

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Rachael Morrison

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Donna Brackin, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Terri Edwards, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2023

Abstract

Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives About the Role of Play in the Kindergarten

Classroom

by

Rachael Morrison

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Macon State College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2023

Abstract

Researchers have established the developmental and educational benefits of play for young students but increasing academic demands in kindergarten make it more difficult to incorporate play into the classroom. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom, considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the Common Core Curriculum/Georgia Standard of Excellence (CCC/GSE). The conceptual framework used to guide this study was based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Two research questions addressed kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play and its implementation in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom. Participants were 10 Georgia-certified teachers in a small urban school district who had taught kindergarten for a minimum of 3 years. Semistructured interviews were conducted, and data analysis occurred through open coding and thematic analysis. Four themes were identified: (a) the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning; (b) CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate; (c) increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints were factors that inhibited play in the classroom; and (d) teachers' perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms. The findings may contribute to positive social change through an understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning included in the kindergarten curriculum.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives About the Role of Play in the Kindergarten

Classroom

by

Rachael Morrison

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Macon State College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2023

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Carlette Davidson; the loving memory of my daddy, Ray Davidson; my grandma, Claudine P. White; and the loving memory of my granddaddy, Carl A. White Jr. They were my inspiration to pursue my doctoral degree. They encouraged me to chase my dreams always. Although my granddaddy and my daddy could not see my graduation, this is for them.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I owe all the honor, glory, and praise to my God and Savior. According to Psalms 9:1, "I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds." To my husband, Steven, for his love, sacrifices, and support throughout this endeavor. Thank you to my parents for their love and encouragement. To my children, I want you always to pursue your dreams, no matter your age. Thank you to my family for their patience and understanding as I finished school. I know it was a long road with lots of long hours. Without each of their tremendous understanding and encouragement over the past few years, it would have been impossible for me to complete my study. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Donna Brackin. This would not have been possible without her unwavering support, assistance, and contributions throughout this dissertation process. It has been a long road, but her continued support made this possible.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background	3
Problem Statement	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Conceptual Framework	6
Nature of the Study	7
Definitions.....	9
Assumptions.....	10
Scope and Delimitations	11
Limitations	12
Significance.....	13
Summary	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	16
Conceptual Framework	17
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables	18
Child Development and the Purpose of Play	19
Learning Value of Play	20
Removal of Play	23

Federal Mandates for Kindergarten	25
Teachers' Perspectives on Play in the United States	29
Teachers' Perspectives on Play Worldwide.....	31
Summary and Conclusions	33
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	35
Research Design and Rationale.....	35
Role of the Researcher	37
Methodology.....	38
Participant Selection	39
Instrumentation	40
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	41
Data Analysis Plan	43
Trustworthiness	44
Credibility	45
Transferability.....	45
Dependability	46
Confirmability.....	46
Ethical Procedures.....	47
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Results	50
Setting.....	50
Data Collection	51

Data Analysis	53
Results.....	58
Results for Research Question 1	58
Results for Research Question 2	60
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	66
Credibility	67
Transferability.....	67
Dependability	68
Confirmability.....	69
Summary	69
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	73
Interpretation of the Findings.....	74
Theme 1	74
Theme 2.....	76
Theme 3.....	78
Theme 4.....	80
Limitations of the Study.....	81
Recommendations.....	83
Implications.....	84
Conclusion	84
References.....	87
Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Teachers	102

Appendix B: Examples of Open Codes and Categories105

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants.....	51
Table 2. Examples of Open Codes.....	55
Table 3. Categories and Themes.....	57

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Kindergarten has become more academically focused due to the implementation of Common Core Standards (CCS) across the United States (Hustedt et al., 2018). The creation of CCS came from the idea to create challenging academic expectations to improve achievement and college readiness for all students. In 2010, 46 states adopted CCS (Gewertz, 2015). By 2015, states began to reverse adoption of these standards (Gewertz, 2015). Georgia was one of those states. In 2015, at the state level, CCS was revised, and the name changed from Common Core Georgia Performance Standards to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE; Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2015). According to Taylor and Boyer (2020), the increase in academic expectations has created a challenge for teachers regarding integrating play into their daily teaching. Teachers have removed play from their classrooms because of the focus on implementing standards for academic achievement (Bodrova & Leong, 2019). Wu (2021) explained that play is a context for learning and a link to the child's development, making play and learning important issues in early childhood education today. My study's findings may contribute to positive social change through an understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning included in the kindergarten curriculum.

According to Önder (2018), there is a link between play and children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Cognitive, emotional, and social skills are prerequisites for children to learn more complex concepts as they get older (Allee-

Herndon et al., 2022). Including play in the curriculum can help develop children's academic, social, and emotional functions (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Examining kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards may fill a gap in practice concerning their perspectives of the role of play in the classroom in the United States (see Taylor & Boyer, 2020).

Bodrova and Leong (2019) noted that kindergarten students are playing less in the classroom environment than they did in the past due to the pressures of academic achievements. Play is being removed and replaced with drill and skill exercises and nightly homework (Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Teachers have seen changes in kindergartens across the United States with increased academic content and standardized testing (Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019). Child development is linked to play because it facilitates a child's thinking (Wu, 2019). The removal of play has affected young children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Christakis, 2017). A curriculum created for kindergarten that incorporates play may be linked to future academic success for young children (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018).

In Chapter 1, I identify the problem that kindergarten teachers have fewer opportunities to implement play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. I provide the reader with the background and significance of the study. I include the problem statement, research questions (RQs), and conceptual framework. In addition, I discuss definitions of

key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the implications for positive social change.

Background

Implementing standards to be taught in the early years has increased academic expectations for kindergarteners (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Teachers have been challenged to incorporate these standards and developmentally appropriate practices such as play (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). The pressure from these increased academic expectations has resulted in children not playing as much in the classroom environment as they did in the past (Bodrova & Leong, 2019). Guirguis (2018) explained that CCS in the United States have triggered schools to introduce academics earlier. The previous introduction of math and reading standards has led to decreasing or, in some cases, removing play from the classroom (Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Yogman et al. (2018) explained that a child's brain structure is enhanced through play. Researchers have examined the effects of removing play on young children's cognitive, emotional, and social development and determined that it has developmental and educational benefits for young children (Christakis, 2017; Önder, 2018). Pistorova and Slutsky (2018) stated that removing play from the classroom disengages students from learning. Pistorova and Slutsky demonstrated that play has many benefits for students, but when it is removed, they lose their ability to emotionally regulate, build necessary social skills, develop problem-solving strategies, and increase imagination and creativity. Bluiett (2018), Murray (2018), and Pistorova and Slutsky called for more research on the lack of play in the classroom.

In June 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was introduced across the United States. Georgia adopted these standards in July 2010 (GADOE, 2010), and classroom implementation of these standards began in 2012 across the state. With the implementation of CCS, teachers used these standards to guide their teaching and promote a more rigorous curriculum to prepare students for college and career success. In 2013, Georgia's governor requested a formal review to ensure that students are college and career ready and asked that GADOE audit the standards (GADOE, 2023). In 2015, Georgia renamed its state standards, moving from CCS to the GSE (GADOE, 2023). GADOE (2023) decided to make this name change to ensure that the standards taught to students were specific to the state of Georgia. During this transition period, GADOE (2023) also pulled out of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers test development consortium and decided to work with teachers in the state to create their own standardized assessments.

For kindergarten, increased academic expectations have challenged teachers to integrate play into their daily teaching (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Bodrova and Leong (2019) determined that due to the pressures of academic achievements, children are playing less in the classroom environment than they did in the past. Researchers have established the developmental and educational benefits of play for young children (Ali et al., 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Danniels & Pyle, 2018; Önder, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). There was a gap in practice concerning kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the role of play in the classroom in the United States.

Problem Statement

The problem I addressed in this study was that kindergarten teachers have few opportunities to implement play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Bodrova and Leong (2019) established play's developmental and educational benefits for young children. According to Taylor and Boyer (2020), the increase in academic expectations has created a challenge for teachers to integrate play into their daily teaching. The time to participate in play has decreased in kindergarten (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Bluiett (2018) explained that due to the changes in federal mandates for early childhood education, there is a need to explore play in the classroom. Researchers have established the developmental and educational benefits of play for young students (Bluiett, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). There was a gap in practice concerning kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the role of play in the classroom in the United States. Murray (2018) expressed the need for further research to address the lack of play implementation and return it to the classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Bodrova and Leong (2019) explained that children play to learn. Brodrova and Leong focused on children's need to play and the relationship between academics and play. Child development is linked to play because it facilitates a child's thinking (Wu, 2021). I used a basic qualitative design consisting of open-ended interview

questions to explore 10 kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom. The knowledge gained through my study may be used to raise awareness for educators and policymakers of the critical influence play has on a young child's learning.

Research Questions

The following RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

RQ2: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

Conceptual Framework

Child development is linked to play because it facilitates a child's thinking (Wu, 2021). Play and learning are among the most important issues in early childhood education (Wu, 2021). Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory focuses on children being active participants in their learning as well as learning by doing. The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD can be defined as a child's learning range. A child's learning capability ranges at the base as their capability when doing a task individually and at the peak as their capability with adult support (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that young children can learn and develop through playful interactions with others. According to Vygotsky, children can interact and engage beyond their age during play. Play creates a ZPD because it is the source of development; early childhood education should be structured so that the ZPD is

activated and utilized in teaching (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout Vygotsky's work, the importance of play in relation to a child's cognitive growth and development is highlighted and has contributed to the understanding that the foundational learning of a child is through play. Vygotsky's ZPD informed the current study by providing a framework for play implementation.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD served as the foundation for developing two RQs and allowed me to determine that a qualitative research method (semistructured interviews using an interview protocol) was the best approach for this study. The importance of play in relation to a child's cognitive growth and development is evident throughout Vygotsky's work. Vygotsky's ZPD provided me with information about the foundational learning of a child through play, which guided me in developing the interview protocol that included open-ended questions focused on exploring kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom. In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed explanation of the conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

Using a basic qualitative approach with interviews, I explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A basic qualitative design is appropriate to answer RQs about the participants' experiences and perspectives from their standpoint (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). A qualitative design was appropriate for my

study because a qualitative researcher aims to understand and explore the interpretation of participants' experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The concept explored in this study was kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in their kindergarten classroom, considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Researchers have established play's developmental and educational benefits for young children (Ali et al., 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Danniels & Pyle, 2018; Önder, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). Kindergarten teachers face challenges incorporating play into their curriculum due to high academic expectations (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Play-based learning has been established as a developmentally appropriate practice for early childhood education (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). The current study's participants included 10 purposefully sampled kindergarten teachers from a small urban school district in Georgia with a minimum of 3 years of kindergarten teaching experience. Data were collected through semistructured interviews using an interview protocol and conducted in person or via Zoom, depending on the participant's choice. Nine participants selected an in-person interview, and one selected a Zoom interview. Once data were collected, data analysis was performed through thematic analysis. I coded the data using an open coding strategy, which allowed me to break apart the data and generalize initial concepts (see Saldana, 2016). I identified, analyzed, and reported codes and themes within my data through thematic analysis (see Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

Definitions

Cognitive development: How a child learns to think or acquire knowledge and understand the world around them (Piaget, 1962).

CCC: A set of clear college and career-ready standards developed by 48 states for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2021).

Developmentally appropriate practices: The opportunities created for learning that supports children's overall well-being and healthy development as informed by theories and literature about how children develop and learn (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020).

Early childhood education: Educating children from birth to age 8 (NAEYC, 2020). During this period, children go through the most rapid phases of their growth and development (NAEYC, 2020).

GSE: Instructional expectations provided to teachers in the state of Georgia (GADOE, 2023).

Kindergarten: A class that precedes first grade. This class is designed to prepare children between the ages of 4 and 6 for first grade (Education Commission of the States, 2022).

NCLB Act of 2001: An act that authorized several federal education programs administered by the states. This act requires states to test students in reading and math in Grades 3–8 and once in high school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Play: Children's play is a child-initiated experience that can occur with or without adult interaction. Play can also occur in teacher-led experiences with specific learning outcomes (Bodrova & Leong, 2019).

School readiness: A set of skills and knowledge children need to succeed in school (Head Start, Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

ZPD: A child's learning capability range. At the base is a child's capability when doing a task individually, and at the peak is the capability a child has with adult support (Vygotsky, 1978).

Assumptions

There were three assumptions made in this study. First, I assumed that the kindergarten teachers interviewed would respond openly and honestly to the interview questions and communicate their experiences and perceptions as asked. The honesty of the participants was important for valid results (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also assumed that teachers who had taught kindergarten for 3 or more years would have sufficient experience. According to Walker (2016), teachers have gained experience and confidence after completing their first few years of teaching. Finally, I assumed that a sample of 10–12 kindergarten teachers would be representative of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Guest et al. (2020) stated that data saturation occurs within the first six to 12 interviews. These assumptions were necessary for the current study to ensure

that the data collected would be meaningful and relevant in exploring kindergarten teachers' perspectives.

Scope and Delimitations

Kindergarten teachers have few opportunities to implement play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. To address this problem, I conducted a basic qualitative study with 10 kindergarten teachers in a small urban school district in Georgia. This study was delimited to kindergarten teachers who had 3 or more years of experience teaching kindergarten. The definition of kindergarten and site selection determined these delimitations. Kindergarten is designed to prepare children between the ages of 4 and 6 for first grade (Education Commission of the States, 2022). I excluded other school personnel, such as classroom aides, paraprofessionals, and other professionals in the classroom who were not kindergarten teachers. These individuals were excluded because they did not meet the selection criteria for this study.

Delimitations arise from within the scope of the study and define the boundaries that will be considered (Simon & Goes, 2013). The current study's results may not apply to readers whose focus is on a different population or context (see Merriam, 2009). As the researcher in this study, I reported the findings and provided readers with information that may apply to other populations or contexts; however, it is up to the reader to determine transferability (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations

Potential weaknesses or problems in the study can be identified as limitations (Creswell, 2016). Limitations are common in all qualitative case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and an effort was made to mitigate their influence in the current study. One limitation was that the study was conducted in a small urban school system in a specific geographic location. The transferability of the results may be limited because of the small number of participants from this location. I provided thick, rich descriptions of all processes and used direct quotes from participants to allow the reader to determine whether the results are transferable to their situation.

