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Action Research: The Impact of Guided Play on Foreign Language Learning among Young

Learners

A Thesis submitted in

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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

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We hereby approve that this capstone

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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

English language teachers have always recorded that children learn more efficiently when integrated into guided play. As a result, much research was conducted throughout the years to track the effectiveness of guided play, reveal children's language learning experiences, and the role of scaffolding during the learning process. On the other hand, there is a limited number of studies that reflect on EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher's perceptions of guided play. Moreover, there is little local data about the influence of guided play in preschool English classes. Hence, this qualitative action research aims to address this gap by examining the impact of guided play in foreign language learning among young learners and disclose the evolution of the EFL teacher's perceptions of guided play.

The results of the research study show that guided play has a significant positive impact on foreign language learning among young learners. Learning becomes meaningful and engaging when implementing guided play. Moreover, scaffolding, and guided play enable the learners to become autonomous and aware of their learning paths. In addition, EFL teacher's perceptions of guided play drastically changed recognizing its significance in TYL (teaching young learners).

Keywords: Guided play, young learners, scaffolding, human mediation, teacher's perceptions, teachers' roles.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Guided play has gained significant attention as an effective pedagogical technique in TYL. Play is a vital component of children's growth and development. Thus, Sahlberg (2019) claims it is essential to incorporate play into the early childhood education curriculum, as children will be exposed to the target language in a natural environment.

Historically, the theoretical roots of guided play come from the theories proposed by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner. These scholars brought forward the importance of implementing play in teaching young learners. Firstly, Piaget (1960) defined language learners as "active learners" in his theory about constructivism, where he claimed that children learn only by actively engaging in learning. Then, Vygotsky (1967), elaborating on the prior theory, initiated "social constructivism" and the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where he suggested that there was a gap between a child's current and potential knowledge. The only way to address that gap was to offer the assistance of a more knowledgeable person who would help the child to achieve his full potential. Finally, Bruner (1976), reframing adult assistance, introduced the term "scaffolding," referring to "systematic help" from an adult who would make learning goals achievable.

Guided play is defined to be adult-initiated and child-directed play, where children have the autonomy to control their language learning journey (Tsao, 2008). Their language experience is nurtured by adult support and mentorship. Moreover, pedagogically guided play is goal-oriented learning, where the learning objectives are set in advance by the EFL teacher (Toub, 2006). EFL teachers assist children in acquiring vocabulary, semantics, and syntax of the language by exposing them to real-life language, providing meaningful feedback, and encouraging young learners to solve problems and make their own discoveries (Vasilyeva, 2008;

Weisleder, 2013; Wasik, 2017; Korat, 2002). Teachers take numerous roles in teaching to facilitate language input and make the learning process more meaningful (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Dau, 1999). They act as a manager, doer, facilitator, mediator, game participant, and an observer. With adapted roles, EFL teachers ensure that learners' abilities are taken into consideration and appropriate learning goals are targeted (Mason, 2000).

1.1 Problem Statement

Even though guided play has been identified as a rewarding instructional approach in teaching young learners, there seems to be little local research about its implementation and efficiency in a foreign language learning environment in Armenia. Moreover, research data about EFL teachers' perceptions of guided play and its impact on foreign language learning is lacking. In addition, reviews of the available data point to this gap. This study addresses the gap in the Armenian context by identifying to what extent guided play influences foreign language learning among young learners. Furthermore, it presents insightful teacher reflections and investigates the changes in EFL teacher's perceptions of guided play as a valuable pedagogical approach to TYL.

1.2 Purpose Statement

This action research strives to explore the impact of guided play on foreign language learning at among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia. Besides, it investigates the progress of individual children during the time of six weeks of teaching. Additionally, the study explores the changes in EFL teacher's perception of guided play.

In this light, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does guided play impact foreign language learning among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia?

2. How have the EFL teacher's perceptions about guided play evolved during the research?

1.3 Significance of the study

The results of the study will be insightful, surfacing methodological and pedagogical implications of guided play in teaching English to young learners. The findings will benefit a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, local training centers, preschools, and even the Ministry of Education in Armenia. It will enable the ministry to revisit their perceptions of guided play by reframing it and making it an indispensable part of early childhood education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

By nature, children are born to play. It is a natural part of growing, evolving, and learning of a child. Therefore, integrating and incorporating play in the early childhood education curriculum is largely considered to be highly essential (Sahlberg, 2019). However, because there is no universal definition of play, there are also many misunderstandings and tensions in deciding the most beneficial implementation methods.

This literature review unpacks different definitions of play and guided play, the effectiveness of guided play in foreign language learning among young learners, and its theoretical roots. It goes beyond exploring the teacher's role in language learning also to pinpointing international practices and presenting existing data on local context.

2.1 Free Play versus Guided Play in Language Learning

As long as children grow, they learn by playing. Play includes a variety of activities, such as moving around, exploring the surrounding world, building blocks, negotiating rules, and interacting with peers and adults. It is an "expression of what they [children] know" (Lifter, 2011, p. 228). Play is a creative stimulus to discover the unknown and actively engage in acquiring knowledge. It boosts children's physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional development (Sahlberg, 2019; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2009), enabling them to make connections and associations with the world, practice communication, vigorously participate in problem-solving, and offer innovative ideas. Elkind (2008) adds that children create imaginary experiences which help them acquire skills they cannot gain from any other activity. Children can make mistakes and start all over again. They build on their prior knowledge, share it with their peers, and interact. When children are engaged in play, they learn by experimenting, manipulating, and taking imaginary roles.

Researchers demonstrate different kinds of understanding of play and its role in learning. That is why constant tensions prevent us from having an accurate definition of play. Going back as early as 1960s, Vygotsky explains that play is imaginary; it is the "realization of unrealizable dreams" (1967, p. 7). It is the time when children are free to learn at their own pace. However, according to Hutt (1989), play incorporates many activities; a part of them can be conductive to learning, another part of them not. On the other hand, Chazan argues that by playing "the child attains a degree of autonomy sustained by representations of his inner and outer worlds." (Chazan, 2002, p. 198). In addition, Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg believes that play is "systematic exploration, experimentation, and discovery" (2019, p. 19).

