional design?

The data analysis related to RQ2 revealed three themes. All study participants reported that they encountered multiple barriers as they implemented play-based pedagogy practices. Teachers reported because of curricula and administration demands and other barriers, they were unable to implement play-based pedagogy practices (see Figure 2). There were no discrepant cases pertaining to this research question.

Figure 2

RQ2 Emerging Themes

Theme boxes:

Research Question 2
How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers implementing play-based learning practices instructional design?

Theme 1:
The barriers that impact the implementation of play-based learning practices.

Theme 2:
Insufficient training to implement play-based learning practices effectively

Theme 3:
Utilizing structured and unstructured play-based learning practices to meet administrative and curricula demands.

Theme 4: Teachers Have Encountered Multiple Barriers When Implementing Play-Based Learning Practices

Under this theme, the study participants shared that they plan for play-based learning practices, but due to significant barriers, it has been increasingly difficult to implement the instructional practice with fidelity. P1 stated,

The biggest barrier in implementing play-based learning practices is time. Time is spent teaching student's classroom and play-based learning practices. Another barrier are administrators. Administrators are expecting accountability in which the work is produced through some type of written word that can be placed inside of a student's portfolio. In addition, not having the available resources to implement play-based learning practices effectively, for example, space, time,

additional help, and materials to accommodate the growing need for students to reinforce the concept or skills. Also, having to cover curriculum demands, and the constant fear of being observe and not provided enough rigorous instruction the administrators want to see.

P2 acknowledged,

Time is always a barrier. We do 30 minutes per day. I would prefer if the students had one hour because if you want the students to go to more one center, they need more time within centers. If you are doing 30 minutes per day and you want that center to be used every day that week, the students won't have enough time to complete the activity, and as a teacher assessing all the students within that amount of time will not be sufficient. If I have more time, the students will be able to cover more than one content area (reading and math) or integrate science and social studies, as well as with ELA center, because I would like to have at least 30 minutes in the content area, but if the students are only doing 30 minutes per day that means the students are only getting 15 minutes of reading and 15 minutes of math in the center. Another barrier that I've encountered is scheduling time to create play-based learning activities along with the instruction to the activity, rubric, response, and assessment sheets.

P3 stated,

The main barriers I have encountered in implementing play-based learning practices would be the space and the amount of money I have to spend on available resources. One of the things that I have encountered after the barriers is

that my parents and I have incorporated fundraising and implemented class piggy

bank to get extra money, because it can get expensive. Another barrier is being

the only adult coming up with creative student activities.

P4 noted, "A major barrier in implementing play-based learning practices is following

curriculum pacing calendar and administrators not understanding the concept of play-

based learning and in their mind, they only see students playing." P5 shared, "For my

students, there was a language barrier many of the students in my class were English

Language Learners and had difficulty understanding the instructions in the centers." P6

encountered,

> The main barriers were creating follow-up activities after the initial activities
>
> were completed. Parents and administrators may not be in favor of using play-
>
> based learning practices in place of rigorous instruction utilizing more paper and
>
> pencil. Another barrier was the absence of formal assessment. I did not believe
>
> that there were opportunities to conduct formally assess student academic
>
> outcome through play-based learning practices. Another barrier is not receiving
>
> the necessary training to implement the instructional practices effectively.

P7 reported,

> Time. Time is one of the main barriers with implementing play-based learning
>
> practices because there are many things that administration is expected for
>
> teachers to do, especially the content area instruction. I also find expectations,
>
> administration, not getting the teachable moment, where you can flow with
>
> students and get it going. Another barrier is lack of material, for example, not

having enough computers, one child could be working on a computer and the

other children could be waiting until they are done.

P8 shared, "Overall, it's costly to get materials. Another barrier is time management and

but also managing all of the kids, classroom management, time management, and storing

of materials." P9 responded,

The barriers I encountered were dealing with behavior issues, pairing of students,

attention span, and activities may not be engaging to students. Sometimes the time

it takes to set up the activities can be barrier, as well. Another barrier I found that

being the only adult in the classroom, at times, I feel like Wonder Woman having

to run around making sure everything is in place and students are working

independently or cooperatively with others. So, another barrier is not having

another adult that I would be able to delegate what needs to get done so that play-

based learning activities run effectively. At times, I do have to spend my money. I

do not have enough space to store materials.