Researcher bias, another limitation, is the preconceived beliefs, feelings, and ideas that may influence the interview process. As the researcher, I had control over participant selection, data analysis, and the interpretation of results. Because of this, my perspectives may have interfered with the results of this study. However, multiple measures were taken to ensure the credibility and reliability of this study and that my personal biases or beliefs did not influence the outcomes. I used a reflective journal to address personal bias by documenting all thoughts and feelings that arose during the interview process (see Johnson, 1997). I used an interview protocol for the consistency of interview questions. I provided thick, rich descriptions of the methodology and participants' responses to allow the reader to determine transferability. Member checking was conducted after the final data analysis when participants received a summary of my findings. The final measure I took to address potential biases was to have an expert reviewer not related to the study review the collected data. This reviewer checked for bias and the accuracy of themes

from the data analysis (see Johnson, 1997). The expert reviewer works in education, holds a doctoral degree in early childhood education, and is employed at a local school. This individual had no connection to the participants or the location of the study because they were employed in a different district.

Significance

Önder (2018) demonstrated a link between play and children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Cognitive, emotional, and social skills are prerequisites for children to learn more complex concepts as they get older (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022). My findings may contribute to positive social change through an understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning included in the kindergarten curriculum. This study may also help state and local policymakers better understand kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning that is included in the kindergarten curriculum.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided the background of the study and a brief introduction to the topic of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. The problem, purpose, and RQs were stated.

I also presented an outline of the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD to support the basic qualitative approach selected for this study. The participants in this study were 10 purposefully sampled kindergarten teachers from a small urban school district in the state of Georgia with a minimum of 3 years of kindergarten teaching experience. I used open coding and thematic analysis to analyze the data collected from semistructured interviews to answer the RQs. I listed key terms and their definitions, as well as the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Finally, I discussed its significance and potential for positive social change.

In Chapter 2, I discuss my literature search strategy to locate current peer-reviewed research. I provide a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework and an in-depth review of the recent research literature, establishing a connection to the current study. I present recent information on the topic of play in the kindergarten classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I describe the literature relevant to this study that addresses the problem that kindergarten teachers have few opportunities to implement play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after implementing the CCC/GSE standards. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Researchers have recognized play's developmental and educational benefits for young children (Ali et al., 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Danniels & Pyle, 2018; Önder, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). Academic expectations have increased in kindergarten, which has created a challenge for teachers to integrate play into their daily teaching (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Play-based learning has been established as a developmentally appropriate practice for early childhood education (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). According to Danniels and Pyle (2018), beginning in the 2000s, a shift toward play-based learning in early education curricula occurred in several countries, including Canada, Sweden, China, United Arab Emirates, and New Zealand. There was a gap in practice concerning kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the role of play in the classroom in the United States.

In this chapter, I describe the search strategies I used to obtain relevant resources. I also discuss the conceptual framework based on Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. Chapter 2 includes a review of seminal and recent literature focusing on play in kindergarten

classrooms. The review of current literature provides insight into several aspects and foundations for this study.

Literature Search Strategy

A professional and research literature review was accomplished in preparation for conducting this basic qualitative study. I reviewed recent information and topics on play in the kindergarten classroom. I also attended two appointments with a Walden University librarian to discuss my search criteria. I searched multiple databases to obtain recent literature on the topics included in the literature review.

I used the Walden University Library to access the following databases with the search criteria: ERIC, Education Source, EBSCOhost, and Academic Search Complete. Google Scholar and the Teacher Reference Center were additional resources to identify other sources. My search process included using Boolean/phrase selections, which helped me identify full-text publications limited to academic, peer-reviewed journals. The inclusion criteria included articles that were (a) peer-reviewed, (b) full-text, and (c) published between 2018 and 2022. I excluded studies that were not peer-reviewed and articles not available in full text. I used the following keywords and search terms to search for relevant literature: *role of play in the kindergarten classroom, role of play in early childhood education, benefits of play in early childhood education, common core in the kindergarten classroom, teachers' perspectives on the role of play, removal of play in kindergarten, increased academics in kindergarten, common core and play, teacher perceptions or teacher attitudes or teacher views or teacher belief or educator perceptions or educator attitudes or educator views or educator belief, and United States.*

Conceptual Framework

The problem addressed in this study was that kindergarten teachers have few opportunities to implement play in the classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. Vygotsky argued that young children could learn and develop through playful interactions with others. Vygotsky noted that children could interact and engage beyond their age during play. Children can separate what can be seen from what can be implied during play and think about something even when it is not present. Vygotsky viewed this as a step toward developing higher cognitive functions and verbal thinking. Play creates a ZPD because it is the source of development; early childhood education should be structured so that the ZPD is activated and utilized in teaching (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD can be defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Throughout Vygotsky's (1978) work, the importance of play in relation to a child's cognitive growth and development is highlighted. To learn, children must be presented with tasks beyond their capabilities. ZPD is the area where instruction is the most beneficial because the task is outside the child's ability range, challenging them and promoting cognitive growth and development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's research contributed to the understanding that the foundational learning of a child is through play

and the effect that play has on young children's learning and development and its social and emotional benefits.

In the current study, I explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory provided me with a foundation for understanding the role of play as it relates to the development of young children. Taylor and Boyer (2020) stated that constructivist theory stresses the importance of play related to a child's cognitive growth and development. Play lays the foundation for future academic success, and these seminal theorists supported the perception that children learn through play.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD provided information that guided me in developing the interview protocol. The interview questions were designed to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE. The data collected through semistructured interviews using the interview protocol were thematically analyzed.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

This section begins with an outline of child development and the purpose of play, followed by a description of the learning value of play and removal of play. I present literature on the federal mandates for kindergarten in the United States and teachers' perspectives on play in this country and worldwide.

Child Development and the Purpose of Play

Play has a vital role in a child's development (Yogman et al., 2018). To fully develop, children need to acquire a variety of skills. Children's brain structure is enhanced when they play, allowing them to grow and develop (Yogman et al., 2018). Play provides students various learning opportunities that cannot be taught through direct instruction (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020). Play is the predominant way children learn and helps develop their imagination, language skills, physical capacities, and social-emotional skills (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020). Play at school is important because students can access materials and playmates in class (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020).

Play-based learning has been proven to be a developmentally appropriate practice for early childhood education (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Danniels and Pyle (2018) demonstrated through their research beginning in the 2000s that a shift toward using play-based learning in early education curricula occurred in several countries, including Canada, Sweden, China, the United Arab Emirates, and New Zealand. Kindergarten is not mandated in all states in the United States, and in this country, it has become more academically focused due to implementation of CCS (Hustedt et al., 2018). Guirguis (2018) explained that implementing CCS in the United States prompted schools to introduce academics earlier. The United States' educational system shifted to a culture of assessments intended to increase student achievement; however, it is still behind other countries in reading, math, and science skills (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021). Allee-Herndon and Roberts (2021) expressed the need for teachers to demand a return to play-based learning. Based on the developmental needs of children and the lack of student

gains, Allee-Herndon and Roberts suggested that policymakers take a closer look at how child development relates to the pedagogy of play and its effects on student achievement.

Murray (2018) discussed the value of play worldwide. Murray noted that many early childhood philosophers and educators recognize the need for young children to play. Murray presented three reasons why play has been reduced in several classrooms worldwide and explored the growing trend of removing play from young children's classrooms. Overstreet (2018) explained that play is integral to a child's social, cognitive, physical, and language development and is one of early childhood's most vital elements. Children who can play tend to develop social skills that enable them to learn and interact with one another (Kinkead-Clark, 2019). Through play, children explore the structures that surround the adult world and learn the meaning of social norms and expectations. Play is the space where children learn through their experiences (Overstreet, 2018). Overstreet noted that CCS were back mapped, starting with desired learning outcomes or goals and then working backward to determine the steps, strategies, and content needed to achieve those outcomes. This approach resulted in expectations being pushed down to lower grades; however, changes were most noticeable in the early grades. Finally, Overstreet explained that although the CCS do not instruct the teacher what to teach, the pressures of accountability for these more rigorous expectations have led to decreased play.

Learning Value of Play

Brown et al. (2021) investigated how children should be taught in kindergarten. The researchers found the participants in their study felt the need to reshape kindergarten

due to overwhelming expectations. If these issues were not addressed, the participants expressed concerns about the potential short- and long-term consequences for kindergartners regarding their social, emotional, and physical development (Brown et al., 2021). Through their research, Pistorova and Slutsky (2018) showed that kindergarten students are exposed to academic content previously not introduced until first and second grade. The introduction of this academic content has compromised the educational experiences of kindergarten students (Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Play is not taught to children; it is instinctual (Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Local school staff, district staff, and school boards are beginning to take note of the changes occurring in kindergarten. Stakeholders have also expressed concern about the short- and long-term consequences for kindergartners if the schools do not address how students are taught (Brown et al., 2021).

Kindergarten students want to learn; however, how they learn is not formal or instructional. Play is how kindergarten students should learn (Vogt et al., 2018). Play is the core of early childhood education, and although it is widely acknowledged, little is known about its effectiveness compared to other methods of learning (Vogt et al., 2018). Opportunities for free playtime are strongly encouraged for kindergarten children (He, 2018). According to Wu (2019), children have unique perspectives and approaches to both play and the process of learning, making them active participants who shape their understanding based on their unique perspectives, interests, and interactions with their environment. Play for children is voluntary (Goodhall & Atkinson, 2019). In play, children choose their activities and the materials they use (Goodhall & Atkinson, 2019).

Keung and Fung (2021) noted that children described play as fun and made them very happy. The children enjoyed playing with others and accessing different materials at their leisure (Keung & Fung, 2021). When learning tasks are perceived as play, students are more engaged in the learning task (Wainwright et al., 2020).

Teachers have noted a link between play, child development, and learning (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). According to Bubikova-Moan et al. (2019), teachers in their study believed that play not only affects a child's holistic development but also their cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social development and is the foundation for learning (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Through the integration of playful learning, content is more likely to be retained as the students are actively engaged and enjoying what they are learning (Zosh et al., 2018).

Moedt and Holmes (2020) conducted a study in an urban public school in the northeastern United States. Their study included 42 culturally diverse kindergarten students divided into two groups in which they were read a story. Afterward, one group was not given playtime related to the story; the other group had 10 minutes to play with finger puppets and other props related to the story. Both groups had to draw the characters and setting they remembered from the story. Moedt and Holmes determined that the students in the play group remembered more than those in the nonplay group. In a similar study conducted in Tennessee, Broderick et al. (2021) observed prekindergarten students working in learning centers. Through these observations, Broderick et al. noted that the play curriculum facilitated learning among all students and that they met many of the Tennessee Early Learning and Development Standards. In a study in Central Florida,

39 kindergarten students were divided between two classrooms (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022). One classroom centered on play-based instruction, while the second focused on direct scripted instruction. Allee-Herndon et al. (2022) discovered that the children in the play-based classroom made greater literacy gains, suggesting the need to explore returning play to the classroom.

In an intervention study, Vogt et al. (2018) noted that higher learning gains occurred in a group given a play-based approach. Interviews with teachers revealed concerns about student engagement related to the implementation of the training program. The teachers were also more enthusiastic when discussing the play-based approach in the interviews. Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk (2018) explained that multiple countries worldwide had implemented play-based learning programs in their kindergarten classrooms. However, Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk found no consensus on how play should be incorporated into these classrooms. Wainwright et al. (2020) suggested that more teacher training is needed to ensure they understand playful practices, which can be utilized in planning and lesson approaches.

Removal of Play

In 1840, Friedrich Froebel (1887/2022) opened the first kindergarten in Blankenburg, Germany. Froebel built a philosophy of kindergarten on the belief that “play is the highest phase of child development” (p. 54) and felt that children needed to be provided with opportunities to play to contribute to their learning. According to Shirakawa and Saracho (2021), kindergarten spread internationally, and from 1851 to 1914, its success was greater in the United States than in Germany, where it originated.

As early childhood educational practices began to develop in the United States, Patty Smith Hill was significant in introducing child-centered philosophy to kindergarten teaching (Liebovich, 2020). Hill believed that to develop their full potential, children needed to play (Liebovich, 2020). According to Rand and Morrow (2021), the experiences children have in kindergarten influence their future learning. Previously, play-based experiences were supported, but there has been a decline in the opportunity for children to play (Rand & Morrow, 2021). Russell (2011) researched and evaluated historical accounts that suggested a transformation of kindergarten beginning in the 1950s. Russell's research and analysis of articles, documents, and policy reviews from the 1950–2000s indicated that in the 1950s, only 3% of kindergarten was based exclusively on academics and 97% on the child's developmental level. In the 2000s, the statistics shifted, and 83% of kindergarten was based exclusively on academics, while only 17% was based on the child's developmental level (Russell, 2011). The shift occurred when kindergarten was no longer recognized as a part of early childhood but categorized with elementary schools, causing it to become more academically focused (Bassok et al., 2016; Russell, 2011). Most children aged birth to 8 are enrolled in early childhood programs, spending about 40 hours a week in these programs (Ali et al., 2018). Based on the time children spend in these programs, Ali et al. (2018) noted that they should have enough opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate practices such as play.

Federal Mandates for Kindergarten

Kindergarten is not mandated in all states. According to the Education Commission of the States (2022), only 19 states have mandated kindergarten, 17 states require a full day of kindergarten, and 39 states require that districts offer kindergarten on either a full or half-day basis. In Georgia, kindergarten is not mandatory, but full-day kindergarten is available in every school district across the state (GADOE, 2023). Pelletier and Corter (2019) reported that when kindergarten children in the United States attend a full-day program, they have higher reading and math scores than those who only attended a half-day program. The additional time children spend in school in a full-day program as opposed to a half-day program allows for more exposure to the content required for kindergarten (Pelletier & Corter, 2019).