Furthermore, researchers identify various types of play in education, such as free, make-believe, symbolic, dramatic, pretend, mature, and guided. For the purposes of this research, we are going to compare free and guided play to be able to analyze the priorities of both. Generally, free play is child-directed and child-initiated. It is fun, engaging, and sometimes without specific educational goals. Adults let the children drive the whole process without interventions (Pyle, Poliszczuk, & Danniels, 2018; Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013; Fisher, 2013). Bodrova (2015) argues that free play assists children in developing general competencies, negotiating, and creating rules. They have opportunities to imitate adult behavior, adjust their talk, and take social roles. Likewise, due to free play in language learning, children learn the pragmatics and symbolic nature of language, boost their communication skills and cognitive understanding, expand oral vocabulary, and become verbally expressive (Pasi Sahlberg, 2019; Cheep-Aranai & Wasanasomsithi, 2016; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). During play, children are encouraged to use more advanced linguistic forms they would not use in daily activities thanks to expanded language exposure and language input (Weisberg, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff,

2013). They can build on their prior linguistic knowledge and expand their oral vocabulary by interacting with their peers (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). In conclusion, we can identify gaps in all the definitions and characteristics distinguished by prior research: free play does not assist in acquiring literacy, productive and receptive skills in a completely new foreign language.

On the other hand, there is ample evidence that guided play is more effective in language learning, as it targets major drawbacks of free play. It stands between free play and direct instruction and is referred to as adult-initiated and child-directed play. Children have an opportunity to control the activity they are integrated in by being intrinsically motivated. Accordingly, in guided play, children have sufficient autonomy to make decisions about how they learn as opposed to free play, where they play without specifically set objectives (Weisberg, Kittredge, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Klahr, 2015). Importantly, guided play offers adult support, which facilitates children's language learning journey through adult interaction and linguistic assistance (Tsao, 2008). Massey defined guided play as "an opportunity to have continued exposure and practice with vocabulary and comprehensive language through teacher scaffolding and adult-child interaction" (2013, p. 128). Similarly, another group of researchers described guided play as "learning experiences that combine the child-directed nature of free play, focusing on learning outcomes and adult mentorship" (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Kittredge, & Klahr, 2016, p. 177). Toub found that guided play "embraces adult guidance and provides goal-oriented scaffolding in service of the learning goal" (2016, p. 123). In guided play, "adults initiate the learning process, constrain the learning goals, and are responsible for maintaining focus on these goals even as the child guides his or her own discovery" (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). For the purposes of this research, Toub's definition of guided play is adopted, as it highlights the importance of adult guidance and scaffolding.

2.2 Guided Play and Its Theoretical Roots

While it is true that children initiate their learning paths, adult guidance and support play a crucial role in language learning. Let us imagine a preschooler who has to spell simple words. Not remembering letters properly, they constantly make mistakes. In guided play, the adult can help by giving hints or assisting in spelling the correct letter. As a result, the preschooler will be able to spell the word correctly. This kind of "help" in literature is defined as "scaffolding" which will be discussed further in the chapter. The word originally means a temporary construction to support the construction or repair of a building. Here the term "scaffolding" states adult help and guidance in learning.

Guided play and scaffolding have theoretical roots coming from Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner. Jean Piaget (1960) views language learners as "active learners" who explore the world through play. He refers to the term active learning as "constructivism," which means that children learn only by actively exploring their surrounding world. Hence, they construct knowledge by dynamic explorations. Lynne Cameron (2001) reviews that "whereas for Piaget the child is an active learner alone in a world of objects, for Vygotsky the child is an active learner in a world full of other people." Lev Vygotsky (1967) emphasized the role of the social environment by adding the term "social constructivism." He was curious to find out whether the assistance of a more knowledgeable person would facilitate and challenge a child's language learning experience. Thus, he introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests a gap between a child's current knowledge and their learning potential, which they can achieve with adult help. "In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 13). He mentions that a child's intentions, future plans, motives, and motivations are born while

playing, making it an indispensable part of learning. Vygotsky (1978) believed that in order to construct their ZPD and cognitive development, children should socialize with their peers and adults to be able to accomplish more complex activities. Later, Jerome Bruner elaborates on both theories and introduces "scaffolding," which refers to systematic help. According to Wood, Bruner and Ross, scaffolding "consists essentially of the adult "controlling" those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within range of competence" (Wood et al, 1976, p. 90). Hence, adults raise interest in the task, make it achievable, guide through the whole process, highlight essential features of the task, control stress or frustration, and model possible solutions (Wood et al., 1976).

Having understood the theoretical roots of guided play, it is clear that it evolved from the need of creating a mediating space where young learners can be encouraged to learn and supported with a complete toolkit to tackle language learning from different perspectives. This research study uses Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Bruner's concept of scaffolding as the main research framework. The following functions of scaffolding are implemented: recruitment, reduction in degrees of freedom, direction maintenance, marking critical features, frustration control, and demonstration. Wood et al (1976) claim that by carrying out these functions, the teacher is able to raise students' interest in the task, simplify and direct the process, highlight the important parts of the task by controlling frustration, and making it achievable by modeling.

2.3 The Teacher's Role

Many researchers argue that free play is the most effective type of play where learners are self-motivated to experiment, learn and discover. They share knowledge with their peers without adult intervention. However, a vast majority of researchers document that children

playing with their peers interact about familiar and well-known concepts without attempting to discover something new. They are put into the boundaries of their own knowledge and skills. Therefore, teachers and educators have an indispensable impact on learning when they implement unique learning strategies while playing with young learners. Preschoolers rely on adult guidance and support to learn and discover. In a recent study conducted in two kindergarten classes at different public schools in the United States, children enthusiastically practiced and learned phonics with the help of teacher guidance. The intervention study lasted for only three weeks with a fifteen-minute intervention per day. The implemented games triggered positive engagement, where children enjoyed a sense of accomplishment and self-actualization (Cavanaugh, 2017).