This theme aligns with the previous research included in the literature review

section, which states that it has been recognized that teachers considered play and

learning to be distinct entities, and teachers were challenged when they attempted to

implement academic learning and play to meet the current curricula demands (Pyle &

Danniels, 2018). In response to greater academic rigor, teachers reported that they have

been experiencing challenges with integrating play within students' traditional learning

practices (Keung & Fung, 2020; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018).

Theme 5: Teachers Need Adequate Training to Meet Students' Academic Learning

Needs to Implement Play-Based Learning Practices Effectively

Under this theme, all study participants shared that they do not receive the proper training to implement play-based learning practices. Teachers acknowledge that they had to seek out professional development, whether by observing seasoned teachers, networking with outside sources, online educational resources, webinars, or YouTube videos. These resources included play-based learning strategies, best teaching practices, matching content area standards to the appropriate activities, creating play-based learning activities, and assessments.

P7 responded,

The administration has not supported teachers with available resources to enhance the implementation of play-based learning practices. The things I have learned to implement the instructional practices are what I have learned on my own to see, to watch, to learn, and to do. I feel children learn through play, especially in kindergarten. They need more play and should be an expectation and exactly what they see in prekindergarten and that play-based learning should be transferred to kindergarten, and they have taken that away in kindergarten and more academic has replaced it.

P6 reported, "I used professional development training. I also used repeated class intervisitation and met with other teachers to learn about their best teaching practices." P4 noted, "The school did not provide any professional development. I did my own research and found new ways in order to implement them." P2 explained, "I have to add, I have

not had as much professional development training in play-based learning practices as I would like, but in my early years of teaching, they did provide professional development with centers, but not many." P8 stated, "Mostly, my professional development was on my own. I watched blogs, YouTube videos, and mostly on my own." P3 acknowledged,

> Owning my own business, I am able to attend professional development training on my own and collaborate with teachers; however, before opening my school, the administration did not provide any training, which became my primary reason why I opened the school.

P5 acknowledged, "I mainly collaborated with other teachers, professional development training that I researched, and class observations." P1 shared,

> Kindergarten teachers do not receive professional development training in play-based learning practices. Professional developments are focused for Grades 3-5. Teachers need to look for their own training to educate them on play-based learning practices. Mainly looking at videos, for example, YouTube, to learn how play-based learning practices should be implemented in kindergarten.

This theme aligns with the previous research and findings from the literature review that based on the perspective of teacher training and theoretical understanding, while it is expected for teachers to serve as play professionals, it has been found that the level of training is insufficient, compared to the training received to other play professionals outside of the school settings (Fung, 2009; Howard, 2010). There has been an increasing number of teachers who have reported they do not receive the necessary training that will help them to implement play-based pedagogy practices in the

kindergarten classroom, and without the necessary professional development, teachers

will turn to rigorous instruction to meet the needs of academic learning and achievement

(Gronlund & Rendon, 2017; Dinkel et al., 2019).

It also aligns with the situated learning theory that states it is important to

understand that teachers with a stronger understanding of play-based learning practices,

sufficient time, and the appropriate space can function effectively and achieve a greater

sense of empowerment (Diamond et al., 2016).

Theme 6: Teachers Have Incorporated Structured Play-Based Learning Practices with Unstructured Play-Based Learning to Meet the Needs of Administrative and Curricular Demands

The participants selected to implement both unstructured and structured play-

based learning practices that incorporate targeted learning objectives and learning

standards to help meet administrative and curricula demands. All nine teachers expressed

concern because of current demands in ELA and Math, they find that only implementing

unstructured play-based learning practices is not sufficient in meeting student learning

needs. In addition, teachers are accountable to meet content area pacing calendar

deadlines and are held accountable to achieve student learning outcomes.

P1 shared,

I plan both structured and unstructured play-based learning practices. I plan both

because unstructured instructional practices, because students need something that

is very, very structured and systematic and in a clear way. The activities need to

be focused and based on what the whole group lesson was based on especially if

an administrator walks in and questions why the students are not sitting at their

table working on sheets.