Although CCS was never in effect in all 50 states, 46 adopted them into their schools as early as 2010 (Gewertz, 2015). Schools across the nation have mandated a set of skills that students should have at each grade; these defined set of skills are referred to as standards. At the state level, CCS were revised in 2015, and Georgia changed the name from Common Core Georgia Performance Standards to the GSE (GADOE, 2015). The requirements to teach essential literacy and math skills left kindergarten teachers limiting and removing various play and exploration opportunities for their students (Bassok et al., 2016). This removal of play effects young children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, with those identified as low-income being affected the most (Christakis, 2017). These implementation of GSE concerning academics have led to the removal of play (Christakis, 2017).

In June 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was introduced across the United States. Kindergarten in many states has become more academically focused due to the implementation of CCS (Hustedt et al., 2018). In California, Costantino-Lane (2019) examined 10 public school kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the change in kindergarten with CCS implementation. The teachers expressed that there was a shift from a developmental to a more academic-focused curriculum. They also stated that developmental activities like play were removed and replaced with drill and skill exercises. The teachers shared that the curriculum was rushed and could be compared to the previous first-grade curriculum before implementation of CCS (Costantino-Lane, 2019). Children aged 5 to 6 years old are expected to read and write at advanced rates that are not developmentally appropriate (Bassok et al., 2016). Bodrova and Leong (2019) noted that children are not playing as much in the classroom environment as they did in the past due to academic achievement pressure. According to Taylor and Boyer (2020), the increase in academic expectations has challenged teachers with integrating play into their daily teaching. Many educators consider play to be disconnected from academics, while others believe that learning only occurs during direct instruction (Taylor & Boyer, 2020).

Federal mandates emphasizing academics have led teachers to exclude developmentally appropriate practices, such as play, from their early childhood classrooms (Bluiett, 2018). Despite these disconnected perspectives between play and academics, researchers have shown that sufficient academic gains are primarily achieved through and because of play when incorporated into the early education classroom

(Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Many early childhood educators admit to seeing a decrease in developmentally appropriate classroom practices such as play (Bluiett, 2018). Early childhood educators were pressured through NCLB in 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 to introduce advanced skills to early childhood students to advance their academics at an earlier age (Kostelnik et al., 2019).

Through the federal government's endorsement of NCLB in the United States, early childhood educators found themselves with reading programs that were not developmentally appropriate for young children (Bluiett, 2018). Hustedt et al. (2018) stated that kindergartens in the United States had implemented policies that increased academic focus. Federal mandates beginning with NCLB required reading programs to be "scientifically based" (Bluiett, 2018, p. 84). Bluiett (2018) stated that further research is needed on the effects of sociodramatic play and the literacy classroom because there is a gap in the literature. There is a need to explore play in the classroom environment due to curriculum changes and current federal mandates (Bluiett, 2018).

According to Brown et al. (2020), kindergarten teachers have noted extensive modifications concerning kindergarten over the last several decades. Education stakeholders often debate the effects changes in kindergarten have had (Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019). These conversations between stakeholders tend to be isolated, making it challenging to ascertain whether these changes align with the stakeholders' perceptions of what kindergarten should be (Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019). In an ethnographic study, Brown, Englehardt, Barry, and Ku (2019) explored how stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels in Texas and West Virginia made

sense of the changes in kindergarten. Findings showed that the changes in kindergarten did not align with their understanding of kindergarten. Further research is needed in this area on a larger scale across the United States (Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019).

DeLuca et al. (2020) stated that two priorities currently shape education in kindergarten. These priorities include emphasizing standards and assessments to monitor student learning and acknowledging that kindergarten needs to support appropriate developmental practices; however, these priorities counteract one another (DeLuca et al., 2020). Hustedt et al. (2018) noted that kindergarten teachers prioritized assessments. The teachers in the study said that kindergarten was the new first grade during focus groups and that their role was to prepare students for more challenging academics (Brown et al., 2020). Early childhood educators are concerned about expectations, standards, and curriculum at the elementary school level (Brown et al., 2020). School readiness has also become a crucial issue concerning a child's academic development (Kokkalia et al., 2019). Stakeholders view school readiness as children possessing the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in school (Kokkalia et al., 2019).

Teachers are not the only stakeholders who have experienced the effects of federal mandates in early childhood education. Parents are also aware of state and federal mandates' effects on their child's classroom environment. Brown, Englehardt, Ku, and Barry. (2019) explored parents' perspectives in Texas and West Virginia on the effect of state and federal mandates. Parents were unhappy with the kindergarten changes and shared their concerns about the increased academic expectations but expressed sympathy for educators implementing these mandates. There was also uncertainty among parents

regarding the changes made through these mandates (Brown, Englehardt, Ku, & Barry, 2019).

Teachers' Perspectives on Play in the United States

Teachers have identified play as essential in child development and strongly believe it is the best learning method for young children (Sofa et al., 2018). Play is a critical component of kindergarten. Historically, play has supported the child's cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development (Pyle et al., 2022). Despite the role of play in kindergarten, teachers have expressed challenges with play integration, noting that the pressure of the academic curriculum has reduced the time allotted for play (Ebbeck et al., 2019). According to Pyle et al. (2022), play-based learning is a developmentally appropriate practice as it relates to the development and learning of a child. However, teachers have different perspectives regarding the relationship between play and learning in the kindergarten classroom (Pyle et al., 2022).

The trend in kindergarten education has shifted toward emphasizing academic instruction at the expense of play despite its established developmental benefits at this early stage (Brown, 2021). Consequently, there is now greater pressure on kindergarten students to excel academically. Teachers have difficulty incorporating the required standards into a play-based learning framework (Pyle, Poliszczuk & Danniels, 2018). The emphasis on academic learning and balancing developmentally appropriate practices and play in kindergarten has created tension and pressure for teachers. According to Pyle, Poliszczuk, and Danniels (2018), there is a need to examine the role of play in kindergarten classrooms and its effect on student learning because "it is essential to the

successful shift from strictly academic kindergarten programs to programs that emphasize academic learning through developmentally appropriate practices such as play-based learning” (p. 23).

Many preschool environments still include play, but Alaca and Pyle (2018) noted that play in kindergarten can provide developmentally appropriate teaching strategies for topic implementation. In the United States, the purpose of kindergarten is to prepare students for first grade by teaching them specific academic skills (Brown, 2021). Brown (2021) examined the transformation of kindergarten from the viewpoint of teachers, revealing that school preparedness for kindergarten has shifted from emphasizing social skills, routines, and procedures toward a concentration on academic abilities. Blanco et al. (2019) demonstrated the effectiveness of play on a kindergartner’s academic achievement. In the southwestern United States, 36 kindergarten students were involved in a 6-week study, receiving a 30-minute play therapy session each week. After the 6-weeks concluded, the children underwent assessment with the Early Achievement Composite of the Young Children's Achievement Test. Outcomes indicated substantial improvements for students compared to those who did not participate in the play therapy sessions (Blanco et al., 2019). Through these studies, researchers have shown that play has value in relationship to the academic success of kindergarten children (Blanco et al., 2019; Brown, 2021). According to Paterson (2020), play allows children to gain skills that will later be used in adulthood. However, teachers’ understanding and perspectives of how play fits into the classroom vary. Societal views in Western culture often create a divide regarding what the expectation for classrooms should be as opposed to what is

developmentally appropriate for young children, leaving teachers unsure of where play fits into their classrooms (Paterson, 2020).

Teachers' Perspectives on Play Worldwide

Teachers worldwide also have perspectives about the implementation of play as it relates to kindergarten. Liu et al. (2019) discovered that teachers in China felt that a balanced approach to child-initiated play and teacher-directed instruction is a proper way to educate children in kindergarten. In Hong Kong, teachers shared that they knew how to implement a play-based learning curriculum, but environmental factors, such as parents' academic standards, made implementation difficult (Keung & Fung, 2020). Keung and Cheung (2019) also conducted a study in Hong Kong regarding kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of play-based approaches. Findings showed that play-based learning effectively teaches the whole child (Keung & Cheung, 2019). Canadian teachers have expressed that it is essential to differentiate between the age-appropriateness of a topic and developmentally appropriate ways for implementation (Pyle et al., 2017). However, teachers were uncertain about implementing play in their classrooms (Danniels & Pyle, 2022). In a study conducted in Ontario, Canada, kindergarten teachers noted that a lack of resources and training left them unsure about implementing play in their classrooms (Danniels & Pyle, 2022). In the Afadjato South District in Ghana, teachers had positive perceptions about using play as a technique in their classrooms (Kekesi et al., 2019). Teachers had good intentions of using play as a teaching technique, but implementation depended on the materials available and teachers' perspectives and motivation to incorporate play into their classrooms (Kekesi et al.,

2019). In the Bojanala Region of Northwest Province in South Africa, inadequate resources and large enrollments also negatively influenced the implementation of children's play in the classroom (Phajane, 2019).

Researchers in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Western Australia discovered that teachers felt it was important for young children to learn through play and many benefits to providing children with playtime (Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019; O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021). In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, researchers noted that early childhood years were focused on achieving standardized targets through standardized assessments (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). However, the teachers expressed how play was important in their classrooms but struggled to find the time to allow the children to play. Academic pressures have superseded the time devoted to play in the classroom (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). In Ireland, teachers stated that play is an important pedagogical practice for supporting children's learning and social-emotional development (O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021).

Hesterman and Targowska (2020) surveyed 40 Western Australian early childhood teachers regarding their perspectives on play. The teachers expressed their beliefs about play and its importance in the early childhood classroom, but that its role was diminishing. Academic pressure and finding time to devote to play have removed it from the classroom (Hoskins & Smedley, 2019). In a similar study in Turkey, Canaslan-Akyar and Sevimli-Celik (2022) examined how teachers supported playfulness in early childhood classrooms. Canaslan-Akyar and Sevimli-Celik noted that playtime was often limited due to the focus on academics. Teachers described using play in the classroom for

teaching skills, such as sharing, but play was not often integrated into core curriculum subjects (Canaslan-Akyar & Sevimli-Celik, 2022). This growing trend of removing play from the kindergarten classroom is occurring not only in the United States but worldwide. Researchers determined that globally, play was being removed from the classroom despite teachers' perspectives that it was important to a child's development (Canaslan-Akyar & Sevimli-Celik, 2022; Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Hoskins & Smedley, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented a review of recent literature surrounding play in kindergarten classrooms. I discussed child development and the purpose of play, learning the value of play, removal of play, and federal mandates for kindergarten. I reviewed teachers' perspectives on play in the United States and worldwide. This review provided insight into several aspects and foundations for this study concerning kindergarten in the United States and kindergarten and early childhood programs worldwide (see Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Pyle et al., 2022; Wu, 2021). Bluiett (2018) explained that in the United States, with the changes to curriculum and current federal mandates, there is a need to explore other types of play in the classroom environment. Pyle, Prioletta, and Poliszczuk (2018) explained that multiple countries worldwide had implemented play-based learning programs in kindergarten classrooms; however, there was no consensus on how play should be incorporated into these classrooms effectively. According to Pyle et al. (2022), play-based learning should occur in kindergarten, a practice mandated in several countries. Although the United States has not universally

adopted play-based learning, a growing body of research has emphasized the significance of play in a child's development. (Pyle et al., 2022). The literature also supported the value of exploring teachers' perspectives (Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Pyle et al., 2022; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). The gap in practice in the literature was that few researchers have conducted qualitative studies on kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom in the United States.

In Chapter 3, I outline the research design and rationale and my role as the researcher. I discuss the methodology used for this study, including data collection and analysis. Finally, I address issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. According to NAEYC (2020), the knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for young children's cognitive development is limited among some who are making educational decisions. This results in uncertainty about what are and are not best practices for children. It is important for those involved in educational decision making to be aware of the programs and children they serve in their role (NAEYC, 2020). Children find play to be fun (Keung & Fung, 2021). When learning tasks are perceived as play, students are more engaged, which results in increased academic achievement (Wainwright et al., 2020).

This chapter includes a discussion of the research design of the current study, the rationale for its selection, and my role as the researcher. The methodology is described, including participant selection and instrumentation as well as procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures are also addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

The following two RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

RQ2: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

Different types of qualitative research designs can be used as a fundamental framework (Merriam, 2009). Design selection should correlate with the RQs when performing a qualitative research study. Interviews were selected for data collection in the current study because they are one of the leading research tools related to a qualitative study design (see Merriam, 2009). Using interviews allowed participants to freely discuss their experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to their perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Semistructured interviews using an interview protocol were the chosen data collection method (see Appendix A). This data collection method was consistent with the basic qualitative design.

Before selecting a basic qualitative design, I considered other qualitative approaches, such as case study and grounded theory. I also considered a mixed-methods study, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Exploring kindergarten teachers' perspectives allowed for collection of qualitative data but not for quantitative data. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for this study. A case study design would not have been feasible for my study because it requires more than one data collection source to ensure validity (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participant interviews were the only source of data collected

in this study. A grounded theory design was also rejected because this study was not conducted to generate a new theory (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to design and implement the study by (a) requesting permission from the school district superintendent to conduct my study; (b) recruit eligible participants; (c) obtain consent from the participants; (d) collect, transcribe, and analyze the data; and (e) report my findings. Another role was to create interview questions (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and ensure interviews were conducted nonbiased and respectfully. I was responsible for audio recording participants' interviews while asking open-ended questions using the interview protocol.

I am one of the multitiered system of support coordinators for a small urban school district in a southern state. I have been in the education profession for 15 years. Before my role as one of this district's multitiered system of support coordinators, I worked in several others as a general education and special education teacher in Grades 1–3. I also served as an instructional coach for Grades K–5. My work with young children, the progression of education, and standards changes prompted my interest in the current study. I did not have a supervisory or instructor role in the district I selected to conduct my study, nor did I have authority over the participants. In my professional role, I focused on student data and did not work directly with teachers.

