

Teachers' Perspectives on Literacy Skills Development among Kindergarteners: Evidence from Kindergarten Teachers in Agona East District, Ghana

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Abstract

This paper examined the perspectives of kindergarten teachers on literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners. The study focused on public kindergarten teachers within the Agona East District of Ghana. 132 public kindergarten teachers were sampled for the quantitative aspect of the study using census technique of sampling and 12 participants were sampled using the convenience sampling technique for the qualitative phase of the study. The explanatory sequential mixed methods research design enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide respectively. The quantitative data were analysed descriptively using the SPSS and the hypotheses were tested with the use of Pearson Correlation. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data. The study established that majority of kindergarten teachers in the district had a positive perspective on literacy skills and literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners. They believed literacy skills development offers numerous benefits to kindergarteners and that a teacher's view of the benefits of literacy skills instruction influences lesson delivery. Based on the findings, it is recommended that headteachers of the basic schools and the District Education Directorate should make efforts at motivating kindergarten teachers to regard these positive views with high esteem, and should organize periodic seminars and symposia on the relevance of effective literacy skills among kindergarteners for kindergarten teachers. This will enable them to keep up and maintain the knowledge and positive view they hold on the relevance of literacy skill development to kindergarteners.

Keywords: Teachers' perspectives, Literacy skills, Early childhood education, Kindergarteners

1. Introduction

The most critical stage of every discipline of life is the foundation. In the life of an individual, the early developmental stage, which is also the foundational stage, is of high relevance. UNESCO (2010) defined early childhood education as the education of young children that promotes their physical well-being, cognitive and linguistic skills, and social and emotional maturity. In Ghana, Early Childhood Education (hereinafter ECE) covers the period from birth to age eight and encompasses education, health, nutrition, and protection services (UNESCO, 2010). Oppong Frimpong (2019) states that educating young children has become a much more prominent issue globally. Accordingly, Yeng, Woode-Eshun, and Badu (2022) maintain that prioritizing quality elementary education has become important for governments worldwide with the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on Quality Education (Goal 3). It has become the focus of discussion at all levels of government, and an issue for experts and the general public alike as contributing to and preparing children for their education and future life.

Currie (2001) advocates that improvement of academic learning among learners such as reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication, thinking skills, logical reasoning, problem-solving, decision making, critical thinking, job task planning, and organizing are reasons for which children are enrolled in ECE. Delays in the effective development of any of these skills before children exit the kindergarten levels often have long-lasting consequences on learners, their families, and the society at large (UNESCO, 2007).

Literacy encompasses the skills an individual requires for efficient communication. These skills include listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Literacy skills are a vital part of every child's overall development (UNESCO, 2007). It is the foundation for doing well at school, socializing with others, developing independence, and managing money. Also, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2007) refers to literacy skills as encompassing reading, writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand. It also extends to new media including non-digitized multimedia, digitized multimedia, and hypertext or hypermedia. It could be recognized in this definition that, literacy skills are seen not only to include the traditional way of teaching and practicing reading, writing, and other literacy activities. Rather, it inculcates modern trends such as the use of technological devices in facilitating the acquisition of literacy skills.

The numerous benefits of literacy skills in the academic life of early grade learners cannot be overemphasized. Literacy transcends the mere ability of an individual to use reading and writing skills during Literacy and English lessons at the early years. It is useful to an individual throughout the academic and social life. Consequently, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2010) asserts that literacy involves a continuum of learning that enable individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. Bruner (2010) considers reading and writing proficiency in the foundational stages a key milestone in a child's educational development and a sentinel indicator of future educational successes.

Literacy can be seen as dependent on instruction, with the corollary that quality of instruction

is key. This view emphasizes the developmental nature of literacy, the passage of children through successive stages of literacy, in each of which the reading and writing tasks change qualitatively and the role of the instructor has to change accordingly (Snow, 2004). Literacy competence opens the door to all other academic learning, hence, children in preschool and kindergarten should be taught emergent literacy skills to help them succeed in school and later in life (Schleppegrell, 2012). Moreover, early literacy skills improve and build opportunities for learners to participate in their home, community, and school environments, as well as to engage in existing adult roles, such as jobs (Cihak, Wright, Smith, McMahon, & Kraiss, 2015; Rupp, Afacan, Yang, & Pickett, 2017).