P2 stated,

When I taught the lesson on counting from 1 to 5, the lesson was structured

because the students were placed in groups based on their learning ability. The

students use oversize dice, in which they were able to count to roll the dice, they

had the visual counting the dots instead of counting on their fingers on the dice to

find the sum of the two addends. As the students worked independently, I walked

around making sure they understood the concept. They can move from counting

on their fingers to counting up. Then, after the structured activity was completed,

the students were allowed to go to a center of their choice to work on unstructured

activities.

P3 shared,

It's a little different for me since I have own business, but I do implement both

structured and unstructured play-based learning practices. The reason I choose to

do both is because I do believe the young children learn by exploring and

experimenting with different types of objects and from each other, but on the

other hand, I am held accountable by the Department of Education in Virginia that

there are certain skills and concepts that students need to master by the end of the

academic year, and through certain unstructured activities, I am not seeing growth

or the progress. With that being said, both are done on a daily progress. The

students work on structured activities during the mornings, and then after lunch,

the students are in centers working on unstructured activities. I think it's the best of both worlds.

P4 explained,

> For me, after the whole group lesson was completed, students worked on their independent work, and after I checked it, students knew they could go into their choice of center. The centers that were available were building blocks, theatre, puppetry, music, and art. I noticed that most of time, when the students were in these types of centers, there were a lot of discussions. One time I heard the boys say I am going to make a tower. Another child asked him, "Why are you going to make a tower?" He responded, "When I went to see my grandmother and grandfather, I saw one and I thought it was cool? It is going to be really high like the one I saw." Another child said, "I saw one too. The one I saw had windows. Are you going to have windows in your tower." "Yea, I am, and I am going to put a bell on top." What I noticed about unstructured play-based learning practices, it is less about goals and standards and more about exploring, experimentation, collaboration, causes, and effects. I thought it was amazing as each child collaborated on making this tower. To me, it was just a tower, but for them, it was something major. During the conversation, I heard him say I am going to have 2 windows on one side and 2 on the other side, that makes 4, let's count them together. They had math. Then one of the other boys said, "We should give it name?" The boys said, "Friends and hug each other. Let's draw a picture and write the name." I thought for a moment, the boys shared what they were going to

do, what it was going to have, counted the windows and bell, collaborated, and negotiated what the name should be. They used the state standards of speaking and listening, discussed how high it was going to be, counted the number of windows and bells it would have, and then wrote the name of the tower. They used three or four standards without being instructed this is what you are going to do in this center. It really amazed me and how an activity of building a structure on their own, they managed to pull out objective and standards.

P5 responded,

When I started as a kindergarten teacher, I mostly implemented structured play-based practices. I had mostly English Language Learners and having them not know the language proficient, it helped them learn English, since most of them spoke in their native language.

P6 stated,

Many of the play-based learning practices were structured, as I was a dual language teacher in Haitian Creole and many of the of students did not speak English. The activity was based on a specific lesson learning standard, whether it was sorting, counting, identifying patterns, or forming a particular letter. For the type of class, every play-based learning activity had its learning objective, as well as its standards. Students are given opportunities to participate and engage in the activity that would improve or enhance their learning based on the learning target. Later as the students learn more English, unstructured play-based learning activities are introduced. But the majority of the activities are structured.

Summary

In order to answer the research questions for this basic qualitative study, I utilized two data sources: the preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews. In summary, this study results revealed that kindergarten teachers are implementing structured and unstructured play-based learning practices every day for a specific amount of time. Teachers are implementing both structured and unstructured because they are faced with challenges from administrators and curricula demands, but they know the importance of play and learning and the benefits it provides. Even though teachers are implementing structured play-based learning practices, they are also implementing unstructured play-based learning practices to enable students to explore, experiment, engage with other students in peer discussions, collaborate, and build relationships, not only with teachers but with one another. Teachers plan and organize a variety of instructional strategies and use background knowledge and instructional delivery models to implement play-based learning practices effectively.