My goal as the researcher was to lessen bias. Conflicts of interest can occur when a secondary interest influences the researcher's professional judgment and relationships (Bero, 2017). No conflicts of interest occurred because I had no supervisory or

authoritative role over any participants. I did not select participants with whom I had previous relationships. I offered a \$10 gift card to increase interest in participation because the study site was a small urban district, and the teachers had busy schedules. I documented my thoughts and feelings as they arose in a reflective journal to address personal bias. The reflective journal was used to document my personal biases as I recognized them. The potential for research bias in this study was minimal. Additionally, I kept an audit trail by recording the decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure transparency and traceability in the research process. Member checking was also conducted to increase my study's accuracy, credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability.

Methodology

The research design for this study was basic qualitative. A basic qualitative study allows the researcher to understand and improve educational practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative design also allows for understanding participants' perspectives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were collected through interviews so the participants could freely discuss their experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to their perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Once data were collected, thematic analysis based on the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun et al. (2019) was used to guide my data analysis process.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study were kindergarten teachers from a small urban school district in Georgia. I am one of the multitiered system of support coordinators in the school district, and all kindergarten teachers have access to emails through the district email database. These emails are also available on each school's website and are public knowledge. I had access to this database as a district employee. Once I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (02-07-23-0154738), I submitted a request in writing to the school district superintendent requesting permission to conduct my study. Once I received permission and approval from the school district superintendent, I emailed all kindergarten teachers in the district asking for volunteers to participate in the interview process. If the recipients wanted to participate, they replied to the email indicating their decision with the words, "I consent."

I used purposeful sampling in this study because it allowed me to select participants from a group from which I wanted to obtain information. According to Babbie (2017), it is suitable to select a sample based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. The purposeful sample was 10 kindergarten teachers with a minimum of 3 years of experience teaching kindergarten and currently employed in the district where this study was conducted in the state of Georgia. According to Guest et al. (2020), data saturation often occurs with the first six to 12 interviews. Those who replied to the email indicating their decision to participate were asked about their years of kindergarten teaching experience when I called to set up their interview because I did not have access to this information. All who replied met the criteria for participation.

Instrumentation

I used an interview protocol to collect data during the interviews. Researchers conduct interviews when feelings or behaviors cannot be observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected interviews as a data collection method to explore the perspectives of the 10 kindergarten teachers on the topic of this study. The interviews were semistructured and lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. Using open-ended interview questions with an interview protocol allowed for flexibility while obtaining data from the participants (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions had been developed as open-ended within the interview protocol (see Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). All participants were given a choice of how they wanted to conduct their interview: in-person conducted after hours off campus, Zoom, or a phone call. All interviews were audio recorded with the participant's permission. I transcribed the interviews using Capterra transcription software after they were completed.

I created the interview questions for my study based on the conceptual framework and related literature. Interview Questions 1–3 assisted in answering RQ1. Interview Questions 4–6 assisted in answering RQ2. I asked clarifying questions as necessary throughout the interview process. Data collected through the semistructured interviews gave my study deeper context and meaning (see Seidman, 2012).

The interview protocol allowed me to inform participants of their rights and expectations and ask open-ended questions. Participants were asked seven interview questions in the same order, and prewritten prompts helped me probe for more information or obtain clarity if a response was unclear. The interview protocol promoted

consistency in the interviews, bolstering the reliability of my study. Recording participants' responses ensured accuracy in their analysis (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I conducted a mock interview with one of the instructional coaches in the district to establish content validity. This mock interview helped me become familiar with the interview protocol and determine that the questions would elicit data to answer my RQs.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before recruitment of participants and data collection, I obtained permission to conduct the study within the district. The local school district required my IRB submission and approval to be submitted to the superintendent and an official request to conduct my research. After IRB approval, I submitted a request in writing to the superintendent to obtain permission to conduct my study in the district. Once approval from the superintendent was obtained, recruitment occurred through email. A purposeful sample for the study consisted of 10 teachers from a small urban school district in Georgia who had taught kindergarten for a minimum of 3 years. I had access to all kindergarten teachers' emails through the district's email database, but they were also available on each school's website as public information. The email invitation included a consent form and was sent to all kindergarten teachers in the district because I was not able to predetermine their years of kindergarten experience.

Teachers who accepted the invitation to participate responded to the email indicating their decision with the words, "I consent." After receiving an email indicating their decision to participate, I called the teacher and asked them about their years of kindergarten teaching experience because I did not have access to this information.

During this phone call, if the criteria of 3 or more years teaching kindergarten was met, I scheduled the interview to be conducted in person, via Zoom, or through a phone call based on the participant's choice. Once permission was granted and participants were selected, I conducted one interview with each participant. Nine participants selected an in-person interview, and one selected a Zoom interview. All interviews occurred after the teachers' contracted hours (3:30 p.m. or later), during the week and off campus in a location based on the participant's choice, with the exception of the phone interview, which was conducted in a private office I had permission to use at a local high school. I conducted the interviews as planned and completed data collection within 3 weeks.

Data were collected during each interview using a reflective journal and with audio recordings with participant consent. I used the journal to describe what occurred during each interview and the interview environment and to record my thoughts and feelings throughout to eliminate bias. These notes also included any thoughts and ideas I may have had before the interview (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Additionally, an audit trail was kept by recording decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure transparency and traceability in the research process. I recorded all sessions and transcribed them using the Capterra transcription software. The recordings allowed for data preservation and enhanced analysis (see Merriam, 2009). At the end of each interview, I thanked and debriefed the participants, reminding them that all collected data would remain confidential. I also asked if they had any questions. After answering the participant's questions, I told them that once the data had been analyzed, I would provide them with a summary via email for them to review. I explained they could

email me to share their feedback after reviewing the summary. They were also told before exiting the interview that the final study results would be shared with them at their request and that if they had any further questions, they could ask them now or later by calling or emailing me. I thanked them again for their time and asked what type of gift card they would prefer—a \$10.00 gift card to Starbucks or Chick-Fil-A—to show my appreciation for their participation and completion of the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the six-phase process by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun et al. (2019) for thematic analysis to analyze the data. All data were examined to identify emerging ideas, patterns, topics, and themes that repeatedly occurred during the interviews. The first phase in the process was to familiarize myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). Within 24 hours of interview completion, I uploaded the recordings of the interviews to the online transcription service Capterra. After uploading the recordings, I checked to be sure Capterra accurately transcribed word-for-word what was said during the interviews. Familiarizing myself with the data involved repeated listening and reading of the transcribed interviews and reviewing the notes in my reflective journal. Reading the transcripts multiple times allowed me to identify similar keywords and phrases (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

After familiarizing myself with the data, I used open coding, the second phase of thematic analysis, focusing on common terms or phrases from the participants' responses relevant to the RQs. Codes provide words or phrases that represent the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used different colored highlighters to identify similarities in keywords and

phrases across the interviews. I was able to group similar codes and identify relationships among the data or coding groups. This allowed me to establish categories and, later, themes. From these categories, in the third phase of thematic analysis, I began to search for themes (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). Once the emerging themes were identified, I reviewed them for accuracy, which was the fourth phase. In the fifth phase, I defined and labeled the themes before the sixth phase of reporting my findings and connections to the literature (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this final report, I communicated to the reader the validity of the analysis by using data that addressed each RQ.

An expert reviewer checked for accuracy in the data, looking for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis (see Johnson, 1997). The reviewer works in education, holds a doctoral degree in early childhood education, and is employed at a local school. This individual had no connection to the participants or the selected location in the study as they were employed in a different district.

Discrepant cases can help form a more thorough argument by providing a perspective that does not support but does not refute the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There were no discrepant cases; however, if there were, they would have been reported and documented. Reporting and documenting such cases would have enhanced the validity and findings of my research.

Trustworthiness

In a qualitative research study, researchers rely on specific criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Ensuring validity and

reliability in qualitative research means taking measures to conduct the research study ethically (Merriam, 2009). Validity refers to the procedures researchers use to support their findings and accurately reflect the participants' experiences. The validity of this study was determined by its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility can be defined as the truth of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It establishes whether the research findings represent useful information drawn from the participants' original data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility for this study was accomplished through member checking and using an expert reviewer to ensure the accuracy of the data. Member checking was conducted after the final data analysis when participants received a summary of my findings. The expert reviewer was given data without identifying information other than the participant's alphanumeric identifier. Their review occurred after I completed my final analysis, checking for bias in the themes that emerged from the data analysis (see Johnson, 1997).

Transferability

Transferability allows readers to transfer my findings to another setting and produce similar data (see Creswell, 2016). Thick, rich descriptions are detailed accounts of the setting and research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This data helps the reader understand key areas of this study and if the results can be transferred to other situations (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my study, I identified and explained the RQs to help make the participants' perspectives meaningful for the reader (see Lincoln & Guba,

1985). To help the reader transfer the data, I described in detail the participants and the setting (see Erlandson et al., 1993). It is up to the reader to determine transferability.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of the study's findings over time (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Dependability allows for the processes and procedures used in this qualitative study to be tracked. The dependability in this study was achieved through a mock interview, member checking, and an expert reviewer. A mock interview was conducted with one of the instructional coaches in the district where the study took place to gain familiarity with the interview protocol prior to the first interview. Member checking refers to the process in which a summary of the findings is shared with the participants to ensure the content of the study is trustworthy and to rule out misinterpretation of the participants' responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). An expert reviewer not related to the study checked for accuracy in the data, looking for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis. All data will be kept for 5 years after completion of the study, which also allows for its review if needed later. Using these strategies, I enhanced the dependability of my study.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to objectivity and confirming that the study's findings accurately represent the participant and their experiences and not the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). I kept a reflective journal to document any questions, thoughts, perceptions, or biases that arose during the interview process. In my reflective journal, I addressed personal bias by documenting all thoughts and feelings as they arose

(see Johnson, 1997). I documented my role in and responses to the research process and any adjustments that I made to the study (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Additionally, an audit trail was kept by recording the decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure transparency and traceability in the research process. The Captterra transcription software also helped with the confirmability of the study. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times to verify the software captured the responses correctly. My goal was to ensure that the interpretation of data was unbiased.

Ethical Procedures

Approval to conduct this research was requested from Walden University's IRB and then the school district superintendent. The IRB process ensured that my research complied with ethical and legal protocols. No research was conducted until approval was received. Taking extra precautions at the beginning of an interview to ensure ethical concerns are addressed is vital for both the participant and the researcher. If any ethical concerns had arisen concerning recruitment materials or data collection, an Adverse Event Reporting Form would have been completed and sent to Walden University's IRB.

Participant confidentiality is one of the most critical factors in conducting qualitative research. The participant consent form was emailed to the participant, and their response served as written consent. Before starting each interview, I reviewed the consent form again with the participant, which ensured voluntary participation (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The consent form included the purpose of the research study, a description of the participants' role, any risks and benefits, the procedures used to keep the participants' data confidential, and the amount of time required for participation in the

study. This consent form notified the participant of their right to stop the interview at any time and how to contact me and IRB. I also needed to answer any ethical concerns that the participant may have had before, during, and after the study was completed (see Merriam, 2009). No ethical concerns were raised by the participants. Throughout the entire process, I remained open to addressing any potential ethical issues and proactively ensured that participants felt comfortable and informed about their participation. To eliminate conflict of interest, none of the participants worked at the school in which I am employed (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

The interview protocol was followed. Participants were allowed to review a summary draft of the research findings to determine the accuracy of the information. The district and participants' names were kept confidential by using alphanumeric identifiers. No identifying information was included in the study. Participants had no questions regarding the summary or further comments to contribute. Access to the data was limited to me; no one else had permission to view or retrieve the data. The data are stored on a password-protected computer located at my home. Hard copies of materials from this study are locked in a filing cabinet in my home and will be kept for 5 years, after which all paper copies will be shredded. All digital data will be deleted. I will select each file and execute the “delete” command to remove all digital data. Next, I will permanently delete the files from the computer’s recycle bin.

Summary

Chapter 3 included the research method used for this study to explore kindergarten teachers’ perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the

kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. A basic qualitative study was selected with a purposeful sample of 10 kindergarten teachers with a minimum of 3 years of kindergarten teaching experience. The study took place in a small urban school district in Georgia. Data were collected through semistructured interviews using an interview protocol. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The trustworthiness of this study was determined by its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. All participant information was kept private, and all data collected was secured.

In Chapter 4, I provide a discussion of the study's setting and the data collection and analysis methods. I detail the study results as they pertain to each RQ and present my findings using the participants' responses. I demonstrate evidence of trustworthiness and conclude with a summary of the answers to the RQs.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. This study addressed two RQs:

RQ1: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

RQ2: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

In this chapter, I describe the study's setting and the data collection and analysis processes. I present the study's results as they address each RQ with supporting data and provide evidence of trustworthiness. This chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Setting

This study was conducted in a small urban school district in Georgia. District demographics are 72.8% White, 13.9% Black, 0.6% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.8% Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. In this district, 21.9% of students qualify for participation in the federal free and reduced-price meal program. The district has four elementary schools with five kindergarten teachers at each for a total of 20 kindergarten teachers district wide. The purposeful sample for this study included 10 kindergarten teachers whose years of experience ranged from 3 years to 10 or more. There was at least

one participant from each elementary school in this study. I gave each participant an alphanumeric identifier (e.g., T1, T2). Table 1 provides the participants' codes, gender, and years of experience teaching kindergarten. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of study that may have affected the interpretation of the results.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant	Gender	Experience teaching kindergarten (years)
T1	Female	5
T2	Female	18
T3	Female	22
T4	Female	7
T5	Female	14
T6	Female	16
T7	Female	20
T8	Female	11
T9	Female	4
T10	Female	8

Data Collection

After I received approval from Walden University's IRB, I began the data collection process, beginning with recruitment. I sent every kindergarten teacher in the district an invitation email and consent form to communicate information about the study. Teachers who wished to participate replied to the email with the words, "I consent." After each reply, I emailed the potential participant, inquiring about their years of experience teaching kindergarten. Once I confirmed they met the selection criteria, I sent another

email asking how they wanted to conduct their interview (in person, Zoom, or phone call) and requesting a date and time that worked for them.