For instance, learners who do not read and write proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more to drop out of high school than their peers who are proficient readers (Feister, 2010). It is therefore critical for teachers to help young children to be ready for school and other life by working with them to develop early literacy and learning skills. This is because literacy skills are the gateway to successful education and for that matter conscious efforts must be channelled to promoting it at the early childhood level (Feister, 2010). Teachers are encouraged to target instruction on alphabet knowledge, shared book reading, conventions of print, phonological awareness, and emergent writing (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008). Despite this knowledge base, evidence suggests that early childhood teachers provide a range of literacy-learning experiences which may be less than optimal for encouraging long-term gains (Dwyer & Harbaugh, 2020). As part of efforts to improve early literacy experiences, focus should be on teachers' thinking, knowledge, beliefs, planning, and decision-making process than an observable teacher behaviour. Teachers' cognition and views shape their understanding of teaching and their classroom practices. It comprises the mental lives of teachers, how these are formed, what they consist of, and how teachers' beliefs, thoughts and thinking processes affect their teaching (Richards, 2008).

Knowledge is critical for teaching and is considered the foundation through which teachers make instructional decisions (NAEYC, 2020). There are different types of knowledge that researchers have targeted to better understand and improve instruction, many of which draw from the extensive research base. Among them is the knowledge of how children develop literacy skills (Cash, Cabell, Hamre, DeCoster, & Pianta 2015; Cox et al., 2015), understanding of the content itself (Piastra, Ramirez et al., 2020), and knowledge to enact literacy instruction (Hindman & Wasik, 2011). These types of knowledge are viewed to be based on facts, science, or research regarding what is known about how children develop emergent literacy skills (Hoy et al., 2006).

Researchers have also examined how these different types of educator knowledge are associated with instruction. For example, Piastra, Connor, Fishman, and Morrison (2009) examined educators' knowledge of English language and literacy, accessing educators' disciplinary content knowledge or knowledge about the content they were teaching. They found that higher disciplinary knowledge predicted children's literacy outcomes when examined in combination with time in decoding instruction. Thus, they linked educators' disciplinary content knowledge with their instruction. In contrast, Cash et al. (2015) examined a different type of knowledge, looking at educators' understanding of children's

skill development within specific language and literacy developmental domains. Although they measured a variety of child outcomes, they found that educators' knowledge only predicted gains in children's expressive vocabulary and print knowledge. Implicit in their findings is the notion that knowledge informs instruction which can then be linked to children's learning. Moreover, sometimes changes in educators' knowledge do not result in improved outcomes for children (Cunningham et al., 2009; Gerde et al., 2014), suggesting that the type of knowledge measured, in these cases disciplinary content knowledge and knowledge of emergent literacy, may not always be linked to language and literacy instruction.

The act of teaching is much more than delivering the knowledge and skills to the learners. The views of teachers on the teaching of literacy have a filtering effect on the instructional decisions they take and the activities they perform. Such views are shaped by several factors including schooling, professional coursework, context and experiences from teacher education programmes and the classroom (Friesen & Butera, 2012; Cox et al., 2015). When attention is paid to what teachers are holistically made of and what they could instill into children, there will be deliberate efforts at selecting teachers for the early childhood level. In particular will be those who will handle literacy lessons because it is envisaged that literacy lessons will be delivered as how a teacher perceives the literacy instruction. However, associations across these types of knowledge, (literacy instruction, and child outcomes) had been mixed (Cash et al., 2015; Piasta et al., 2020; Schachter et al., 2016). Thus, although evidenced-based types of knowledge remain a research focus, there are inconclusive understandings of how this knowledge, teaching, and learning are connected.