This study further revealed that kindergarten teachers plan collectively for play-based learning practices and use curriculum and instruction to guide their planning. However, teachers are faced with multiple barriers, but feel the main barrier is time. They feel that they do not have enough time to implement play-based learning practices in the way students are able to explore, experiment, and collaborate. Lastly, this research study revealed that administrators are not providing adequate training. Teachers are doing their own research, using online educational resources, such as toys for theatre, reading rockets, ABC Mouse, Starfall, and teacher pay teacher. In addition, the teachers are

collaborating with outside sources and observing teachers when they are implementing play-based learning practices.

In Chapter 5, I include an introduction, the purpose and nature of this basic qualitative study, an interpretation of the findings, and how the findings relate to the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study. Furthermore, in Chapter 5, I discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change. Finally, I describe the significance of the study and provide a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and barriers encountered in kindergarten curricula. I conducted this basic qualitative study to address the gap in previous research that addressed kindergarten teachers' experiences implementing play-based learning practices and the barriers they encounter. The research questions in this study were analytical in nature. The questions were devised to explore how kindergarten teachers plan and implement play-based learning practices. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory informed the conceptual framework of this basic qualitative study. I also used Fullan's (2007) educational change theory as the analytical lens to explore current and former kindergarten teachers' perceptions and opinions about their implementation of play-based learning practices and the barriers they encountered. I used these frameworks to interpret the findings related to each research question in this basic qualitative study.

The key findings that emerged from the data analysis revealed that kindergarten teachers were using play-based learning practices daily for a specified amount of time. The teachers were implementing both structured and unstructured activities for students to apply the skills or concepts taught during the whole class lesson. The key findings also revealed the kindergarten teachers were using unstructured practices to fulfill student needs of exploration, experimentation, collaboration, and negotiation as students work in partnerships or small group settings. In addition, the key findings also indicated that school administrators were not addressing the needs of additional professional development training to gain a better understanding in the implementation of play-based

learning practices. It was revealed that for kindergarten teachers to improve and enhance their training, they would need more professional development to address the specific needs of students' academic learning.

Interpretation of the Findings

This basic qualitative study's findings were interpreted through the lens of Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and informed by the literature review. Lave and Wenger described that learning takes place through relationships between people and connects previous learning with authentic, informal, and often unintended contexts Lave (1988) emphasized the importance of the significance of the social construction of learning and how people in groups attain new knowledge. In the situated learning theory, Lave further stated that learning is social and comes from participating in daily situations, not from an isolated process. Situated learning is a matter of creating meaning from real activities of daily living, where learning occurs relative to the teaching environment. For example, the following are examples of situated learning activities: field trips in which children actively engage in an unfamiliar environment, cooperative learning and internship experiences in which students are immersed and physically active in an actual work environment, and learning centers used in classrooms in which children are involved in activities that present as real-life experiences. These experiences illustrated that children are actively involved in addressing real-world problems. As the practice implies, the student is situated in the learning experience, and knowledge acquisition becomes a part of the learning activity, its context, and the culture in which it is developed and used (International Society for Technology in Education, 2007). Children

form or construct their knowledge from experiences they bring to the learning environment. Situated learning involves children in cooperative activities in which they are challenged to use their critical thinking and kinesthetic abilities. Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory worked well as the conceptual framework for the data analysis and data interpretation in the current study.

The subsequent sections outline the data interpretation of the key findings in this study for both research questions based on the conceptual framework, followed by references to the related research included in the literature review. I describe the data interpretation of the key findings for both research questions. The findings for each research question includes synthesis of those significant findings.