From sending out the invitation emails to conducting the final interview, the data collection process took approximately 3 weeks. I collected data from 10 kindergarten teachers. Nine participants selected an in-person interview, and one selected a Zoom interview. All interviews were held during the week after work hours and off campus in a location of the participant's choice, with the exception of the phone interview, which I conducted from a private office I had permission to use at a local high school. The participants were only interviewed once. The length of each interview was between 30 and 60 minutes. An interview protocol was used to collect data, and each interview was semistructured. The interview questions were asked in the same order for each participant, and prewritten prompts were used when needed to probe for more information and gain clarity when needed. I recorded the audio for each interview with the iPhone app Voice Memo. I completed all interviews with no distractions or interruptions.

No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection, and there were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. The data are stored on my personal password-protected computer at home. Hard copies of materials from this study are locked in a filing cabinet in my home. Access to the data was limited to me; no one else had permission to view or retrieve the data. Five years after the study concludes, all files and data pertaining to this study will be deleted and permanently discarded. After 5 years, the data will be removed from the locked filing cabinet, and all

paper copies shredded. All digital data will be deleted. I will select each file and execute the “delete” command to remove all digital data. Next, I will permanently delete the files from the computer’s recycle bin.

Data Analysis

I used the six-phase process by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun et al. (2019) for thematic analysis to analyze the data. All data were examined to identify ideas, patterns, topics, and themes repeated during the interviews. The six steps included (a) familiarizing myself with the data, (b) generating codes, (b) searching for themes, (d) reviewing emerging themes, (e) defining and labeling themes, and (f) creating a report (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019).

The first phase of the thematic analysis was to familiarize myself with the data (see Braun et al., 2019). This involved listening to the recordings, reading the transcribed interviews multiple times, and making notes. Within 24 hours of interview completion, I uploaded the recordings to an online transcription service, Capterra. I transcribed each interview using Capterra word-for-word. To ensure transcription accuracy, I listened to each interview audio recording and read the transcripts line-by-line, making corrections in Microsoft Word. After every interview, I carefully listened to the recordings and reviewed the notes in my reflective journal. I also read the final transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the data.

After familiarizing myself with the data, I began generating codes, the second phase of thematic analysis, using open coding (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). I focused on identifying common terms or phrases from the participants’

responses relevant to the RQs. I used highlighters in different colors (yellow, pink, orange, blue, green, and purple) to identify similarities in keywords and phrases from the interviews. From my data analysis, I identified 51 open codes. Table 2 provides examples of 11 open codes, participant alphanumeric identifiers, and excerpts from the data representing each code.

Table 2*Examples of Open Codes*

Code	Participant	Excerpt
Play can be anything	T1	"I think that play can be anything where students are able to work together in build [sic] social skills and learn how to work cooperatively, cooperatively with others, that will transfer into skills that they'll need later in life."
	T5	"Anything hands-on in the room would be play."
	T4	"I just consider play to be like if I set out toys and I say, okay, you can go play with them whatever they decide to pick up and use and however they decide to use it, it's not structured."
Role of play is important	T1	"I think the role of play is extremely important because they're 5 and 6 years old, and they need lots of movement, and they need lots of interaction and I feel like when they're not able to do that."
	T10	"I just think play has such an important purpose in kindergarten."
Expect too much	T5	"It is just not right that we expect so much from these babies. You know, it is not developmentally appropriate."
	T6	"What we expect is too much."
Academically focused	T4	"At this school, it's an academically based focused kindergarten for the kids, a core curriculum is taught."
	T7	"Kindergarten here is academically focused."
Not developmentally appropriate	T2	"I think over the years, they have pushed more and more down to kindergarten. And some things I don't feel like are developmentally appropriate."
	T3	"But sometimes I think that what we're doing now is not developmentally appropriate."
	T6	
No time for play	T8	"There just isn't time to have playtime."
	T5	"That's very hard, actually, to have playtime. I mean, I try to, you know, I try to incorporate it."
Students would learn more through play	T9	"I think that students would learn more and be more engaged and more interested in school if there were more playing [in] kindergarten."
	T3	"I think kids learn better through play, especially like playing games instead of giving them worksheets."
Only free time is at recess	T7	"The only free playtime they get is at recess."
	T1	"I feel like that right now we don't really have any, any of that time aside from what they get for recess."
Kindergarten has changed	T9	"You know, kindergarten itself has changed. What is now in pre-k is what kindergarten used to be, and we are teaching what used to be taught in first grade."
	T7	"It's changed because you have less play in the classroom now, and kids need more play."
More play	T5	"I think we should have more play. We used to have free time, but now we don't."
	T7	"It's changed because you have less play in the classroom now, and kids need more play."
Used to have centers	T6	"We used to have centers that the kids went to for an hour a day."
	T8	"We used to have centers. The kids could pick if they wanted to do dress up, or go to the kitchen station, or build blocks. Now, our centers are academically focused and usually in a game format."
	T5	"In the past, we had centers. The children could pick what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go. Now, we don't have centers now, not like it used to be."

I found connections between the codes to cluster into categories. I was able to identify and assign eight categories. Appendix B includes 16 open codes and eight categories with participant alphanumeric identifiers and excerpts from the data.

In the third phase of thematic analysis, I evaluated and arranged the coded data into categories searching for themes (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). I conducted member checks by providing each participant with a concise one-page summary of the analyzed data. Participants had no questions regarding the summary or further comments to contribute. The four themes that emerged are listed in Table 3. I used thematic data analysis to examine the recently formed themes alongside the categorical data. I refined the themes while establishing connections between these and the RQs.

In the fourth phase, reviewing the themes, I conducted two additional rounds of review on my thematic data to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Braun et al. (2019) proposed a set of questions as a guideline for identifying and analyzing themes in qualitative research. These questions were used to aid in the identification of potential themes and helped me conduct thematic analysis. By using these questions, I verified the coherence and consistency between the identified themes, conceptual framework, relevant literature, and RQs. In this analysis phase, no modifications were necessary for the themes established in the third. Table 3 includes categories and themes.

Table 3*Categories and Themes*

Category	Theme
Role of play	Teachers believed the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning.
Need for more play	
Not developmentally appropriate	Teachers felt the CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate.
Standards and academics	
Time constraints	Teachers indicated increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints as factors that inhibited play in the classroom due to implementation of CCC/GSE standards.
Absence of centers	
Need for more play	Teachers' perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms.
Ways to bring back play	

In the fifth phase, I defined and labeled the four themes and determined that no revisions were required. Through a thorough data analysis, I determined the data answered the RQs. The sixth and final phase of thematic analysis was a concluding review of the themes and documenting the results (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019). Upon completing a comprehensive data analysis, I confirmed the presence of four themes that answered the RQs. The four themes provided valuable insight into kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards.

No contradictory findings were evident in the data, eliminating the need for further analysis. While reviewing the data, I remained attentive to the potential presence of discrepant cases. I sought instances in which participants' ideas contradicted other statements on factual matters. No discrepancies were identified during this process.

Results

I conducted a basic qualitative study with semistructured interviews to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. For each interview, I asked seven questions. Two RQs guided the study, and the results are organized by each.

Results for Research Question 1

Theme 1 was associated with RQ1: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom? Teachers believed the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning. The teachers' perspectives from this study highlighted a belief in holistic development. They recognized that a child's growth goes beyond academic achievements. By focusing on social skills and learning through play, participants acknowledged the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals who can thrive academically and socially. For example, T1 stated,

I think the role of play is extremely important because they're 5 and 6 years old, and they need lots of movement, and they need lots of interaction, and I feel like when they're not able to do that, they're not making meaningful relationships

between what they're learning and applying it to their everyday life and things that they'll encounter in the real world.

The emphasis on play for developing social skills demonstrates the importance of social interaction in a child's education. Participants believed that by fostering collaborative play, they can help children develop essential interpersonal skills that will serve them well in their personal and professional lives. T8 stated, "Kids need time to play to be able to interact with peers and learn to make friends. They have to be able to socialize, you know." T4 shared, "I feel like the importance of play is definitely for socialization and problem-solving, just real-life problem-solving skills."

Participants viewed play as a form of experiential learning. They understood that hands-on activities and interactive experiences enable children to grasp concepts more profoundly and meaningfully and shared those thoughts. T10 expressed,

I think play is absolutely necessary in kindergarten. It helps kids develop. They learn so much through play. The biggest thing is social. They learn to make friends and solve conflicts. Something we see the world as a whole having a problem with. Well, maybe it is because we don't have time to play, and build relationships, and learn social skills in kindergarten.

T5 noted,

I definitely think it's very important for kids to have to play in kindergarten that's inside the classroom as well as outside. It shows them how to be team players. It teaches them how to work with other kids, play with other kids, how to be nice, how to share, how to talk, how to cooperate, how to interact, how to socialize, and

how, you know, to treat others the way they want to be treated. It's just how they learn about everything.

T6 shared,

I think play should be what kindergarten focuses on. Play is how they learn. They learn so much when they play. It is how they make friends and how they learn to communicate with others, you know. Play is important, and it just isn't there anymore.

Results for Research Question 2

There were three themes relevant to the second RQ: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom? Theme 2, teachers felt the CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate; Theme 3, teachers indicated increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints as factors that inhibited play in the classroom due to implementation of CCC/GSE standards; and Theme 4, teachers' perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms. These themes collectively provided insight into the challenges teachers face in implementing play, the academic focus of kindergarten, and bringing play back within the CCC/GSE-governed classroom.

Teachers Felt the CCC/GSE Standards Removed Play From the Classroom and Were Not Developmentally Appropriate

Over half of the participants shared their concerns about the potential sidelining of play-based learning and developmental appropriateness due to the implementation of CCC/GSE standards. T2 expressed,

Sometimes, I think that what we're doing now is not developmentally appropriate. It should be first-grade standards. And I understand that maybe some children are ready and that's the reason why they have the Common Core is because, as a whole, the United States is behind. And so, I think that Georgia and all other states are feeling the pressure to have the standards more rigorous. So, we are trying to get those standards taught. So, it's more structured, it's more rigorous. I feel like that the children don't realize it, but I feel like that they're a little more stressed than they used to be because they're just not ready for what is required.

T3 shared,

Some things I don't feel like are developmentally appropriate. Just thinking about it, we're looking at our new standards for math; everything is related to algebra. And kindergarten really needs to just be counting. I think over the years, they have pushed more and more down to kindergarten. And some things I don't feel like are developmentally appropriate.

T10 explained,

There is definitely less playing going on in kindergarten. Everything is tied to a standard and is academically based. We have such a heavy focus on reading that

almost half my day is spent teaching reading. Because of this, we don't have time for kids to play.

The increasing academic demands had participants concerned about the appropriateness of the expectations placed upon them in kindergarten. T6 shared, "The demands academically just get more in first grade. I don't think it is developmentally appropriate what is expected out of these 4- and 5-year-olds in kindergarten." T7 explained that

kindergarten has changed in the last 20 years. We went from the majority of our day being unstructured playtime to kids having to sit in their desk or at their table for 30 to 45 minutes at a time. The standards became the focus, not the development of the child.

Teachers Indicated Increased Expectations, Absence of Centers, and Time Constraints as Factors That Inhibited Play in the Classroom Due to Implementation of CCC/GSE Standards

The implementation of CCC/GSE standards inhibited classroom play. Teachers noted factors like increased expectations, removed centers, and time constraints as the main hindrances. CCC/GSE led to a more structured, intense academic approach, reducing playtime. All 10 participants described factors that inhibited play in their kindergarten classrooms. T2 shared, "We don't have time for play anymore. I feel like we don't have time to do that. Because the standards are more rigorous." T2 went on to say: "I personally believe that there's more pressure on the children; there's more pressure on the teachers to get the standards covered." T7 noted, "The play has gone away because the standards are more as well as what is expected of the teachers and what is expected of

the children.” T1 explained, “Our schedule is so jam-packed full of expectations that there’s no wiggle room for anything additional right now.” T8 added, “There just isn’t time for play.”

With implementation of the CCC/GSE standards, teachers felt there was a shift toward a more structured and rigorous approach to education, leaving less time for play. Participants discussed how increased academic demands and standardized assessments left limited time for unstructured play and exploration. T8 shared,

We have a four-page report card that we have to check off every item on by the end of the year. It is just so much. If I didn’t have to teach 80 minutes of reading groups every day, that would help, too. I try my best to make it fun and engaging, but sometimes what is required doesn’t always let that happen. The changes can’t come from the school, though. These are things that the State Department would have to change. The state department gives us our requirements. It is just a lot because really kindergarten isn’t even mandated in Georgia. So, you have all these standards that we are required to teach, but really, the kids aren’t even required to come. They don’t have to come to school until 6, and that is first grade. They would really be behind in those situations.

Almost all participants described that the absence of centers, which previously existed, inhibited play in their kindergarten classrooms. The absence of centers, which provided opportunities for hands-on learning and creative expression, was perceived as a loss for both teachers and students. T5 explained, “In the past, we had centers. The

children could pick what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go. Now, we don't have centers now, not like it used to be." T8 said,

We used to have centers. The kids could pick if they wanted to do dress up, or go to the kitchen station, or build blocks. Now, our centers are academically focused and usually in a game format. Kindergarten was fun. It is not fun now. The kids are pressured, the teachers are pressured. We just have so much stuff to teach to get them ready for first grade. They don't even get a nap anymore. So many of them still need a nap. It is just so much for them.

T6 shared,

We used to have centers that the kids went to for an hour a day. They were able to pick where they wanted to go and what they wanted to do. They were given a choice and were able to just free play at those centers. Now, that is a thing of the past in kindergarten, and they only do that in pre-K.

T10 explained.