1.1 Problem Statement

The above discussions suggest that a teacher's notion of what literacy skills development are and how they are developed at the kindergarten level shapes the entire approach to literacy teaching/instruction. This action will either affect learners positively or negatively depending on the standards of the teacher.

Globally, literacy instruction has been seen as important (Currie, 2001; Casey & Sheran, 2004; Bruner, 2010; & Owu-Ewie, 2018). However, another relevant dimension to literacy skills development which is the perspectives of teachers on what literacy skills are and how they are developed among kindergarteners seems to be largely missing in literature as far as the readings of this researcher are concerned. Much attention has not been paid to that. Most studies that tried to address the phenomena only focused on teachers who teach at the upper primary education level, and not specifically at the kindergarten level (Lane, Prokop, Johnson, Podhajski, & Nathan, 2014; Walsh, 2011; Dixon & Wu, 2014; Kimmy, 2017; Cunningham & O'Donnell, 2015). Additionally, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of these studies employed explanation sequential mixed methods as a design. The researcher is of the opinion that this knowledge and methodological gaps in ECE teachers' perspective of literacy skill development among kindergartners could be filled by embarking on this study.

Consequently, these huge gaps occasioned this paper as the researcher was motivated to undertake this study to contribute to knowledge and discussion of literacy skills development

and to contribute to educational literature. It is important for this study to be carried out because, more often than not, a teacher's understanding and perception of literacy development is the least of things we consider but to an extent, it is the deal breaker which determines whether the entire process will be meaningful, purposeful and beneficial to learners or not. It is therefore relevant to focus on examining the perspectives of kindergarten teachers on literacy skills development at the kindergarten level. The purpose of this study, therefore was to establish KG teachers' level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners; examine their views on the relevance of literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners; and identify how their views influence their literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the researcher in conducting the study;

- (1) What is the level of understanding of kindergarten teachers on literacy skills development among kindergarteners in Agona East District?
- (2) What are the views of kindergarten teachers on the relevance of literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners in Agona East District?
- (3) How do ECE teachers' views influence their literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners in Agona East District?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference between the level of understanding of what literacy skills development among kindergarteners are, and the ECE teaching experience.

And,

H₀: There is no statistically significant different between the level of understanding of what literacy skills development among kindergarteners are, and the general teaching experience.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants used for the study were kindergarten teachers who were teaching at the Agona East District of Ghana. These teachers were supposed to have gone through training in early childhood education to be able to handle learners at that level.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

A convenience sampling technique was employed in the selection of the qualitative participants. Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the study (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). With this technique, the researcher went to

the school and in each school, the ECE teacher who was first accessed in class or in the school, who was ready and willing to take part in the study was selected for the qualitative phase.

2.2.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

The target population was all kindergarten teachers in the Agona East District which comprised 132 public kindergarten teachers and 38 private kindergarten teachers, totalling 170. The accessible population included all public kindergarten teachers in the district. They were 132 in number. Census was used to sample all 132 public kindergarten teachers in the Agona East District as respondents for the quantitative part of the study and 12 public ECE teachers were selected for the qualitative phase of the study.

2.2.2 Measures and Covariates

Two instruments (i.e. questionnaire and interview guide) were employed to gather data for the study. The questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.905, suggesting that it was very reliable. The researcher gathered the quantitative data from respondents using questionnaires and the semi-structured interview guide was used for the qualitative data collection from participants to triangulate, confirm or disconfirm the data from the quantitative study. As opined by Kuranchie (2016), the differing nature of quantitative and qualitative data calls for different approaches to analysing them (Creswell, 2014). Thus, after retrieving the questionnaires from respondents, the researcher coded the responses and entered them into the computer using the Statistical Package for the Service Solution (SPSS) Version 25.0. Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used in analysing the quantitative data. The hypotheses were tested with descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation. A mean of 3.0 was realized for the analysis. The interpretation of this was that any item that scored a mean value above 3.0 indicated that most of the respondents agreed to the particular item. Conversely, any item that scored a mean value less than 3.0 indicated that most respondents did not agree to the item in question.