Teachers push the learners out of their comfort zone to acquire new skills and carry out challenging tasks. They "build the appropriate scaffolding that can lead them forward in their zone of development" (Korat, 2002, p. 390). Teachers help learners construct extended answers, formulate their opinions, and offer solutions by posing questions. These questions assist children in making connections between the focus word and its applications (Wasik, 2017). For example, with the question "Can you describe what a house looks like?" the teacher pushes the learner to use descriptive language to define a house. Similarly, the open-ended "How can we build a house?" question enables the child to go further and give opinions, reasons, solutions and be creative in their answer. These questions develop inquiry learning when children have opportunities to speak while playing and experimenting.

Research on language learning indicates that children who have more exposure to interactions with adults tend to possess richer vocabulary, develop the semantics and syntax of the language (Vasilyeva, 2008; Weisleder, 2013). Thus, children learn vocabulary, word usage in

context, and grammar through multiple exposures through definitions, real-life examples, and background explanations (Hirsh-Pasek, 2009). Teachers invite them to talk and scaffold linguistic and cognitive improvement by providing meaningful feedback (Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). Feedback can be diverse in different situations. It can vary from asking further questions, recasting, repeating, and defining words to making explicit connections (Wasik, 2017). Teachers can ask supplementary questions about sizes and types of houses, materials we use to build a house, reconstruct their short answers in complete sentences, add new information, and use already familiar words and concepts. Still, teachers need to be conscious about wait time after asking certain questions. Learners may need extra time to process the question, think and formulate their answers. It is crucial not to give away answers right after the question but to wait and appreciate their thinking. Not only should the teachers wait for the exact answer, but also, they should encourage learners to look for alternative solutions and other possibilities (Korat, 2002). Yet, when the child struggles and doesn't know the answer, the teacher should provide the correct answer and teach the child using their prior knowledge (Wasik, 2017). This is when learning happens.

Hadley (2002) recognizes two kinds of teacher support in guided play: outside the flow or inside the flow. These types of involvement are illustrated in the following situations.

Situation 1

Teacher: I can see that you are building something. What is it?

Student: It's a tower.

Teacher: Wow, how big it is. Who lives there?

Student: A princess and a dragon.

Teacher: A prince will come to free the princess?

Student: Yes.

Situation 2

Teacher: Let's build a tower together.

Student: Okay.

Teacher: Do you want a tall or short tower?

Student: Tall, very tall.

Teacher: Can you pass me those brown legos?

Student: Here.

Teacher: I'll build the roof. Which part do you want to make?

Student: I'll build the walls and a long bridge.

The first example demonstrates the teacher's role as outside of the flow, where the teacher asks questions for reflective discussion. While in the second situation, we witness that the teacher is taking the role of a playmate performing certain functions and assisting. Both teacher roles are rewarding; what is more, it will be of greater value if the teacher "makes the second kind of interventions and expands her repertoire in the process" (Hadley, 2002, p. 14).

According to the research, regardless the teacher is outside or inside the flow, several other roles are identified: teacher as an observer, doer, stage manager and facilitator, mediator, and participant in the play (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Dau, 1999). As an observer, a teacher takes notes on students' behaviors, pauses, and watches their natural discoveries. As a doer, an

educator does not just sit and watch but also makes play possible. As a stage manager and facilitator, a teacher clarifies relationships, provides enough props and time, sets the rules, and chooses related activities (Jones & Reynolds, 1992). Props should be educational to facilitate the play process and make it meaningful. As a mediator, a teacher is always conscious of the learners' abilities and language skills and ensures appropriate learning is targeted (Mason, 2000). As a participant in play, a teacher acts as a role model offering ideas that nurture students' growth and development (Jones & Reynolds, 1992). To conclude, it can be inferred that teachers take multiple roles during a single class to provide enough scaffolding and reinforce the language learning process.

To summarize, it is safe to say that there is a lot of teacher participation in play, and it is teachers who "have to decide the right degree of involvement" depending on what they observe in class (Ashiabi, 2007).

2.4 Successful Guided Play Intervention Studies: International Practices

Prior intervention studies have confirmed the effectiveness of implementing guided play in language learning curricula. It is proven to be one of the most successful pedagogical approaches to teaching a language to young learners. For example, the Play Every Day English language intervention project, implemented in India, South Africa, and Mexico organized by Sesame Workshop, proved that children had more academic progress through play in all three countries. One of the research questions was the following: "How can play workshops leverage and reinforce compelling key messages that resonate with caregivers?" (Foulds & Bucuvalas, 2019, p. 24) During the needs assessment process, researchers found out that the majority of educators did not even have a holistic understanding of play and its benefits. One of the caregivers said, "There are so many worries about meeting our household expenses.

Who has time to play?" Seventy-seven percent of Indian caregivers, fifty-four percent of Mexican caregivers, and seventy-four percent of South African caregivers agree that studying is more important than playing. Play Every Day designed to integrate three different kinds of play: making and building, imagination exploration, and dream to be a grown-up. As a result, the key findings indicated that children succeeded in learning more new words and enjoyed the learning process. Play also embraced their creativity and imagination, enabling them to carry out future roles.

Another play-based language learning intervention was carried out in Thailand. The participants were twelve Thai students from elementary school. One of the aims of the study was "to investigate young language learners' opinions regarding their experience in learning the English language through play-based language learning activities" (Cheep-Aranai & Wasanasomsithi, 2016, p. 140). During the intervention, PLL (play-based language learning) activities were implemented throughout the fifteen-week course. Activities included creative play, pretend play, physical actions, circle time, and many more. At the end of the study, children stated that learning a language through play was entirely new for them. As for the play-based learning, the participants voiced that all the activities were fun, they had freedom and autonomy in the classroom to control their learning, which was easier through play.

In Norway, as in any country in the world, children's right to play and freedom, directly connected to their well-being and involvement, is unconditional. To validate the framework, a study was conducted in ECEC institutions (eighty kids in general) to see "the relation between three-to-four-year-old children's play, well-being, and involvement" (Storli & Sandseter, 2019, p. 68). The results indicated that with the significance value $p<.001$, there was a strong positive correlation between play and well-being (.40) and play and involvement (.57). Additionally,

there was a strong negative correlation between non-play and well-being (-.40) and play and involvement (-0.57).

During another play intervention project in Liberia, nine-year-old Angel Kolli said, "Our teacher is so good to us and allows us to play and learn at our own pace" (Wang, 2018, p. 7). The researcher concluded that not only did play-based learning aid language learning, but also it nurtured love towards learning.