A little more than 10 years ago, I don't know exactly when it happened, but we had to take down all of our kid-directed centers once the new standards for kindergarten were introduced. These were like the housekeeping center, the reading center, the kitchen center, the block center, [and] the art center. The kids could just pick whatever they wanted to go to. They had an hour every day to pick what center they wanted to play at. They loved it. I loved it because you could see the interacting and acting out rules and making rules and solving conflict. They

were learning and growing. Now, they just sit in their desks or on the carpet unless I plan some lessons that have movement in them.

Participants also expressed their thoughts regarding the time constraints they encountered in the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom. Increased academic demands and standardized tests left little room for unstructured play. T4 shared, “I think the hardest part is we still try to implement that time for play for the children. We still find time for it, but it’s just in a different way and on a much tighter schedule.” T5 stated, “It’s very hard, actually, to have playtime. I mean, I try to, you know, I try to incorporate it, but there just isn’t the time with everything we are expected to teach”. T8 said, “There just isn’t time to have playtime.” T2 added, “We don’t have time for play anymore. I feel like we don’t have time to do that because the standards are more rigorous. I feel like we’re in a time crunch.”

Teachers’ Perspectives on How to Bring Play Back Into Their Classrooms

All participants shared their perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom. These perspectives included ways to bring play back into their classrooms. T1 shared, “We need a change in our schedule; everyone needs to understand the importance of play and help us make room to incorporate it.”

T10 suggested,

Add back in the center time. Cut down on some of these requirements we have, like all the assessments and the guided reading. I’m not saying it needs to go away. There just needs to be a balance between play and the academics. I think we have gone too far one way.

T3 commented, “For there to be more play in our classroom with the kids, I would think that some of our standards would need to be taken away.” T2 said, “I think they need to be able to have different things in the classroom that they can go to and play, whether it’s like Legos, the building blocks, a puppet area that is student-directed and builds critical thinking skills.” T6 expressed,

I just wish kindergarten would go back to the way it used to be. I know we need standards, but if we could have that hour of free play back for centers, I think it would be better. It is just not right that we expect so much from these babies.

They need playtime.

All participants in the study shared their perspectives on reintroducing play into CCC/GSE-governed classrooms. They suggested various approaches, such as changing schedules, reducing assessments, and removing some academic standards to make room for play.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research studies have specific criteria to guarantee the trustworthiness of their findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). To achieve validity and reliability in qualitative studies, researchers must conduct them ethically (Merriam, 2009). Validity pertains to the procedures researchers employ to substantiate their findings and faithfully represent participants’ experiences. This study’s validity was assessed based on its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility for the current study was established through member checking and the use of an expert reviewer to check for accuracy in the data, looking for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis. Member checking serves as an extra credibility measure, ensuring that findings accurately represent participants' viewpoints and experiences. Because no comments or questions were received during the member-checking process, there was no need for additional steps to be taken. To ensure a rigorous evaluation, an expert reviewer examined the thematic data. The expert reviewer was given a concise data summary without identifying information other than the alphanumeric identifiers. Their review occurred after my final analysis. The expert reviewer works in education, holds a doctoral degree in early childhood education, and is employed at a local school. This individual had no connection to the participants or the location in the study because they were employed in a different district. The expert reviewer checked for accuracy in the data, looking for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis. Using an expert reviewer helped me identify and address any potential biases in the study. An expert review of the thematic data also helped establish trustworthiness and credibility in the data analysis.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability pertains to how applicable and relevant the study's findings are to other contexts or settings (Creswell, 2016). Thick, rich descriptions are detailed accounts of the setting and research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I provided rich and detailed descriptions in my study, using direct quotes that accurately

reflected the participants' viewpoints and perspectives. I also comprehensively described the study's recruitment and interview processes and participants' experiences. Data analysis is essential for transferability because it helps other researchers determine if the study findings can be applied to their own population. Member checking was conducted; I sought feedback from participants to validate my interpretations' accuracy and enhance the findings' validity. I maintained a reflective journal to address bias and reflect on the research process, documenting my thoughts and reflections throughout the study. Additionally, an audit trail was kept, recording the decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure transparency and traceability in the research process. An expert reviewer checked for accuracy in the data, looking for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis. This approach allows readers to assess the applicability and transferability of the research findings.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of a study's findings over time (Burkholder et al., 2016). Dependability allows for the processes and procedures used in a qualitative study to be tracked. The dependability of this study was gained by conducting a mock interview, using member checking and an expert reviewer, and achieving data saturation. To ensure dependability, I used an interview protocol to for consistency in questioning. I familiarized myself with this protocol through the mock interview. No clarifications were required because there were no comments or questions from the participants during member checking. Data saturation was achieved when data analysis yielded no new codes, categories, or themes. Throughout the data analysis phase of my research, no

evidence contradicting the findings was identified; therefore, no further analysis was required.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to objectivity and confirming that the study's findings accurately represent the participants and their experiences, not the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). To establish confirmability in this study, I maintained a reflective journal to document my emotions, questions, thoughts, and opinions throughout the research process while also implementing member checking and having an expert review the thematic data. The use of Capterra transcription software to transcribe the interviews contributed to the confirmability of the study. By using this software, I had a reliable and consistent method of transcribing interviews, ensuring the accuracy and fidelity of the participants' responses. To further enhance confirmability, I listened to the audio recordings multiple times to verify the software accurately captured the participants' answers. This thorough review process strengthened the reliability and confirmability of the study's data, reducing the potential for transcription errors and enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the findings. All data will be kept for 5 years, which allows for review if needed at any time. Using these strategies enhanced the dependability and confirmability of my study. After 5 years, the data will be removed and destroyed. Hard copies will be shredded, and all files will be deleted.

Summary

Chapter 4 was a review of the data analysis of this study. This study was designed to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play

in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. In this basic qualitative study, I provided a description of the setting and data collection process. The data collection involved conducting semistructured interviews with a total of 10 participants. Furthermore, I outlined the procedures used for analyzing the qualitative data.

Theme 1, teachers believed the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning, answered RQ1. The theme focused on the beliefs held by teachers regarding the role of play in the classroom. According to their perspectives, play serves as a powerful tool for influencing a child's development of social skills and learning. Teachers recognize the significance of play as a means to foster social interactions, promote cooperation, and enhance communication among students.

Three themes answered RQ2. Theme 2 was teachers felt the CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate. This theme highlights the sentiment expressed by teachers regarding the CCC/GSE standards and their effect on the presence of play in the classroom. According to the participants, these standards were perceived as removing play from the learning environment and were considered not developmentally appropriate for students. Teachers believed that the emphasis on standardized curriculum and assessment overshadowed the importance of play in fostering developmentally appropriate instruction and practices.

Theme 3 was teachers indicated increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints as factors that inhibited play in the classroom due to the implementation of CCC/GSE standards. This theme focused on teachers' descriptions of various factors

that hinder play in their classroom following implementation of CCC/GSE standards. The participants raised concerns about higher expectations, removed centers, and time constraints. Theme 3 demonstrated teachers' perspectives on how these factors, resulting from the adoption of CCC/GSE standards, have had a negative effect on play in the classroom, ultimately affecting the learning experiences of students.

Theme 4 was teachers' perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms. Participants provided their viewpoints and strategies for incorporating play back into the learning environment. They expressed the need to combine academic demands with play to infuse it into the curriculum. Participants discussed various approaches, such as allocating dedicated time for play, integrating play into lesson plans, creating play-based learning centers, and providing open-ended materials for exploration. They emphasized the importance of balancing academic requirements with opportunities for play and actively sought ways to integrate it into the curriculum. This theme showed teachers' commitment to reestablishing play as a vital component of the classroom experience, driven by their belief in its positive effect on student learning and development.

In this chapter, I provided an explanation of the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I discussed the aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in this study. These were addressed through various methods, including member checking, an expert reviewer, maintaining a reflective journal, achieving data saturation, and utilizing interview quotes to enhance

trustworthiness. No evidence contradicting the findings was found throughout the data analysis phase, eliminating the need for further analysis.

In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings. A thorough analysis of the results for each theme is provided, highlighting their alignment with the RQs and the relevant peer-reviewed literature cited in Chapter 2. The chapter also includes a discussion of the study's limitations and detailed recommendations for addressing them. I outline potential areas for future research, opportunities for social change, and the study's broader implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. I collected data through semistructured interviews conducted in person or via Zoom, according to the participants' meeting preferences. The 10 participants were kindergarten teachers from the research district with at least 3 years of kindergarten teaching experience. I identified four themes from the data analysis: (a) teachers believed the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning; (b) teachers felt the CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate; (c) teachers indicated increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints as factors that inhibited play in the classroom due to implementation of CCC/GSE standards; and (d) teachers' perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms.

In Chapter 5, I explain the findings of this study and provide an understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. I use Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD to assess and compare findings with the recent literature. I discuss relevant literature and my conceptual framework in each theme's discussion. The chapter also includes the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and implications. I conclude the chapter by sharing my reflections on the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

After obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB, I initiated data collection. Using purposeful sampling, I successfully recruited 10 participants for one-on-one semistructured interviews. The data analysis followed the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun et al. (2019). Interpretation of the findings was grounded in the literature review and the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. In this section, I describe the four themes based on their corresponding RQs. I link the themes to relevant literature and the conceptual framework. Theme 1 addressed RQ1: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom? Themes 2, 3, and 4 addressed RQ2: What are kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the implementation of play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom?

Theme 1

Teachers believed the role of play in the classroom was to influence a child's development of social skills and learning. This theme focused on how teachers perceive play as a valuable tool for promoting various aspects of a child's growth and education. Participants emphasized the importance of play for socialization, peer interaction, and the development of friendship-making abilities. T9 stated, "Kindergarten is so important for the development of their social skills." T9 emphasized that play enables children to learn vital social skills such as cooperation, communication, sharing, and treating others with respect. T7 explained that "they [children] are still learning how to socialize in kindergarten. They are learning how to interact with each other." Many teachers highlighted that play provides valuable opportunities for children to learn to work as a

team and develop positive relationships with their peers. T1 shared, “In kindergarten, they [children] learn how to work cooperatively, cooperatively with others that will transfer into skills that they’ll need later in life.” This aligns with existing research because play offers students diverse learning opportunities that cannot be effectively taught through direct instruction (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020). Play serves as the primary means through which children learn, fostering the development of their imagination, language skills, physical abilities, and social-emotional competencies (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020; Overstreet, 2018).

Participants also emphasized that play helps children acquire and apply knowledge effectively. Participants emphasized that play is how young children learn best because it fosters curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. T9 expressed,

I think play is really important in kindergarten. It helps kids learn in a fun way.

They can be creative, make friends, solve problems, and understand things better.

Playing also makes kids feel good, confident, and ready to learn more.

Overall, the teachers’ perspectives reflected a strong consensus on the pivotal role of play in promoting social, emotional, and cognitive growth during the kindergarten years. Vygotsky’s (1978) ZPD indicates that children can interact and engage beyond their age level during play, creating a ZPD in which their learning potential is maximized. The findings of my study support Vygotsky’s ZPD and the emphasis on the importance of play in a child’s cognitive growth and development.

Several researchers confirmed the developmental and educational advantages of play for young children (Ali et al., 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019;

Danniels & Pyle, 2018; Önder, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). The participants in my study expressed a strong belief in the significance of play in the kindergarten classroom. They viewed play as influential in a child's overall development, social skills, and learning experiences. According to researchers, play allows children to engage in meaningful interactions, apply their learning to real-world situations, and build essential problem-solving skills (Ali et al., 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Danniels & Pyle, 2018; Önder, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; Wu, 2021). Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD suggests that play can serve as a pathway for children to learn and develop within their ZPD. The findings of my study support the developmental and educational benefits of play in relation to Vygotsky's ZPD, which outlines the importance of play concerning a child's cognitive growth and development.

Theme 2

Participants in the current study felt the CCC/GSE standards removed play from the classroom and were not developmentally appropriate. The second theme addressed how teachers view the effect of academic standards on play in the kindergarten classroom, expressing their concerns about its potential implications for children's development and educational experiences. Educational policies such as NCLB influenced the transition away from play-based learning. The emerging academic expectations in kindergarten present a challenge for teachers to incorporate play into their daily instructional routines (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). This is consistent with the findings of my study. The participants expressed concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the current educational standards and their effect on play in the kindergarten classroom.

Participants also reported that pressure to meet rigorous standards, similar to those of first grade, has resulted in less unstructured playtime for children. T5 shared,

We have all the standardized things that we have to do like screenings, the FastBridge, the GKIDS [Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills], the guided reading testing, sight word testing, letters and sound tests, [so] it takes up a lot of time and doesn't leave any time for play.

Researchers indicated that kindergarten students are now exposed to academic content traditionally introduced in first and second grade (Brown et al., 2020; Costantino-Lane, 2019; Long, 2018; Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Current participants noted that this shift limits children's opportunities to build a strong foundation for communication, emotional expression, and problem solving. Participants also mentioned that the current academic demands might cause stress for young children who may not be developmentally ready for such rigorous expectations. This aligns with research that indicated academic content has compromised the educational experiences kindergarten students have (Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Current participants expressed concerns about the reduced emphasis on play in today's classroom and highlighted its potential effect on children's development and social skills. Zosh et al. (2022) explained that early childhood education underwent significant changes as schools shifted from offering free play and center time to adopting structured, skills-focused, and teacher-led curricula. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized play's significant role in a child's cognitive and social development. Vygotsky's ZPD suggests that children's learning and development are optimized when they engage in playful activities.

Theme 3

Teachers indicated increased expectations, absence of centers, and time constraints as factors that inhibited play in the classroom due to implementation of CCC/GSE standards. All 10 participants described factors hindering play in their kindergarten classrooms. These included increased academic expectations, the absence of previously available centers, and time constraints. Participants shared their perception that time for play has diminished due to the more rigorous academic standards. Participants described the pressure experienced by children and teachers to meet these standards. T4 shared, “We just don’t quite have as much time for play with the standards and the guided reading programs that we have to use. They are great programs, but they are time-consuming.” Participants attributed the decline of play to the increased demands placed on both teachers and students by the standards. T6 explained,

We have all of these standards on the GKIDS report card that have to be met by the end of the year, and it is just too much. The expectation is to have them ready for first grade, and it is just not possible with every student.