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based learning practices instructional design? The key findings that emerged for the first research question were related to the teacher's background knowledge of play-based learning strategy, structure of play-based learning instructional practice, and selection of the appropriate strategies for the effective implementation of the instructional model. The first key finding under structure of play-based learning practices revealed that kindergarten teachers were implementing both structured and unstructured play-based learning practices daily between 20 and 30 minutes. Kindergarten teachers chose to implement structured and unstructured practices due to the multiple challenges resulting from administrative and curricular demands, being the only adult in the classroom, feelings of inadequacies, lack of resources, insufficient training, and varying student

abilities. However, teachers recognized the importance of play-based learning and the benefits it provides. Although teachers were implementing structured play-based learning practices, they were also making time to use unstructured play-based learning practices at different times of the day to enable students to explore, experiment, engage with other students in peer discussions, collaborate, and build relationships not only with teachers but with one another. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning regarding the importance of the social construction of learning and how people in groups attain new knowledge. Lave and Wenger stressed that situated learning environments place students in authentic learning situations in which they are actively immersed in an activity while using problem-solving critical thinking skills. These opportunities should involve a social community that represents real-world experiences and encourages students to tap into their prior knowledge.

The second key finding was that kindergarten teachers plan collectively for play-based learning practices, use curriculum and instruction to guide their planning, organize a variety of instructional strategies, use background knowledge, and consider instructional delivery models when they select different practices to implement play-based learning practices effectively. The participants agreed that selecting and implementing play-based learning instructional practices during structured and unstructured activities supports children's learning through the different academic content areas and targeted objectives. This finding aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) views about the significance of play and learning in the primary years and that learning takes place through close relationship with other students and teachers and through

connecting prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual learning. This finding also emphasizes the benefits derived from using play-based instructional strategies, including self-awareness, greater confidence, communication, and increased oral language and cognitive development.

The third finding was that the kindergarten teachers monitored and assessed students' work through structured and unstructured play-based learning practices. Teachers plan a variety of opportunities for students during guided and independent practice for monitoring and assessing students' work. Teachers used discussions between themselves and students working in partnerships and in small groups to dive deeper into their understanding of the skill and concepts. In addition to teacher-to-child and student discussions, teachers also used student data to determine strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. This finding also aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes the importance of using assessments with play-based learning practices. To assess student performance in relation to curricular standards, teachers must be able to monitor and measure different aspects of student learning and development within the context of play. Because productive assessment approaches capture children's strengths and needs, it is important that teachers are able to use assessment approaches to monitor and support children in play where they demonstrate their best learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Because play has been mandated as the dominant instructional context in many kindergarten curricula, and assessment is one of the primary forces shaping teachers' learning and instructional practices, the integration of play and assessment has become essential (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018).

The fourth finding was differentiated instruction was used periodically during structured play-based learning to elicit expected changes in student learning. Teachers would like play-based learning practices to address the different levels students are at, whether its struggling learners, on level, or advanced learners. Differentiated instruction influences the delivery of the lesson because it makes a connection between the lesson previously taught between the whole group and the center activities. In addition, differentiated instruction would also focus on the social-emotional development, as well as students' creative impression. Additionally, modifications in the instructional content, process, and product can help students grasp key aspects of instruction effectively. This finding aligns with the existing literature that stresses that differentiation instruction is a beneficial teaching tool that addresses students' educational levels. Effective differentiation in play-based learning should include the modification of instruction, collaboration, autonomy in learning, and integrating teaching and practice to enhance learning (Pham, 2012). Differentiated instruction gives students the tools and methods to be self-directed, creative, and contextually responsive to seek the knowledge by using core principles and concepts.

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers to implementing play-based learning practices in instructional design? The key findings were related to the barriers kindergarten teachers encountered when they implemented play-based learning practices. The first key finding revealed that six participants faced challenges in implementing play-based learning practices due to administrative and curricular demands. Two other

participants received positive feedback and encouraged their administrator to visit their classroom when they were implementing play-based learning practices. Six participants stated that there are required skills and concepts children need to learn and master. The administrators believed that these skills and concepts could not be achieved through unstructured play-based learning practices. Most of the participants had instituted structured play-based learning instructional practices to meet the needs of content area skills and concepts, as directed by administrative demands. This finding aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes that many teachers have embedded a play-based learning framework into various content areas, such as literacy, using student-guided play (Cavanaugh et al., 2017) by allowing reading and writing activities to include collaboration and discovery using costumes and artwork.