Interestingly, all the studies contribute to the idea that implementation of guided play in the curriculum is rewarding. The conclusions are drawn that guided play embraces language learning making it fun, enjoyable, creative, and autonomous.

2.5 Play-Based Learning in the Armenian Context: Local Practices

The majority of the international research on the implementation of guided play indicated its significant value in integrating it into the preschool curriculum. Following successful guided-play intervention studies abroad, it is time to explore local practices. Unfortunately, there seems to be no empirical data about the integration of guided play in the local Armenian preschool education system, which creates a major gap in understanding teacher perceptions about guided play, its practical application in the preschool curriculum, and student experiences. However, fundamental reforms are planned to be executed. On May thirteenth 2021, the government of Armenia adopted state educational standards for preschool education (Government of Armenia, 2021). Some of the standards address curriculum design. It states that educational curricula should incorporate three ways to organize a child's life: classes, play, and free time. Even, additional space should be allocated for foreign language learning and peer interaction. Play should dominate direct instruction in the education curriculum, balancing individual work and peer interaction between students. Educators should adopt play-based learning incorporating a

diversity of play. However, there is no elaboration on the need for teacher training in PBL learning.

Many local educators welcome the idea of play-based learning by mentioning that play "nurtures curiosity towards language learning" and "boosts cooperation and interaction" (Simonyan, 2020; Arghuntyan, 2020). Furthermore, parents are positive about learning through play strategy. On the open parents' blog, one of the parents confirms that her child can recognize English letters, knows some English words, and is able to spell all due to games (Gnoyan, 2015). Nevertheless, we cannot claim a dynamic shift because of the total absence of any further research to date.

At the time of running this study, the Armenian branch of UNICEF has commissioned a study to demonstrate support for Armenia's pre-primary education system. The main focus of the research study was the comprehensive system analysis and policy recommendations for the preschool system in Armenia. The final results of the research have not been published yet; however, we could get the preliminary results from the research team lead C. Sargsyan (personal communication, February 14, 2022). In the expert interview, a number of findings were shared. As a result of focus group discussions with teachers based in Yerevan and regions, the researchers made the following observations. Firstly, teachers see play and learning as a dichotomy rather than a wholesome teaching method. Secondly, the framework of play-based learning is not defined and is usually misinterpreted by local teachers. Overall, it can be observed that teacher perceptions and local educational context unveil the reality where play-based learning is mistreated.

This research exposes the effectiveness and impact of guided play in language learning in an Armenian preschool by meticulously observing the participants' linguistic improvements,

tracking their progress, reflecting on the teaching process, and demonstrating the advancements in teacher perceptions. By answering the questions about how guided play impacts foreign language learning and how the teacher perceptions evolve during the research process, this study presents qualitative results and insightful discussion to address the existing gap by answering the following guiding questions:

1. How does guided play impact foreign language learning among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia?

2. How have the EFL teacher's perceptions about guided play changed during the research period?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study uses an action research method to improve English language learning processes in a local preschool in Armenia. It investigates the usage of guided play in EFL learning and attempts to promote a practical change in teaching young learners by implementing guided play. The research explores how efficient guided play is in an EFL language learning setting and how the perceptions of an EFL teacher about guided play evolved during the research period.

Action research is defined as an "iterative process involving researchers and practitioners acting together on a particular cycle of activities, including problem diagnosis, action intervention, and reflective learning" (Avison et al., 1999). It is an empirical approach that integrates theory and practice to bring a positive change, generate theoretical and practical knowledge, nurture collaboration and cooperation, and boost continuous growth (Burns, 2015). The motive of this research is the gap between what exists and the desired outcomes the participants want to have. Hence, the researcher is a change advocate for better learning experiences. Typical representations illustrate circles or spirals of action research: planning, action, observation, and reflection.
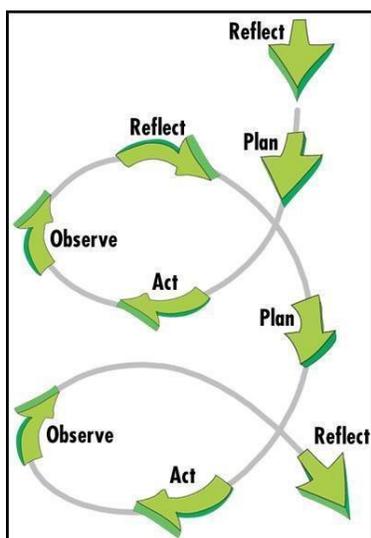
The first phase of planning includes outlining and developing the scope and timing of the research, which follows the next stage of initiating and observing actions. The third phase integrates evaluations, developments, and clarifications. During the last fourth phase, the researcher draws conclusions, maintains openness to revisions, and ensures the trustworthiness of the results. The following diagram presents how the spirals of action research function.

This chapter focuses on the setting, participants, data collection, instruments, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Within the framework of action research, a qualitative study was conducted in a local Armenian private preschool. To ensure validity and reliability, several instruments were used for data collection: interviews, teacher reflections, researcher journal, a self-assessment checklist, holistic rubrics to assess class performance, and student artifacts. The preschool was chosen by convenience sampling because of COVID-19 restrictions. As many preschools banned foreigners or external observers from entering due to safety concerns, intervention studies were not welcomed by the principal and parents.

For the purposes of this research study, the researcher taught the classes, and the main teacher co-taught and observed. Thus, several circles of data collection were implemented: initial observations, planning, action, observations, reflections, and post-teaching observation. First, a tentative plan was designed for an action study, and then it was executed by the researcher. Meanwhile, the researcher observed and evaluated the procedures of interventions. During the last phase, the researcher maintained openness to revise and recheck the collected data and analyze evidence (Burns, 2015).