The participants’ perceptions are supported by researchers who noted that children play less in the classroom environment than they did in the past due to the pressures of academic achievements (Bodrova & Leong, 2019; Costantino-Lane, 2019; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Federal mandates have led to removal of developmentally appropriate practices such as play from the early childhood education classroom (Bluiett, 2018). Participants also explained that their schedule is packed with expectations, leaving no room for additional activities like play. T9 commented,

We have this GKIDS report card that we have to complete 4 times a year. It is all the standards that a kindergarten student is expected to master to be ready for first grade. It is four pages long. It [*sic*] is a lot of expectations tied to our standards, leaving us no time for play.

Participants emphasized time constraints and pressure to cover numerous requirements, affecting the ability to make kindergarten a fun and engaging experience. Furthermore, participants expressed their struggles with incorporating playtime due to the tight schedule dictated by the CCC/GSE standards. Participants acknowledged their efforts to make time for play but found it challenging amidst the expectations and workload. The participants' perspectives are supported by research in which teachers have expressed difficulties with integrating play into the curriculum, citing academic pressures as a reason for reducing playtime (Ebbeck et al., 2019; Hustedt et al., 2018; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018).

Participants also mentioned the removal of centers that previously offered children choices and free play opportunities. T2 shared, "I've seen kindergarten go from where every day you would have centers like home living, dramatic play, and dress up to now where those things don't exist, and it's or more of a structured play with sight word games." Participants recalled how centers allowed children to interact, act out scenarios, establish rules, and solve conflicts to foster growth and learning. The participants' statements about the removal of centers that provided children with choices and free play opportunities align with previous research emphasizing effective play-based learning being child-led, where students have freedom and choice in their actions and play

behavior (Boryga, 2022; Long, 2018; Zosh et al., 2022). These findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, which emphasizes the importance of activities in which children can collaborate with others and advance their skills with the assistance of more knowledgeable individuals such as teachers.

Theme 4

Participants shared their perspectives on how to bring play back into their classrooms. Participants described reintroducing play in the CCC/GSE-governed classroom. T9 commented, "The biggest change would be taking away some of these standards. If we could have less, we would have time to actually incorporate some playtime." Participants suggested bringing back center time and reducing assessments and guided reading sessions to balance play and academics. Another suggestion was to remove some standards to create more opportunities for play with students. T6 shared, "I know we need standards, but if we could have that hour of free play back for centers, I think it would be better." T2 expressed that

changes would have to come from the level of [the] Georgia Department of Education. If teachers were able to talk to the people at the state department, I think that would hopefully influence someone to think about what is developmentally appropriate for these 5-year-old babies. We cannot continue to push all of these academics on them and expect results.

The participants' perspectives align with previous research in that educators advocate for the return of play in kindergarten and other early education settings (Long, 2018). Current participants also proposed having different play options in the classroom,

such as Legos, building blocks, and a student-directed puppet area, to promote critical thinking skills. Participants also expressed a desire for kindergarten to return to its previous focus on play, with one participant advocating for the restoration of 1 hour of free play for centers to better accommodate the developmental needs of young learners. Participants' perspectives coincide with research suggesting that many classrooms are currently prioritizing academics at the expense of play, which can hinder the development of discovery and critical thinking skills in young learners (Bassok et al., 2016; Christakis, 2017; Hustedt et al., 2018; Overstreet, 2018; Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018).

The findings of my study align with Vygotsky's (1978) view of play as a source of development. The teachers in my study affirmed the significance of play for kindergarten students, emphasizing how it allows them to engage in meaningful interactions, apply their learning to real-world situations, and build essential problem-solving skills. This reflects Vygotsky's notion that play provides a context for children to learn and develop within their ZPD, where they can acquire new skills and knowledge through social interactions and guided play activities.

Limitations of the Study

Potential weaknesses or problems in the study can be identified as limitations. (Creswell, 2016). Limitations are common in all qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There were limitations in the current study, including the small sample size, location, and researcher bias.

I addressed the small sample size limitation by offering comprehensive and detailed information about participants' interview responses. Additionally, I conducted interviews until data saturation was achieved, ensuring a thorough exploration of the topic. The sample size included 10 kindergarten teachers with 3 or more years of experience teaching kindergarten. The transferability of the results is also limited because of the use of a small number of participants from the specific location. I provided thick, rich descriptions of my research processes to address this limitation and included direct participant quotes. These efforts enable the reader to assess the extent to which the findings may be applicable or transferable to their own situation or context. Member checking was conducted; I sought feedback from participants to validate my interpretations' accuracy and enhance the findings' overall validity. I maintained a reflective journal to address biases and reflect on the research process, documenting my thoughts and reflections throughout the study. Additionally, an audit trail was kept; I recorded decisions made during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure transparency and traceability in the research process. An expert reviewer assessed the compatibility of the emerging themes with the categorical data to check for bias. This approach allows readers to assess the applicability and transferability of the research findings.

The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, allowing participants to freely express their viewpoints about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom to minimize researcher bias and ensure consistency. This approach helps avoid soliciting responses that may not align with the research objectives, leading to a more accurate

representation of the teachers' perspectives. I also maintained a reflective journal to diligently document my emotions, questions, thoughts, and opinions throughout the research process, implemented member checking, and had an expert reviewer check for bias and the accuracy of themes from the data analysis.

Recommendations

The first recommendation for future research is to expand the research population to include a wider range of schools from different types of areas, such as cities, suburbs, and rural communities, to explore how different areas approach play in the kindergarten classroom and its integration with academic requirements. This study was limited to kindergarten teachers in a small urban school district in Georgia. By broadening the study's population to include a wider range of kindergarten teachers from diverse areas, researchers could develop a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering the increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE.

The second recommendation is for further research to address the lack of implementation of play in educational settings and advocate for its return to classrooms. Researchers may highlight its crucial role in child development and academic success by investigating the benefits and challenges of incorporating play. Based on recent research findings, the changes observed in kindergarten education do not align with teachers' perspectives of what kindergarten should be (Brown, 2021; Pyle, Poliszczuk & Danniels, 2018; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Recent research demonstrates the absence of play-based

learning implementation and emphasizes the need to reintroduce play into kindergarten classrooms (Bluiett, 2018; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Ku, 2019; Murray, 2018; Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018). Future research should build upon the findings of this study to gain a deeper understanding of current kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the role and implementation of play in the classroom. It is essential to consider the effect of increased academic requirements resulting from the adoption of the CCC/GSE standards. Future research may provide valuable insight into how teachers navigate the balance between play and academic requirements, informing strategies to effectively integrate play in kindergarten classrooms.

Implications

This study has implications for positive social change through understanding kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning included in the kindergarten curriculum. The results of this study may help state and local policymakers better understand kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning that is included in the kindergarten curriculum.

Conclusion

In this basic qualitative study, I explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic

requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. The research was grounded in both the existing literature review and Vygotsky's ZPD as the conceptual framework, providing a foundation for understanding the participants' viewpoints. I interviewed 10 kindergarten teachers who answered questions concerning their perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. Theme 1 emphasized teachers' belief in the significance of play for promoting social skills, learning, and overall development. Previous research supports this perspective, highlighting the developmental and educational advantages of play for young children. Theme 2 revealed teachers' concerns about the effect of CCC/GSE standards on play in their classroom, as they felt the rigorous academic expectations were not developmentally appropriate. The participants expressed worries about the reduction of unstructured playtime, potentially limiting children's social development. Theme 3 focused on the various factors limiting play in the classroom due to the implementation of CCC/GSE standards. Teachers cited increased expectations, lack of centers, and time constraints as barriers to incorporating play into their daily instructional routines. Theme 4 highlighted teachers' perspectives on reintroducing play into their classrooms. Suggestions included restoring center time, reducing assessments and guided reading sessions, removing some standards, and offering diverse play options to promote critical thinking skills. These findings fill the existing gap in practice concerning kindergarten teachers' perspectives of the role of play in the kindergarten classroom in the United States.

This study provides new knowledge concerning kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. The findings of this study have implications for positive social change by providing valuable information for policymakers at the state and local levels. My findings may contribute to positive social change through an understanding of kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom by providing information on what can be done to increase the amount of playful learning included in the kindergarten curriculum. Understanding kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role of play in the classroom can inform strategies to increase the incorporation of playful learning experiences in the kindergarten curriculum. The insight gained from this research can guide future efforts to support teachers in promoting meaningful and culturally informed teaching practices while ensuring the importance of the role of play in early childhood education is recognized and upheld.

References

- Alaca, B., & Pyle, A. (2018). *Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on culturally responsive education* (EJ1192154). ERIC.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1192154.pdf>
- Alharbi, M. O., & Alzahrani, M. M. (2020). *The importance of learning through play in early childhood education: Reflection on the "bold beginnings" report* (EJ1286551). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1286551>
- Ali, E., Constantino, K. M., Hussain, A., & Akhtar, Z. (2018). The effects of play-based learning on early childhood education and development. *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences*, 43(7), 4682–2685.
<https://doi.org/10.14260/JEMDS%2F2018%2F1044>
- Allee-Herndon, K. A., & Roberts, S. K. (2021). The power of purposeful play in primary grades: Adjusting pedagogy for children's needs and academic gains. *Journal of Education*, 201(1), 54–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022057420903272>
- Allee-Herndon, K. A., Roberts, S. K., Hu, B. Y., Clark, M. H., & Stewart, M. L. (2022). Let's talk play! Exploring the possible benefits of play-based pedagogy on language and literacy learning in two title I kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(1), 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01141-6>
- Babbie, E. (2017). *The basics of social research* (4th ed.). Wadsworth.
- Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858415616358>

- Bero, L. (2017). Addressing bias and conflict of interest among biomedical researchers. *JAMA*, 317(17), 1723–1724. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.3854>
- Blanco, P. J., Holliman, R. P., Ceballos, P. L., & Farnam, J. L. (2019). Exploring the impact of child-centered play therapy on academic achievement of at-risk kindergarten students. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 28(3), 133–143. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000086>
- Bluiett, T. (2018). Ready or not, play or not: Next steps for sociodramatic play and the early literacy curriculum: A theoretical perspective. *Reading Improvement*, 55(3), 83–88.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2019). *Making play smarter, stronger, and kinder: Lessons from tools of the mind* (EJ1238559). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1238559.pdf>
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Boryga, A. (2022, August 5). *For young kids, the power of play-based learning*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/young-kids-power-play-based-learning>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 843–860). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_103-1

- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2018). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Broderick, J. T., Boniol, K., Martin, N., Robshaw, K., & Holley, V. (2021). Impression obsession: Exploring science phenomena in a play-centered preschool classroom. *Science and Children, 58*(3), 76–82. <https://www.nsta.org/science-and-children/science-and-children-januaryfebruary-2021/impression-obsession>
- Brown, C. P. (2021). *Resisting the kinder-race: Restoring joy to early learning*. Teachers College Press.
- Brown, C., P. Barry, D. P., Ku, D. H., & Englehardt, J. (2021). How education stakeholders made sense of the types of learning experiences children are and should be having in kindergarten and why. *Early Education and Development, 32*(2), 291–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1750292>
- Brown, C. P., Englehardt, J., Barry, D. P., & Ku, D. H. (2019). Examining how stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels made sense of the changed kindergarten. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(3), 822–867. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831218804152>
- Brown, C. P., Englehardt, J., Ku, D. H., & Barry, D. P. (2019). “Where’s the joy in the classroom?”: Families’ sensemaking of the changed kindergarten. *Elementary School Journal, 120*(2), 319–346. <https://doi.org/10.1086/705964>
- Brown, C. P., Ku, D. H., & Barry, D. P. (2020). Kindergarten isn’t fun anymore. Isn’t that so sad?”: Examining how kindergarten teachers in the US made sense of the changed kindergarten. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 90*(1), Article 103029

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103029>

Bubikova-Moan, J., Naess Hjetland, H., & Wollscheid, S. (2019). ECE teachers' views on play-based learning: a systematic review. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(6), 776–800.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2019.1678717>

Burkholder, G., Cox, K., & Crawford, L. (2016). *The scholar-practitioner's guide to research design*. Laureate Publishing.

Canaslan-Akyar, B., & Sevimli-Celik, S. (2022). Playfulness of early childhood teachers and their views in supporting playfulness. *Education 3-13*, 50(1), 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1921824>

Christakis, E. (2017). *The importance of being little: What young children really need from grownups*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Costantino-Lane, T. (2019). Kindergarten then and now: Perceptions of ten long term teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(5), 585–595.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00949-1>

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2021). *Common Core state standards*.