The second finding indicated that seven participants experienced being the only adult in the classroom, and because of this they had to teach and manage a class of 25 children. Seven participants shared that they had difficulty implementing play-based learning practices and managing the class. They found extra time was needed to first teach the children rules, routines, and expectations of how they should work in play-based learning centers, and time was also needed to monitor and assess students' work. In addition, two participants pointed out that teaching the children the expectations allowed them to rotate through the centers and not simply work in one center throughout the class period. Also, being the only adult in the classroom makes it extremely difficult having one-to-one discussions and making sure the rest of the students are working as partners or in small groups at the centers. The participants reported they would often have to stop the

conferences and walk around to the other students monitoring their work and then return to the conference. An additional person would be beneficial because one person would conduct the conferences while the other person would monitor the students and make sure the students were on task.

The third finding revealed that nine participants did not have sufficient time to incorporate play-based learning practices. Nine participants shared that time is a major challenge in implementing the instructional practice. They stated that due to meeting pacing calendar deadlines and administrating city-wide assessments, it was impossible to implement play-based learning practices in the way they should be implemented. This finding aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes that teachers are not able to allocate enough time needed to implement play-based learning. Teachers specified that more time is required to find, organize, and create play-based learning materials (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

The fourth finding revealed that due to the school's reduced budget, the nine participants were faced with spending their money to purchase supplies to create play-based activities. Participants stated they had to purchase their own materials to implement play-based learning practices. The school's administrators believed the funds were better spent on academic materials and programs to get students ready for city-wide assessments. This finding aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes administrators are not providing the teachers with the funds to purchase the necessary resources, and many teachers are using their own funds to buy what is needed to help students strengthen their deficient skills.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation arose from the implementation of this basic qualitative study. This limitation was due to involving only kindergarten teachers in a public school environment. The participants of this basic qualitative study included nine kindergarten teachers who taught multiple subject areas (English language arts, math, phonics, writing, science, and social studies) in culturally diverse public schools in the Northeast United States. Therefore, the findings of this basic qualitative study may not be generalizable to all kindergarten teachers who teach English language arts, math, phonics, science, and social studies in the Northeast United States.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future research are based on the strengths, limitations, and literature review of this study. This basic qualitative study offered rich data about kindergarten teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and barriers encountered in kindergarten curricula. This study was limited to kindergarten teachers who teach in public schools. Further research should replicate this study in private and Montessori schools. Kindergarten teachers who implement play-based learning practices in private or Montessori schools might provide additional views and opinions about how they assess student learning in unstructured play-based instructional practices. Such data would be beneficial for researchers and teachers who want to further explore play-based learning instruction in kindergarten classrooms.

Implications

This basic qualitative study's findings provided several contributions to positive social change. The first contribution is for kindergarten teachers to become more knowledgeable about play-based learning practices and the advancement of continued training in the instructional practices. The findings of this study revealed kindergarten teachers' insight into play-based learning practices and the ways they plan, collaborate, implement, monitor, and assess student learning through the use of play-based learning practices.

The second contribution of this study to positive social change is the advancement of district and school leaders' involvement in the transformation of instructional practices. Gaining deeper insight into kindergarten teachers' experiences with play-based learning practices and barriers they encounter may help to ensure that the instructional practices are implemented not only with fidelity but also with the understanding to encourage the effectiveness, dependability, and reliability with the implementation of play-based learning practices.

The third contribution of this study provides a positive social change to increase kindergarten children's oral and cognitive development through play-based learning practices as they move towards the primary grades, where more rigorous instruction takes place. The findings of this study add to the existing literature that addresses various ways to support student learning through play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. When kindergarten students learn through play-based learning instruction,

they can achieve successful academic learning through exploration, experimentation, engagement, collaboration, and problem solving with themselves and others.

Conclusions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices and the barriers encountered in kindergarten classrooms. The findings of this study add to the existing literature that addresses multiple ways to support teachers' implementation of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. This basic qualitative study revealed that play-based instructional practices must be a significant part of the early childhood education academic program because knowledge of this instructional method will increase oral and cognitive development. The study also revealed the importance of utilizing exploration, experimentation, collaboration, and self-regulation to support the students overall learning in kindergarten.