This research aims to reveal the results of the following questions:

1. How does guided play impact foreign language learning among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia?

2. How have the EFL teacher's perceptions about guided play evolved during the research?

3.2 Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in a private preschool in Yerevan, Armenia. It is the type of preschool where the instruction can be in a foreign language. This preschool in Armenia was an institution for kids aged two to six. It offered EFL classes. Foreign language classes were usually conducted from twenty to twenty-five minutes twice a week. One class from the preschool participated in the study; eight kids, aged from four to five, and their main English teacher. Their native language was Armenian, and they were true beginners. For this project, young learners are considered from four- to five-year-old preschoolers. The researcher created the lesson plans and taught the English classes having the main teacher as a co-teacher. The materials were chosen according to level-appropriacy and high-frequency themes, such as emotions, family members, weather, shapes, fruit, and sweets. According to the research framework, the main instructional strategies implemented in the classes were guided play and scaffolding.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection started with initial observations before planning the intervention study. They were unstructured and informal observations to identify the weaknesses in teaching pedagogy and methodology. The observations aimed to assist in the planning stage to provide sufficient ground to address the gaps while designing the action plan. Moreover, the observations enabled the researcher-teacher to familiarize with the kids, recognize their strengths, and create activities that would meet their needs.

After initial observations, the researcher-teacher started creating the lesson plans and goal-oriented activities to address the identified gaps. This stage was followed by teaching the preschoolers, observing their experiences, and reflecting on the classes. A researcher journal was chosen as a tool to write down observations and impressions after every class. The notes included information about specific games, individual performance, types of scaffolding, and teacher roles at class time.

In addition, teacher reflections in the form of informal discussions were conducted three times during the six-week research period. After every fourth class, the researcher spent twenty minutes with the teacher, where she reflected on the previous classes and answered questions posed by the researcher. The researcher wrote down the teacher's responses to analyze them at a later stage.

To provide trustworthiness, holistic assessment was conducted twice during the research, where the researcher and the main teacher gathered and analyzed preschoolers' performance. The holistic rubrics were provided and used during the assessment process. One copy was used for each participant, and two assessments were marked on the exact copy to observe the progress between every three weeks of intervention classes.

Finally, student artifacts were collected once every week to create a portfolio for each preschooler. In the second class every week, the participants made a thematic craft to reflect on their learning in a fun way. Moreover, arts and crafts activities were tailored to the class objectives. This is an effective tool for reaching the learning objectives and conducting formative assessment.

At the end of the study, an interview was conducted with preschoolers in Armenian. The researcher invited every participant individually and asked questions about their experiences and impressions. The interview lasted for twenty minutes, five minutes with each participant. Finally, post-teaching observation of the main teacher was conducted to follow up the changes in her teaching methodology.

3.4 Instruments

The research is designed as qualitative and employs the following instruments

1. researcher's journal,

2. rubrics for assessment,

3. an interview with the participants,

4. post-teaching observation of the main teacher,

5. student artifacts, and

6. teacher's reflections.

To answer the first search question, the researcher implemented the following instruments: researcher's journal, assessment rubrics, the interview, and student artifacts.

To answer the second research question, teacher's reflections were used, and a post-teaching observation of the main teacher was conducted.

3.4.1 Researcher Journal

A researcher journal is one type of reflective writing that plays a significant role in professional growth (Borg, 2001). It serves as a reminder of past experiences and provides evidence and narration of procedures. It "allows for stepping into one's inner mind and reaching further into interpretations of the behaviors, beliefs, and words we write" (Janesick, 1998, p. 14).

This researcher journal reveals an insider perspective and offers critical comments on lesson structures, strengths, and weaknesses of individual classes.

The researcher's journal aimed to understand the researcher's experience throughout the six-week teaching process and served as a source of data for the whole research. It included:

- daily short summaries about each class,

- notes about specific activities that brought a change in the classroom,

- students' attendance and participation, and

- achievements of each class through classroom assessment techniques, for example, monitoring, observations, portfolios, etc.

3.4.2 Rubric for Assessment

A particular holistic rubric (see Appendix A) was adapted from Outeiral (2014) to assess the students' performance. The adaptations made were by the researcher to meet the needs of the curriculum. It included the sections about language and delivery, pronunciation and production, comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and student attitude towards the classes. The section regarding non-linguistic competencies was removed, and another one about vocabulary knowledge was added to target the learning objectives. A short training was provided to the EFL teacher by the researcher about the usage of rubrics. The assessment was done by the researcher and the main teacher twice during the research period of six weeks, once every three weeks. The researcher and the teacher did an informal discussion about individual child performance and assessed it according to the criteria mentioned in the rubrics.

To answer the first research question about the impact of guided play on language learning, mid-course and end-of-the-course assessments were conducted to track down the progress of individual kids and highlight the areas of improvement.

3.4.3 The Interview

A semi-structured interview with preschoolers was conducted with children. Initially, the researcher aimed to interview eight kids. However, during the six weeks of teaching, four students were often absent from the classes. As a result, the interview was conducted at the end of the action research, in the sixth week, with four preschoolers to get insights and understand their experiences with the teaching process. The concept of implementing interviews as an instrument was adapted from prior research (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Lyon, 2014). The questions were asked in their native language, namely Armenian (see Appendix B). The interview aimed at exposing the full display of experience, emotions, and impressions from the whole course. It was important for the researcher to ask for the students' feedback and receive genuine answers from the participants. As this was the first time for the children to experience guided play in foreign language learning, it was insightful to understand children's experiences.

Here are some of the questions posed during the interview:

1. What classes did you like? Why?
2. What was your favorite class?
3. What was your favorite game? What did you learn from this game?
4. What would happen if we learned without games?
5. What topic was your favorite and why?

3.4.4 Post-teaching Observation of the Main Teacher

After the actual six weeks of teaching by the researcher, a class was observed where the main EFL teacher taught the preschoolers. It aimed to collect evidence on whether the EFL teacher changed her traditional teaching ways to implement more child-directed and adult-

initiated guided play. The observation was done once a week after the data collection phase was over.

3.4.5 Student Artifacts

Once per week, thematic arts and craft activities were conducted with the students. It aimed to encourage the students to feel comfortable in the learning environment, help to implement their knowledge, and boost their creativity.

3.4.6 Teacher's Reflections

To answer the second research question about the perceptions of the teacher regarding guided play, three reflections were carried out every two weeks.

The reflections were not in written form but rather an oral guided discussion. The main teacher answered three to four questions at a time by reflecting on her experience and observations in every class. The questions were chosen recommended by the literature review about guided play and teacher roles to target the second research question. The nature of guided play and its effectiveness were questioned and viewed from different perspectives. In addition, multiple questions were designed to target the practical changes guided play brought to the classroom (see Appendix C).