In terms of the qualitative data, after an interview session with a participant, the audio recording was played to them for them to confirm and agree to, before they were transcribed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher arranged responses under the emerging themes (being guided by the research questions) and they were analysed as such. Participants' real names were not used. They were however given numbers to ensure anonymity (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The respondents/participants were assured of confidentiality of their responses by the researcher.

2.2.3 Research Design

The study employed the explanatory sequential mixed-method design. This design occurred in two distinct interactive phases, beginning with the collection and analysis of the quantitative data and then designing the second qualitative phase based on the quantitative findings (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The researcher in this study used this research design to corroborate and explain the quantitative findings with qualitative data as suggested by Wisdom and Creswell (2013).

3. Results

Presented in this section is the analysis of the data based on the responses from teachers on their understanding of what literacy skills are and how these skills are taught among kindergarteners within the Agona East District as structured in the questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. One hundred and twenty-five (125) questionnaires out of 132 were completed and retrieved. Hence, the analysis and discussion were done using the responses in the 125 questionnaires. Interpretations of analysis were provided for each research question, and this was followed by the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 were the alphanumeric names used for the participants for the qualitative analysis.

3.1 Research Question 1: What Is the Level of Understanding of Kindergarten Teachers on Literacy Skills Development among Kindergarteners?

This section sought to find kindergarten teachers' understanding of what literacy skills at the kindergarten level are in Agona East District. Kindergarten teachers responded to five items on the questionnaire. The key for the letter/symbols in the table heading is that: A = Agreed; N = Neutral; D = Disagreed; % = Percentage; Std = Standard deviation. It is worth noting that the researcher collapsed the strongly agreed and agreed to agreement and the strongly disagreed and disagreed to disagreement.

Table 1 displays the responses ratings to a series of statements related to the understanding of kindergarten teachers on what literacy skills are among kindergarteners. The table shows that with exception of item 1 which is "Literacy is a valued skill which includes reading, writing, spelling as well as listening, speaking" which had 124 (99.2%) responding in the affirmative with only one respondent (0.8%) being neutral to the statement, all the respondents agreed to the rest of the items in the table. Thus, "Early literacy skills begin to grow in primary childhood"; "Literacy skills include the ability of children making meaning from written texts"; "Literacy skills involve being able to communicate with others"; and "Literacy is the ability to express understanding of what has been read into texts".

Table 1. Response to the level of understanding of kindergarten teachers on what literacy skills instruction is

S/N	Statement	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	Mean/Std
1	Literacy is a valued skill that includes reading, writing, spelling as well as listening and speaking	124 (99.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)	2.98/0.17
2	Early literacy skills begin to grow in primary childhood	125(100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00
3	Literacy skills include the ability of children making meaning from written texts	125(100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00
4	Literacy skills involves being able to communicate with others	125(100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00
5	Literacy is the ability to express understanding of what has been read into texts	125(100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00
6	Literacy skills are learnt best as a result of the daily activities we engage in	4 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	121 (96.8)	1.06/0.35
7	Kindergarteners continually learn literacy skills as they move to higher levels	120 (96.0)	2 (1.6)	3 (2.4)	2.94/0.33
8	Teaching literacy skills at the kindergarten level does not require specific instructional strategies	4 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	121 (96.8)	1.06/0.35
9	Children learn literacy best on their own when they are surrounded with enough instructional materials	10 (8.0)	6 (4.8)	109 (87.2)	1.21/0.57
10	I spread out lessons throughout the given time to allow learners to have much control over the activities involved	125 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00
11	It is relevant to consciously teach literacy skills to kindergarteners	123 (98.4)	2 (1.6)	0 (0.0)	2.98/0.12

Source: Field data 2022.