This basic qualitative study increased the understanding and relevance of play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. It focuses on providing teachers with periodic professional development training to implement play-based learning practices effectively. It also offers ways to plan, implement, and evaluate student learning through play-based instructional practice. It is my hope that the findings of this basic qualitative study will inform teachers in their efforts to better implement play-based learning practices that will support student academic learning.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Research Participants

Participant Requirements:

- **Be a kindergarten teacher**

- **Have three or more years of teaching experience**

- **Knowledge of play-based pedagogy practices and use of academic instructional strategies**

- **Implemented play-based pedagogy practices**

Research Study: Exploring Teachers' Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms

The purpose of this study is to explore how kindergarten teachers implement play-based learning practices and play-based curricula and to describe and understand the barriers encountered when using play-based learning practices. You will participate in one 45-60 minutes in a video conferencing (e.g. Zoom) and complete 5-10 minutes questionnaire on your experience of implementing play-based pedagogy practices in your kindergarten classrooms. Compensation for taking part of this study will be $25 Amazon gift certificate. Your identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

If you are interested in participating this study, please contact Emily Acevedo at emily.acevedo@waldenu.edu or you can call me at 917-624-0236.

Appendix B: Educator Invitation to Participate Letter

Dear Prospective Participant,

Greetings! I am Emily Acevedo and I am conducting a research study as part of my degree requirement with Walden University. I am hereby inviting you to participate in the study. As you know, I've been a teacher at P. S. 276, The Louis Marshall School, however my role as researcher is separate from my role as a teacher at the school. I am inviting kindergarten teachers who are currently teaching or have taught kindergarten using play-based pedagogy practices at the targeted site. I believe the results from this study can provide insight into the implementation of play-based pedagogy practices implemented by kindergarten teachers at the targeted school.

My research titled, "Exploring Teachers' Implementation of Play-Based Pedagogy Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms," is part of the requirements of my degree. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore teachers implement play-based learning practices and play-based curricula in kindergarten classrooms and understand the barriers kindergarten teachers encounter when using play-based learning practices in kindergarten classrooms. Understanding the barriers will help teachers to become more aware of what they might be doing now and what they want to do once the barriers are removed.

If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the Notice of Informed Consent Form, and complete the Demographic Questionnaire. Please send both forms to the email address below.

You may contact me at any time to answer questions or to address concerns by emailing me at emily.acevedo@waldenu.edu or by phone at 917-624-0236.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Emily Acevedo
Principal Researcher
Walden University, PhD Candidate

Appendix C: Preinterview Questionnaire

1. Describe how you implement play-based learning strategies into your instructional design.

2. Describe how you plan for play-based learning practices.

3. Describe how play-based learning instruction helps your student master specific learning targets.

4. Describe the barriers you have encountered in the implementation of play-based learning practices.

5. Share the ways you assess effectiveness of your play-based learning practices.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

RQ1: How do kindergarten teachers describe and reflect implementing play-based pedagogy practices in instructional design?

- What are play-based pedagogy practices in kindergarten?

- How long have you been using play-based pedagogy practices in your classroom?

- What are some strengths that you possess you believe has made you effective teaching through play-based pedagogy practices?

- Describe a lesson in which you implemented play-based pedagogy practice in your lesson. What went well and how could you improve upon it?

- Describe how the experience of play-based pedagogy practices influence planning or the delivery of the lesson.

- Can you look at your lesson plan and tell me how do you introduce/use play-based learning practices?

- Tell me how this activity work with regards to play-based learning.

- Can you tell me in what content area did you use play-based learning and how did it work?

- Give me some examples in you use play-based learning in your lesson.

- Can you describe how you embed play-based pedagogy practices within your lesson?

- What was your thinking?

- What is working well to support the implementation process for play-based learning practices?

RQ2: How do kindergarten teachers describe barriers implementing play-based pedagogy practices in instructional design?

- Describe possible barriers when implementing play-based pedagogy practices.

- What have you done to overcome the barriers?

- Tell me about your professional development training to support the implementation of play-based learning practices.

- What changes could be made to improve your implementation?

- Do you have any preservice experience to have mentor teacher that used play-based learning practices?

- Could you recommend some resources that you have used?