Several questions are provided as an example:

1. What was successful, effective, or made a difference for the students?

2. How did it feel to be a part of the class?

3. Tell me about a time when you saw learning happen.

4. What did you learn as a teacher?

5. What might have happened if they were taught without games?

6. Will you use the games in your own classes? Why?

7. What is the difference between then and now?

As one can notice, the questions are explicitly goal-oriented, designed to detect the changes in teacher's perceptions of guided play, implementation of games as the primary teaching approach with young learners, and to find out how she could use this approach in her future classes.

3.5 Intervention Procedures

The foreign language classes started on February the first, 2022, and finished on March the eleventh, 2022, six weeks total. They were scheduled twice a week for twenty minutes on Tuesdays and Fridays. The researcher taught, and the main teacher co-taught, assisting with technical help and observing. Furthermore, the main teacher revised the flashcards and played the same games in the classroom to reinforce students' knowledge and facilitate learning.

The researcher developed the lesson plans. Level-appropriate and high-frequency topics, words, and sentence structures were integrated into the lesson plans: emotions, family members, weather, shapes, fruit, and vegetables. Prior class observations showed that the students had some knowledge of colors, numbers, and animals. Accordingly, the rest of the lesson plans included new materials, recycled previously learned words, and activated the students' prior knowledge. Additionally, one topic was chosen per week to support learning without overwhelming the young learners.

Guided play and scaffolding were the only instructional approaches used to teach new content. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic support were implemented in teaching: flashcards, toys, realia, actions, rhymes, stationary, food, etc. The primary way of human mediation was modeling to facilitate the language learning process, provide adult guidance, support, and exposure. To treat the pronunciation errors and raise phonemic awareness, different games and exercises were

conducted, such as pronouncing words by breaking them down to syllables and clapping as we pronounce each syllable.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been assured throughout the whole study. The research has an SRR (Standard Relative Risk); however, there is minimal harm. Moreover, an IRB (Institutional Review Board) was obtained by the researcher to protect the rights of the human participants integrated into the research. Written consent forms were distributed to the parents before the survey in Armenian to ask for their written approval to conduct the study.

The teacher's reflections and the interview with the participants were conducted privately without mentioning any names. For the purposes of the research, the participants' names were eliminated and exchanged with pseudonyms.

The name of the institution was excluded for anonymity reasons.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis was not an isolated phase of the study. It was done in parallel with the data collection process incorporated with the researcher journal. Recommended by prior research (Holliday, 2015), qualitative data was analyzed in the following way:

- coding,
- categorizing codes,
- making connections and themes,
- constructing information out of each theme by forming headings and subheadings,
- reassessing codes and rechecking themes, and
- interpreting data inductively and holistically.

Most of the instruments, such as reflections, researcher journal, an interview and observations, were analyzed thematically by converting the data into codes, and identifying similar patterns. Accordingly, key themes were created, and the qualitative data was interpreted inductively. Additionally, student artifacts and holistic rubrics were used to support the conclusions drawn from the main instruments.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This action research aimed to determine how guided play impacts foreign language learning at a young age in a private preschool in Armenia. The study also addresses the changes in EFL teacher's perceptions during the research process. Hence, this chapter analyzes the data collected from the instruments to answer the two core questions.

4.1 RQ1: How does guided play impact foreign language learning among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia?

To measure the learners' progress throughout the action research and to have solid ground to claim the positive impact after the intervention study, results from the initial class observations need to be referred to. It is important to mention that the students had been learning English for six months before the intervention study began. In addition, as a main part of her teaching, the EFL teacher used flashcards and videos to introduce the new target language. No games, toys, realia, and other educational resources were not used to provide meaningful and authentic language experience.

- First, the researcher found out that the teacher of two foreign languages, Russian and English, was the same, which caused serious problems in teaching. The teacher used flashcards where the words were written in Russian and English. As a result, the kids confused the new words and answered the teacher's questions in different languages.

- Another major concern was that the lessons were unstructured. They were not child-friendly, meaning no routine activities, nursery rhymes, or creative activities were implemented.

- The teacher did not incorporate scaffolding or take multiple teacher roles in the classes. The teacher was considered an authority, and error correction was done explicitly by

recasting. Moreover, foreign language classes were conducted around a small table, where the students had to sit on their chairs and listen to their teacher.

- Finally, guided play was not applied at all. Instead, play and learning were perceived as a dichotomy. The kids were allowed to play only after they finished the class.

As a result of the observations prior to the intervention study, a few tentative conclusions were drawn. First, the students did not have a solid knowledge of the language they were exposed to. One girl was an exception, as her mom was an EFL teacher, and she did know and spoke some English. Second, the learners did not practice the language as they did not play together to use the language taught. Third, the preschoolers were not capable of taking control of their learning and reaching their potential ZPD, as no scaffolding and human mediation were provided.

To validate the results of the current action research and measure the impact of guided play in EFL classes, multiple instruments were implemented: holistic assessment, an interview, a researcher journal, class observations, and student artifacts.

To track the individual student's progress, the researcher and the main teacher used holistic rubrics (see Appendix A) to assess the learners' performance every three weeks. The advancement of each student was evaluated twice during the action research: mid-course and end-of-the-course assessment.

Student #1. Having no prior knowledge of English, the mid-course evaluation showed that the student demonstrated proper pronunciation, could produce one whole sentence and recognize the flashcards, responded to the teacher's questions and was fairly motivated at the end of the third week. Eventually, at the end of the sixth week, the student could utter words clearly,

understand what the teacher asked, knew most of the target vocabulary and chunks, and was eager to have the best results in class.

Student #2. The student had limited prior knowledge about animals, colors, and numbers. At the end of the third week, the student could pronounce the sounds clearly, produce one whole sentence, identify the flashcards, and was motivated during the classes. As a result of the final assessment, the student could respond to questions, produce two sentences, and use the target vocabulary flexibly.

Student #3. Before the intervention study, the student had minimal knowledge about numbers and colors. At the end of the third week, the student could pronounce the sounds correctly, produce one whole sentence, and identify most of the target vocabulary. Eventually, in the end, the student could use simple chunks and target words. He had no pronunciation mistakes and responded to different questions.