<http://www.corestandards.org/?msclkid=0dc2ea91c26411ecb5ac7042b7ce966c>

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing*

among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Danniels, E., & Pyle, A. (2018). Defining play-based learning. *Encyclopedia on early childhood development*. Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development
<https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/play-based-learning/according-experts/defining-play-based-learning>
- Danniels, E., & Pyle, A. (2022). Inclusive play-based learning: approaches from enacting kindergarten teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51, 1169–1179.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01369-4>
- DeLuca, C., Pyle, A., Braund, H., & Faith, L. (2020). Leveraging assessment to promote kindergarten learners' independence and self-regulation within play-based classrooms. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 27(4), 394–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2020.1719033>
- Ebbeck, M., Yim, H. Y. B., & Warriar, S. (2019). Early childhood teachers' views and teaching practices in outdoor play with young children in Singapore. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(3), 265–273. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-018-00924-2>
- Education Commission of the States. (2022). *Strengthening the early childhood education continuum*. <https://www.ecs.org/strengthening-the-early-childhood-education-continuum/>
- Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. SAGE.
- Froebel, F. (2022). *The education of man* (W.N. Hailmann, Trans.). D. Appleton &

- Company. (Original work published 1887). <https://doi.org/10.1037/12739-000>
- Georgia Department of Education. (2010). *CCGPS: Common Core Georgia performance standards*.
<https://archives.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/CCGPSJuly8.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6538E425D6722145B3F25DDC7CA674A057392A682351E2925>
- Georgia Department of Education. (2015). *English language arts (ELA): Teacher guidance for teaching the Georgia standards of excellence (GSE). Elementary: Kindergarten–grade 5*. <https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Documents/ELA-Standards-Grades-K-5.pdf>
- Georgia Department of Education. (2023). *Review of common core Georgia performance standards*. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/Common-Core-Georgia-Performance-Standards.aspx>
- Gewertz, C. (2015, September 30). The Common Core explained. *Education Week*.
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-common-core-explained/2015/09>
- Goodhall, N., & Atkinson, C. (2019). How do children distinguish between ‘play’ and ‘work’? Conclusions from the literature. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(10), 1695–1708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1406484>
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5), Article e0232076.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>
- Guirguis, R. (2018). Should we let them play? Three key benefits of play to improve

- early childhood programs. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(1) 43–49. <https://doi.org/10.18488/61.2018.61.43.49>
- He, M. (2018). Creating play atmosphere and time for children in Chinese kindergarten: difficulties and reflection. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*, 52(3), 351–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-018-9445-7>
- Head Start, Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (n.d.). *School readiness*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness?msclkid=07979457c25811ecb31d9e3b9fa80ad9>
- Hesterman, S., & Targowska, A. (2020). The status-quo of play-based pedagogies in Western Australia: Reflections of early childhood education practitioners. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(1), 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939119885305>
- Hoskins, K., & Smedley, S. (2019). Protecting and extending Froebelian principles in practice: Exploring the importance of learning through play. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 17(2), 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X18809114>
- Hustedt, J. T., Buell, M. J., Hallam, R. A., & Pinder, W. M. (2018). While kindergarten has changed, some beliefs stay the same: Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 32(1), 52–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2017.1393031>
- Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The*

Qualitative Report, 17(42), Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1718>

- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education*, 118(2), 282–292.
- Kekesi, D. K., Donkor, S. K., Aburampah, W., & Torkonyo, M. (2019). Early childhood education teachers' perceptions on the use of play as a teaching technique in Afadjato South District of the Volta Region, Ghana. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(3), 504–516. <http://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1993.02.03.83>
- Keung, C. P. E., & Cheung, A. C. K. (2019). Towards holistic supporting of play-based learning implementation in kindergartens: A mixed-method study. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(5), 627–640. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00956-2>
- Keung, C. P. E., & Fung, C. K. H. (2020). Exploring kindergarten teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in the development of play-based learning. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 46(2), 244–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1724656>
- Keung, C. P. E., & Fung, C. K. H. (2021). Pursuing quality learning experiences for young children through learning in play: how do children perceive play? *Early Child Development & Care*, 191(4), 583–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1633313>
- Kinkead-Clark, Z. (2019). Exploring children's play in early years learning environments; what are the factors that shape children's play in the classroom?

Journal of Early Childhood Research, 17(3), 177–189.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19849251>

Kokkalia, G., Drigas, A. S., Economou, A., & Roussos, P. (2019). School readiness from kindergarten to primary school. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 14(11), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v14i11.10090>

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>

Kostelnik, M., Soderman, A., Rupiper, M., & Whiren, A. (2019). *Developmentally appropriate curriculum: Best practices in early childhood education* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Liebovich, B. (2020). NAEYC's first president: Patty Smith Hill. *YC: Young Children*, 75(1), 84–88.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Liu, X., Hu, B., & Huang, J. (2019). The quality of play center activities of early childhood education in China. *English Language Teaching*, 12(8), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n8p95>

Long, C. (2018). *The power of play in kindergarten*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/power-play-kindergarten>

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research. A guide to design and implementation*, (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

- Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Moedt, K., & Holmes, R. M. (2020). The effects of purposeful play after shared storybook readings on kindergarten children's reading comprehension, creativity, and language skills and abilities. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(6), 839–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1496914>
- Murray, J. (2018). The play's the thing. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 26(4), 335–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2018.1527278>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). *Developmentally appropriate practice*. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/dap-statement_0.pdf?msclkid=7d5fd346c24a11ec973307bb9440a4a1
- O'Keeffe, C., & McNally, S. (2021). "Uncharted territory": Teachers' perspectives on play in early childhood classrooms in Ireland during the pandemic. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 29(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1872668>
- Önder, M. (2018). Contribution of plays and toys to children's value education. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 4(2), 146–149. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.522.2018.42.146.149>
- Overstreet, M. (2018). All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy: The case for play at

all educational levels. *Reading Psychology*, 39(2), 216–226.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2017.1415240>

Paterson, A. (2020). The play paradox: A systematic literature review of play-based pedagogy applied in the classroom. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 37(4), 96–114. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2020.37.4.96>

Pelletier, J., & Corter, J. E. (2019). A longitudinal comparison of learning outcomes in full-day and half-day kindergarten. *Journal of Educational Research*, 112(2), 192–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2018.1486280>

Phajane, M. H. (2019). Play and teaching in early childhood classrooms: Perspectives and practices of teachers and children in South Africa. *E-BANGI Journal*, 16(4), 1–14.

Piaget, J. (1962). The stages of the intellectual development of the child. *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, 26(3), 120–128.

Pistorova, S., & Slutsky, R. (2018). There is still nothing better than quality play experiences for young children's learning and development: Building the foundation for inquiry in our educational practices. *Early Child Development & Care*, 188(5), 495–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1403432>

Pyle, A., Deluca, C., & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education. *Review of Education*, 5(3), 311–351. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3097>

Pyle, A., Deluca, C., Wickstrom, H., & Danniels, E. (2022). Connecting kindergarten teachers' play-based learning profiles and their classroom assessment practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 119, Article 103855.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103855>

- Pyle, A., Poliszczuk, D., & Danniels, E. (2018). The challenges of promoting literacy integration within a play-based learning kindergarten program: Teacher perspectives and implementation. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 32(2), 219–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2017.1416006>
- Pyle, A., Prioletta, J., & Poliszczuk, D. (2018). The play-literacy interface in full-day kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46(1), 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0852-z>
- Rand, M. K., & Morrow, L. M. (2021). The contribution of play experiences in early literacy: expanding the science of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(1), S239–S248. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.383>
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE.
- Russell, J. L. (2011). From child’s garden to academic press: The role of shifting institutional logics in redefining kindergarten education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2), 236–267. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210372135>
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Scharp, K. M., & Sanders, M. L. (2019). What is a theme? Teaching thematic analysis in qualitative communication research methods. *Communication Teacher*, 33(2), 117–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2018.1536794>
- Seidman, E. (2012). An emerging action science of social settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-011-9469-3>

- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75. <http://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>
- Shirakawa, Y., & Saracho, O. N. (2021). Froebel’s kindergarten and its movement in Germany and the United States. *Early Child Development & Care*, 191(7/8), 1164–1174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1865338>
- Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2013). *Scope, limitations, and delimitations*. <https://ders.es/limitationscopedelimitation1.pdf>
- Sofu, S., Thompson, E., Ray, J., & Dako Gyeke, M. (2018). Play pedagogy: Perspectives of basic school teachers in Ghana. *The International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 24(3), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7939/cgp/v24i03/17-29>
- Taylor, M. E., & Boyer, W. (2020). Play-based learning: evidence-based research to improve children’s learning experiences in the kindergarten classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(2), 127–133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00989-7>
- United Nations Children’s Fund. (2018). *UNICEF strategic plan 2018–2021*. https://www.unicef.org/media/48126/file/UNICEF_Strategic_Plan_2018-2021-ENG.pdf
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *No Child Left Behind: Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*. <https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?msclkid=f6fc93dfc25511ecadc01edab240d9d9>

- Vogt, F., Hauser, B., Stebler, R., Rechsteiner, K., & Urech, C. (2018). Learning through play–pedagogy and learning outcomes in early childhood mathematics. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(4), 589–603.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2018.1487160>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Revised ed.). Harvard University Press.
- Wainwright, N., Goodway, J., Whitehead, M., Williams, A., & Kirk, D. (2020). Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: Exploring the implementation of the play-based foundation phase in Wales. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(1), 43–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1653551>
- Walker, T. (2016). *Does teaching experience matter? Let's count the ways*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/does-teaching-experience-matter-lets-count-ways>
- Wu, S. (2019). Researching children's learning and play in a Chinese context: Children's perspectives on their play and learning. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(4), 551–565.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2019.1634241>
- Wu, S. (2021). A co-constructed picture of learning in play by teachers and parents. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(1), 84–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X20971316>
- Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Baum, R., Gambon, T., Lavin, A., Mattson, G., Wissow, L., Hill, D. L., Ameenuddin, N.,

Chassiakos, Y. R., Cross, C., Boyd, R., Mendelson, R., Moreno, M. A., Radesky, J., Swanson, W. S., . . . & Smith, J. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, *142*(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>

Zosh, J. M., Gaudreau, C., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2022). The power of playful learning in the early childhood setting. *Young Children*, *77*(2).

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/summer2022/power-playful-learning>

Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Solis, S., & Whitebread, D. (2018). Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*(1), Article 1124.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01124>

Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Teachers

Demographic Data

Participant number:

The number of years of experience in kindergarten:

(Opening Statement)

(Read to participant) Good morning/afternoon,

I am Rachael Morrison, and I want to thank you for volunteering to participate in my study to discuss kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the role and implementation of play in the kindergarten classroom considering increased academic requirements after the implementation of the CCC/GSE standards. Before we begin our interview, I want to confirm you have read and agreed to the consent to participate you were emailed and that you are voluntarily willing to participate in my study and be interviewed. Do you have any questions about the consent?

As a few reminders, the interview will last about 45 minutes to 1 hour. This interview will be audio-recorded. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary, and we can stop the interview at any time. You can decline to answer a question, and if you get tired, you may ask for a break at any time. Your identity and all personal information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. A participant number has been assigned to you, and you will only be identified by this number. Before we begin, do you have any questions? I will now ask you a series of interview questions. Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions

1. Describe to me what your kindergarten program is like here at this school. *Please tell me more about this.* (RQ1)
2. What do you consider to be “play” in the kindergarten classroom?
3. What is your perspective on the role of play in the kindergarten classroom?
Please elaborate. Please give me an example. (RQ1)
4. How do you incorporate play into your kindergarten class?
5. How have the curriculum and your daily teaching routines involving play changed since the implementation of CCC/GSE standards? (RQ2)
6. What changes would make it possible for you to incorporate more play? *Please tell me more.* (RQ2)

(Closing Question)

7. What else about this topic would you like to share with me?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by.....?

Tell me more about.....

You mentioned.....

What do you mean by.....?

What about time spent....?

(Closing Statement)

(Read to participant)

At this time, you have answered all of my questions, and the interview is complete. Thank you for participating in my interview. Once the data has been analyzed, I will provide you with a summary via email for you to review. After you review the data,

you will email me your feedback. If you have any further questions, you may ask them now, or if you have questions later, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Thank you for your time in contributing to my study. I will be giving you a \$10.00 gift card for Starbucks or Chick-Fil-A. Would you please let me know which you prefer?

(Pause for selection. Hand participant selected gift card or get a mailing address). Thank you again for volunteering to participate in my study. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

Appendix B: Examples of Open Codes and Categories

Category	Code	Participant	Excerpt
Social skills	Play can be anything	T1	"I think that play can be anything where students are able to work together in build [<i>sic</i>] social skills, and learn how to work cooperatively, cooperatively with others, that will transfer into skills that they'll need later in life"
	Play is free choice	T2	"I consider play a free choice where they are able to talk about what they're doing. If they're building with blocks and trying to build something, they're working together. But they're playing, and they don't realize that they're learning, but they can apply it and talk about it."
Role of play	Role of play is important	T1	"I think the role of play is extremely important because they're 5 and 6 years old and they need lots of movement, and they need lots of interaction and I feel like when they're not able to do that."
	Play has an important purpose	T10	"I just think play has such an important purpose in kindergarten."
Not developmentally appropriate	Expect too much	T3	"I think over the years, they have pushed more and more down to kindergarten. And some things I don't feel like are developmentally appropriate."
	What we are doing is not developmentally appropriate	T6	"But sometimes I think that what we're doing now is not developmentally appropriate."
Standards & academics	Core curriculum	T4	"At this school, it's an academically based focused kindergarten for the kids, a core curriculum is taught"
	Academically focused	T7	"Kindergarten here is academically focused"
Time constraints	No time for play	T8	"There just isn't time to have playtime."
	Hard to have playtime	T5	"That's very hard actually, to have playtime. I mean, I try to, you know, I try to incorporate it"
	Only free time is at recess	T7	"The only free playtime they get is at recess"
	No time set aside	T1	"I feel like that right now, we don't really have any, any of that time aside from what they get for recess."
Need for more play	Students would learn more through play	T9	"I think that students would learn more and be more engaged and more interested in school if there were more playing kindergarten"
		T3	"I think kids learn better through play, especially like playing games instead of giving them worksheets"

Category	Code	Participant	Excerpt
	Kindergarten has changed	T9	“You know, kindergarten itself has changed. What is now in prek is what kindergarten used to be and we are teaching what used to be taught in first grade. “
		T7	“It’s changed because you have less play in the classroom now and kids need more play.”
	More play	T5	“I think we should have more play. We used to have free time but now we don’t.”
Absence of centers	Used to have centers	T6	“We used to have centers that the kids went to for an hour a day.”
		T8	“We used to have centers. The kids could pick if they wanted to do dress up or go to the kitchen station or build blocks. Now our centers are academically focused and usually in a game format.”
		T5	“In the past we had centers. The children could pick what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go. Now we don’t have centers now not like it used to be.”
Ways to bring back play	Need to have different things they can go to	T4	“I think they need to be able to have different things in the classroom that they can go to and play, whether it’s like Legos, the building blocks, a puppet area that is student directed and builds critical thinking skills”