Again Table 1 shows that 4(3.2%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that “literacy skills are learned best as a result of the daily activities we engage in”, and 121(96.8%) of the respondents disagreed with that statement. Moreover, the analysis shows that 120(96.0%) of the respondents agreed with the statement “kindergarteners continually learn literacy skills as they move to higher levels” as their view on the instruction of literacy skills among kindergarteners. However, 2(1.6%) respondents were neutral in their rating, while 3(2.4%) of them disagreed.

Table 1 shows that 4(3.2%) of the respondents responded in the affirmative to the statement that “teaching literacy skills at the kindergarten level does not require specific instructional

strategies” as their view on the instruction of literacy skills among kindergarteners. However, 121(96.8%) of them disagreed to the statement. The table equally shows that 10(8.0%) respondents agreed to the statement that “children learn literacy best on their own when they are surrounded with enough instructional materials,” but a majority of them 109(87.2%) disagreed with this statement and 6(4.8) of the participants were neutral in their responses to this statement.

The inference drawn from the analysis is that kindergarten teachers in the Agona East District have an appreciable knowledge of what literacy skills are and how they are developed among kindergarteners and these are supported by the values of the means and the standard deviations. They appreciate the relevance of these skills in the academic life of every kindergartener. Hence, the conscious effort to teach these skills.

To have a deeper understanding of the views of respondents and to triangulate their views on what literacy skills among kindergarteners are, the researcher engaged the respondents in an interview session. The participants were asked during the interview session to share their views and some of the comments expressed are as follows:

... I believe it is the ability of a child to read, speak, and listen in a way that helps them to communicate effectively with one another (Teacher 3).

To me, literacy includes or involves the skills that guarantee children’s ability to be able to read, write, and, in a way, that help them communicate well (Teacher 7).

I understand literacy as one of the fundamental skills that learners need to advance and go higher in their education. These skills include their ability to read, write, speak, and comprehend whatever is communicated (Teacher 6).

My personal view on the teaching of literacy to children at the preschool level as a preschool teacher myself is when teachers teach children how to read, write, listen attentively, and speak fluently using effective teaching methods (Teacher 2).

Though we can learn some aspects of literacy at home and by interacting with our environment, there is always a reason to bring in a professional to help develop these skills using specific and effective instructional strategies (Teacher 5).

The teaching of reading, writing, listening and speaking to children is very important. I believe that literacy needs to be consciously taught among kindergartens, using specific instructional strategies that are appropriate for their level (Teacher 9).

3.2 Research Question 2: What Is the Perception of Kindergarten Teachers on the Relevance of Literacy Skills Instruction among Kindergarteners?

This section sought responses on the relevance of literacy skills to kindergarteners. Respondents responded to five statements in the questionnaire. Sampled respondents were also interviewed to provide explanations to the data gathered from the questionnaire. The analysis is presented as follows:

Table 2. Response to teachers' perception on the relevance of literacy skills to kindergarteners

S/N	Statement	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	Mean/Std
1	Literacy skills is the gateway to successful education	121 (96.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.2)	2.94/0.33
2	Literacy skills build opportunities for learners to participate in community activities	120 (96.0)	2 (1.6)	3 (2.4)	2.94/0.33
3	Competence in literacy skills opens the door to all other academic learning	121 (96.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.2)	2.94/0.35
4	Improvement of literacy skills contributes to why children are enrolled in early childhood education	109 (87.2)	6 (4.8)	10 (8.0)	2.79/0.57
5	Literacy skills is a key indicator to future success	125 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.00/0.00

Source: Field data 2022.

Table 2 displays the responses to series of statements regarding the perception of teachers on the relevance of literacy skills to kindergarteners. The result shows that 121(96.8%) of the respondents agreed to the statement that “literacy skills are the gateway to successful education,” while 4(3.2%) disagreed to the statement. Also, the table shows that 120(96.0%) of the respondents agreed to the statement that “literacy skills build opportunities for learners to participate in community activities” but 3(2.4%) disagreed while 2(1.6%) remained neutral to the statement.