Student #4. At the end of the third week, the student was able to utter words with minor phonetic mistakes, produce one whole sentence, and understand the teacher. Respectively, as a result of the final assessment, the student could respond to questions, produce two-sentence talk, and was highly motivated to learn.

Student #5. With almost no knowledge of English, at the end of the third week, the student could pronounce the words and identify most of the target vocabulary. Correspondingly, in the end, the student could produce one whole sentence and answer the teacher's help with little help.

Consequently, it can be inferred that all the students made apparent progress during six weeks of teaching when guided play and scaffolding were implemented as the primary instructional strategies in foreign language learning. To assure inter-rater validity, the researcher

and the main teacher conducted the assessment separately, then gathered to discuss and finalize the results.

To proceed to the second instrument, the interview, it would be crucial to highlight the common patterns identified in all the answers. All the participants claimed that it would be boring, sad, and uninteresting if the classes were conducted without games, as all of them enjoyed all the activities. The children were hesitant to answer the questions about their favorite class and game, as they gave the same response to both questions. It is a clear indicator that they could not differentiate games and classes, assuming they were the same. To the final question about their favorite theme, they started naming different themes, telling about their experiences and how joyful it was to play. In conclusion, it can be understood that children did not set boundaries between play and learning, instead considered them an emerged activity. It proved that learning happened simultaneously with playing.

Notes about teacher and student performance from the researcher journal presented factual and reflective data from the classes. This tool assisted in keeping track of daily activities, targeting learning objectives, and classroom assessment. It was insightful to go back to the entries written after every class that contained meticulous analysis. It was concluded that with the help of guided play, teacher-student and student-student interactions were established to make learning meaningful and engaging. Students felt comfortable and confident participating, and they overcame shyness through play. While the researcher-teacher initiated the thematic games, they were directed by the children. The clear objectives were set before the class; however, the students had sufficient autonomy to carry out the activities the way they wanted. For example, the researcher placed the flashcards on the floor in two rows during one of the games. The task was to jump on the flashcards and say the words, and children were free to

choose the row they liked. Another example is the activity about the weather. The task was to go outside and identify what the weather was like. The target vocabulary was rainy, sunny, cloudy, and snowy. Even though it was cloudy that day, the students went outside, and by coming back, they had different answers as they felt differently. The main goal for the researcher was to initiate the learning with personalized games, let the children take control over the activities with their discoveries, and not interfere with their learning pace.

In addition, multiple teacher roles were acknowledged during the classes when the teacher-researcher taught. The teacher-researcher was a stage manager and a facilitator when initiating activities, a doer while modeling the game, a mediator when involving the kids in the activity, a game participant to support language output through practice, and an observer when the students took autonomy of the game. All of the roles had significant functions of providing sufficient scaffolding, reinforcing foreign language learning, and targeting the learning objectives with goal-oriented activities.

To target the learning objective of designing a fruit basket, the researcher-teacher took the roles of a stage manager and a facilitator. The baskets were distributed to the learners, and the researcher-teacher guided the learners to choose the fruits they liked and stick them to the basket. The roles enabled the teacher to initiate the activity, make the learners interested in it and check their progress on the topic.

To achieve the learning objective of identifying shapes in the classroom, the researcher-teacher took the role of a doer to model the activity. It aimed to make the process meaningful, relevant to the learners and assess their knowledge of shapes.

To reach the learning objective of drawing shapes on the sand, the researcher-teacher took the role of a mediator to integrate the students into the task. The teacher helped them trace shapes with their fingers to raise confidence, then try the same independently.

To accomplish the learning objective of identifying the family members, the researcher-teacher took the role of a game participant. Three teddy bears were used to illustrate the idea of a family: daddy bear, mommy bear, and baby bear. The researcher-teacher played with the learners to teach the language implicitly by playing with toys.

To fulfill the learning objective of identifying the weather, the researcher-teacher took the role of an observer. The students were assigned to go out, feel how the weather was, come and tell their peers. The researcher-teacher was not involved in that activity, which helped the learners autonomously discover new things and use the target language.

Meanwhile, different types of human mediation, such as modeling and physical movements, and visual aids, such as flashcards and realia, were implemented to address different areas of foreign language development. To treat phonetic issues and raise phonological awareness, various techniques were taught: pronouncing the words by breaking them down into syllables, saying the words with high and low pitches of voice, pronouncing the syllables by jumping, clapping, and stamping their feet, etc.

To personalize the learning and make the process enjoyable, the researcher-teacher designed a range of arts and crafts activities. Each child produced a unique piece every week, which was collected. They were used as a tool to measure how well learning objectives were tailored to the assessment and how successfully the kids completed the tasks.

Week 1. Emotions: Listen and draw the emotion (see Appendix D)

Week 2. Family: Prepare a finger family hand (see Appendix E)

Week 3. Weather: Make a weather wheel (see Appendix F)

Week 4. Shapes: Paint a rainbow heart (see Appendix G)

Week 5. Fruit: Design a fruit basket (see Appendix H)

Week 6. Sweets: Ice cream scoops (see Appendix I)

In the end, after six weeks of teaching, the researcher observed a class where the EFL teacher taught the body parts. The observation pursued the goal of finding out whether the teacher integrated adult-initiated and child-directed guided play in the class and demonstrated any kind of scaffolding during the learning process. Noticeable improvements were observed in the teaching methodology. The teacher effectively made use of flashcards and incorporated kinesthetic learning by asking them to point on their nose, mouth, teeth, etc. Moreover, the class integrated an arts and crafts activity, where the children used paint and drew faces with their fingers by saying the face parts aloud. It was a successful class, where different input and output techniques were applied.

4.2 RQ2: How have EFL teacher's perceptions about guided play evolved during the research?

Regarding the second guiding question of this action research, three reflections in the form of informal discussions were conducted with the EFL teacher to surface the existing and changing perceptions of guided play, its significance, and effectiveness in foreign language learning. It was a guided discussion with specific questions targeted to reveal EFL teacher perceptions' evolution (see appendix C).

The first reflection was on the tenth of February. The aim was to raise awareness about guided play by asking open-ended questions. The questions assisted the teacher to notice differences in teaching pedagogy and methodology and directed to reflect on practical activities.