Furthermore, the data reveals that 121(96.8%) of the respondents agreed to the statement that “competence in literacy skills opens the door to all other academic learning,” while 4(3.2%) disagreed to the statement. Additionally, 109(87.2%) of the respondents agreed that “improvement of literacy skills contributes to why children are enrolled in early childhood education.” 10(8.0%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 6(4.8%) remained neutral in their responses. Findings from the table also reveal that 125(100%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that “literacy skills is a key indicator to future success.”

The kindergarten teachers expressed their views on the relevance of literacy skills to kindergarteners through an interview and some of their voices are captured below. Teacher 11 commented that;

I believe literacy has a lot to offer school children, especially our learners at the early childhood level. These children will be able to read and read well, write and write well and above all communicate effectively.

Similarly, Teacher 1 stated that;

Teaching children to be competent in reading and writing is beneficial to children in all stages of education and all endeavors of life. This is because, in every subject, there is reading and writing and in everything we do in life we have to read to understand and

write what we understand.

Teacher 10 was of the view that;

Through literacy skill development, the learners will be able to express themselves very well, and do reading and writing too. The good thing is that, these skills will be the foundation for the children's later literacy development.

Having collected and analysed responses from both data sets, the researcher took interest in establishing whether there was any relationship between the level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners and the participants' ECE teaching or general teaching experiences. The findings from the hypotheses tested are discussed below.

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference between the level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners and ECE teaching experience.

Also,

H₀: There is no statistically significant different between the level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners and general teaching experience.

The teaching experience tested were in two folds. That is, general teaching experience and KG teaching experience. The researcher tested the relationship that existed between general teaching experience and level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners on one hand and KG teaching experience and level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners on the other hand. The researcher employed correlation analysis to establish the relationship or correlation between these variables. Both general and KG teaching experience were measured in years of teaching and an index was created for the level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners. The result of the correlational analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of level of understanding and general teaching experience

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners	2.6150	0.07378	125
General teaching experience	5.7680	2.38658	125
ECE teaching experience	4.0000	1.74596	125

Source: Field data 2022.

Table 3 shows a descriptive statistic of the study's variables. The mean value of level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners is 2.6150 with a standard deviation of 0.07378. The mean value of general teaching experience is approximately 6

years with a standard deviation of 2.38658. Also, the mean value of KG teaching experience is 4 years with a standard deviation of 1.74596. The sample size was 125 respondents.

Table 4. Correlations of general teaching experience and level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners

		Level of understanding of literacy skills	General teaching experience
Level of understanding of literacy skills	Pearson Correlation	1	0.827
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.158
General teaching experience	Pearson Correlation	0.827	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.158	
	N	125	125

Source: Field data 2022.

Table 4 shows a correlation result between general teaching experience and level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners. The result shows that there exists a strong positive relationship between general teaching experience and level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners. The positive value of Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.827 shows a strong positive relationship. This means that as general teaching experience increase, the level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners also increases.

Table 5. Correlations of ECE teaching experience and level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners

		Level of understanding of literacy skills	ECE teaching experience
Level of understanding of literacy skills	Pearson Correlation	1	0.531
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.729
ECE teaching experience	Pearson Correlation	0.531	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.729	
	N	125	125

Source: Field data 2022.

The result in Table 5 so far shows that there exists a moderate positive relationship between KG teaching experience and level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners. The positive value of Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.531 shows that there exists a positive but moderate relationship between KG teaching experience and level of understanding of what literacy skills are among kindergarteners. This means that as KG teaching experience increases, the level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners also increases. The results so far show that there is a positive relationship between KG teaching experience (KG and general) and of level of understanding of literacy skills development among kindergarteners. This corroborates the findings of Piasta, Connor, Fishman, and Morrison (2009). They found that the higher a teacher's knowledge in a particular discipline, the more likely children's literacy outcomes will be increased. Thus, they linked educators' disciplinary content knowledge with their instruction.

3.3 Research Question 3: How Does ECE Teachers' Views Influence Their Literacy Skills Instruction among Kindergarteners?

Given that richer experience in ECE teaching increases the likelihood of better understanding of learners' literacy skill development, coupled with the fact that respondents generally affirmed that literacy skills development is of great importance, the researcher proceeded to establish how their views about the relevance of literacy skill development influence their literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners. Participants views that are representative of the influence of their literacy skills instruction are presented as:

As I have said already, literacy skill development is very important so I try all my best to select instructional strategy that will help my learners to develop their literacy skills (Teacher 2)

Oh, but you know that you have to select a strategy that will have help you to be able to deliver your lesson well. You should try as a teacher to use child-centered approach when you are teaching literacy skill development (Teacher 9).

Those of us who have been in the early childhood system for long know that if you don't use the right approach to teach literacy, your learners will not be able to develop their literacy skills (Teacher 12).

Sometimes, I know that certain strategies and approaches do not help when we are teaching our children literacy. But the truth is that, I for one, I don't know some of them like the jolly phonics that can help my children to develop literacy easily. But I am doing my best to help my children's literacy development (Teacher 6)

As for me, I know the importance of literacy skill instruction and how it ends up helping children to develop their literacy skills. But I have challenges. For example, if I want to use jolly phonics and shared reading for example, I will need enough textbooks so that each learner will have a copy, but the textbook I have are not enough (Teacher 11)

4. Discussion

4.1 Research Question 1: What Is the Level of Understanding of Kindergarten Teachers on Literacy Skills Development among Kindergarteners?

The results of this analysis suggest that teachers have an appreciable knowledge of what literacy skills are. They defined literacy skills as encompassing a child's ability to communicate effectively through reading, speaking, writing, and listening. This finding agrees to that of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2007). Similarly, Downing (2007), and Keefe and Copeland (2011) indicate that literacy is a valued skill that includes listening, speaking, interacting, reading, writing, and spelling. According to the findings, literacy skills include the ability of a kindergarten pupil to make meaning from what has been written for effective communication. This definition is in line with that of Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2010), that literacy includes the ability to interpret and make meaning from written texts and to communicate with others.

The findings also revealed kindergartner conviction that literacy skills transcend the mere ability of an individual being able to read and write. It involves the ability of a learner to be useful members of their communities and wider society. This finding confirms the view of OECD (2010) which indicates that literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

It has been revealed by the study that teachers view literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners as a conscious effort to help young children to learn to read, write legibly, speak fluently, and listen attentively while using effective literacy skills instructional strategies to assist them in becoming proficient readers and writers as they progress through higher education. This finding is in line with the position of Casey and Sheran (2004), that since literacy competence opens the door to all other academic learning, children in kindergarten should be taught emergent literacy skills to help them succeed in school and later life. Respondents also demonstrated knowledge of most literacy skills instructional strategies used in teaching kindergarteners.

According to the results, teachers consider literacy to be a skill that requires a professional to assist children to learn and master learning. Respondents commented that a professional may assist children in developing these abilities using suitable teaching strategies, even though some literacy components are naturally learned even before enrolling in school. This finding corroborates the assertion of Snow (2004), that literacy could be seen as dependent on instruction, with an emphasis that quality of instruction is key. This view, according to Snow, emphasizes the developmental nature of literacy; the passage of children through successive stages of literacy, in each of which the reading and writing tasks change qualitatively and the role of the instructor has to change accordingly. Several researchers posit that early literacy skills development improves by building opportunities for learners to participate in their home, community, and school environments, as well as to engage in existing adult roles (*e.g.*, Cihak et al., 2015; Ruppert et al., 2017).

4.2 Research Question 2: What Is the Perception of Kindergarten Teachers on the Relevance of Literacy Skills Instruction among Kindergarteners?

The analysis suggested that kindergarten teachers appreciate the relevance of literacy skills to the academic life of every kindergartener. The results revealed that literacy skills help learners to be proficient in reading, writing and communicating with others. The study again demonstrated that literacy skills are the gateways to a successful educational journey. This is because literacy skills are needed in all aspects and disciplines of education. It is required for an individual to read to understand and produce what has been understood in writing. These findings are validated by Bruner (2010), who calls reading and writing proficiency in the foundational stages a key milestone in a child's educational development and a sentinel indicator of future educational success. Researchers such as Owu-Ewie (2018) and Casey and Sheran (2004) also confirm these findings as they indicate that competence in literary skills opens the door to all other academic learning. Currie (2001), adds that the improvement among learners such as reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication, thinking skills, logical reasoning, problem-solving, decision making, critical thinking, job task planning, and organizing are also some of the reasons for which children are enrolled in early childhood education.

4.3 Research Question 3: How Do ECE Teachers' Views Influence Their Literacy Skills Instruction among Kindergarteners?

A corollary from participants responses on how ECE teachers' views influence their literacy skills instruction among kindergarteners appear to suggest that they have a good appreciation of the relevance of literacy skills instruction and its relationship to literacy skill development. This has also been established through the quantitative data. The findings suggest and affirm that, to achieve a particular instructional skill development, ECE teachers should employ instructional strategies that are child friendly and will promote literacy skill development. This sits well with literature espoused by (Topping, 2014), showing that selected instructional strategy promotes or impedes learners' literacy skill development.

Further, it is evident from the responses that ECE teacher can have a good appreciation of early years' instructional strategy and how it develops literacy skill among kindergartners. However, such a teacher will be able to position him/herself to select the appropriate strategy due to challenges such as knowledge about types of instructional strategy, availability of instructional materials/resources and the nature of the classroom (Owu-Ewie, 2018; Lane, Prokop, Johnson, Podhajski, & Nathan, 2014). The implication therefore is that, stakeholders should ensure that the appropriate learning condition (*i.e.*, teaching learning resources, and training on literacy instructional approaches) should be provided for (Borg, 2003). In such an instance, the teachers will be confident in applying those strategies and the learners will be comfortable in getting themselves involved for the teaching and learning process and the ultimate will be literacy skill development among such learners.

5. Conclusions

From the findings, the study establishes that kindergarten teachers are well informed about

what literacy skills are and how they are developed among kindergarteners. Teachers used in this study did not merely share what their knowledge of literacy among kindergarteners is. They went further to explain their perspectives and conviction that there needs to be a conscious effort to teach learners and engage them in literacy-related activities to enhance their literacy skills development.

The study concludes that developing the literacy skills of children right from the foundational stages is not a misplaced priority. It is ascertained that the ability of a child to read and write forms the basis of all advanced learning and development. Thus, essential skills such as reading and writing need to be a sensitive issue and must be developed at all costs. Teachers perceived that literacy development has numerous educational bearings on the academic life of kindergarteners and an ultimate means through which teachers build kindergarteners' comprehension, writing, and overall communication skills.

This study has also been able to establish that, teachers' views of how literacy skills are developed influence their choice of instructional strategy and how literacy skill lessons are to be delivered. Nevertheless, it might be acknowledged that certain conditions must be in place before successful literacy instruction can be carried out. In a situation where teachers are trained professionally with literacy skill approaches, and where teaching learning resources are inadequate, just to mention but a few, a positive view can be held about the relevance of literacy skill development. Yet, the teacher may not be able to deliver a successful literacy instruction.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Head teachers of ECE centers should be resourced by The Ghana Education Service, NGOs that are interested in ECE, and other stakeholders, to carry out periodic in-service training, capitalizing on the current professional learning community (PLC) that goes on in the schools.
- (2) The Agona East Education Directorate, through the SISOs and the ECE coordinators should lend support to the headteachers of ECE centres to strengthen monitoring to ensure attendance and compliance of such PLC sessions. This should sharpen the teacher's knowledge and skills about literacy skills instruction.
- (3) Again, the Agona East Education Directorate, through the SISOs and the ECE coordinators together with the head teachers of ECE centers should institute a motivational package for teachers who particularly and punctually attend the PLC sessions and those who translate what they learning through such trainings into their classroom practice. This package can simply be a point that the teacher will earn for his/her net promotion.

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