The second reflection was conducted on the twenty-fifth of February. The purpose was to collect evidence from the teacher's observations about the children's learning progress and determine the practical and pedagogical value of the activities demonstrated to the EFL teacher.

The final reflection was administered on the eleventh of March. The goal was to identify the need for guided play in teaching English to young learners. The EFL teacher elaborated on the usefulness and effectiveness of guided play and highlighted the eagerness to implement guided play in the EFL classes.

After coding and categorizing codes qualitative data from three reflections, four main areas of interest were identified. Guided play was perceived as an innovative method that nourished students' and teachers' positive attitudes, enabled effective practice, and played a facilitating role in foreign language learning.

4.2.1 Guided play as an innovative method

The EFL teacher highlighted that she hadn't heard of guided play; accordingly, she didn't have any experience in implementing it. However, she was excited to mention that watching the researcher who had sufficient expertise and skills in teaching young learners through guided play was rewarding for her. Getting to know the new instructional strategy, she was confident that realia, flashcards, crafts, and games reinforced learning making it more interesting, constructive, and practical.

4.2.2 Guided play and positive attitudes

Guided play was a safe place for the students to learn and explore the English language, as the teacher claimed. It created a warm atmosphere in the classroom, which, she thought, helped the researcher-teacher make a bond with the children in such a short time. She confessed that she was hesitant and suspicious at first to participate in the study, assuming that it would be

just an ordinary research study with no room for practical implications. Yet, she was surprised to witness how guided play revolutionized her perceptions of teaching. Not only did the children feel happy, engaged, and genuinely interested, but also, they were waiting for the following English classes with great enthusiasm.

4.2.3 Guided play and its facilitating role

The teacher was keen to mention that the children were becoming independent learners due to guided play. As it was adult-initiated but child-directed play, the students developed the confidence to try the activities independently after class time. She was impressed that after the first English class, where the students learned emotions, they were mimicking different emotions and asking each other to guess what emotion they were imitating. The teacher saw that they were in control of their learning experiences, transforming from passive to active learners.

4.2.4 Guided play as a crucial change

To the questions about the difference between then and now, the teacher stated the remarkable progress made in a short period of time. She highlighted that there were moments she doubted the kids would learn specific words and sentences. Nevertheless, she was convinced afterward that guided play provided continuous exposure and practice. Furthermore, she said the students themselves demanded to play when co-teaching and practicing the words after the classes. At last, she mentioned that even though it was highly time-consuming to prepare the games and think of creative activities, it was rewarding to see motivated students eager to learn and discover the language.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the impact of guided play on foreign language learning among young learners in a private preschool in Armenia. In addition, it revealed how teacher perceptions about guided play changed over the time of the action research. This chapter presents the research findings connecting them with prior studies and evaluates the significance and relevance of the results and their pedagogical implications.

5.1 Discussion

Regarding the first research question about the influence of guided play in foreign language learning at a young age, the results documented that implementing guided play in English classes was highly effective. The students made noticeable progress in a very short time. The analysis of factual and reflective evidence from the researcher journal and post-teaching observation implied that learning became meaningful and engaging with the help of guided play. Adult mentorship and goal-oriented scaffolding facilitated language input (Toub, 2016). Moreover, continuous exposure and linguistic assistance accommodated practicing the target vocabulary and making learning more comprehensible (Massey, 2013). These findings support the claim from previous research about the effectiveness of guided play in foreign language learning (Korat, 2002; Cheep-Aranai & Wasanasomsithi, 2016; Cavanaugh, 2017).

Another key finding from the interview with kids was that children didn't see a dichotomy between learning and guided play. Instead, they perceived a class as a game where they were genuinely involved in play and had the independence to direct their learning. They felt happy to realize they could play and learn simultaneously. This finding could be linked to the results of the current study conducted by the Armenian office of UNICEF. While it suggested that EFL teachers in Armenia did not consider play and learning as a wholesome teaching

method, this study proves that young learners could not set boundaries between class and play time perceiving them as a united activity. Furthermore, this finding is similar to the one drawn from an intervention study in Liberia, where the kids mentioned how they learn when they have fun, sing and play (Wang, 2018).

Several roles were executed during the teaching process regarding the teacher role in foreign language class. Recommended by prior research (Hirsh-Pasek, 2006; Wasik, 2017), different learning and feedback strategies were implemented to raise phonemic awareness, help practice target vocabulary, and produce comprehensible answers. As a result of taking up different roles, the researcher-teacher could nurture students' growth, encourage participation, and foster autonomy in learning.

The results from the second guiding research question about the changes in teacher's perceptions of guided play fully disclosed valuable insights about Armenian EFL preschool teacher's understanding of guided play. As there was no empirical evidence concerning research done in Armenia, it was interesting to collect and analyze the data from teacher reflections. As a result, the teacher claimed that her perceptions were revolutionized. Guided play was seen as an innovative teaching method accepted positively, which brought a major difference in the classroom and facilitated language learning. One possible explanation for these results is that the teacher didn't have any knowledge regarding the implementation of guided play in EFL classes. Accordingly, getting to know its effectiveness, the main teacher showed enthusiasm to try various activities in the classroom, as guided play helped the students to acquire target vocabulary, formulaic expressions, and novel sentences by creating a safe place for them to learn and experiment (Elkind, 2008). Their learning was natural and smooth, as they practiced the language simultaneously while playing (Stahlberg, 2019).

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The results of this research study are valuable, as they provide room for practical pedagogical implications.

First, EYL (English for young learners) teachers are suggested to use a variety of objects in the foreign language classes, such as realia, flashcards, worksheets, toys, fruit and vegetables, food, etc. As children are curious to experiment with new things, it is essential to personalize learning with real-life objects. Every opportunity should be taken to enable children to take control of their learning.

Second, a new theme should be introduced and taught to young learners in not less than a week. Children need time to get comfortable with foreign words and practice speaking. EFL teachers constantly need to recycle target vocabulary while playing games indoors and outdoors.

Third, scaffolding and guided play are recommended to be implemented in teaching young learners. Various methods of scaffolding need to be used in a single class. Teachers should apply visual aids, gestures, and body movements and treat phonetic issues with multiple techniques to facilitate foreign language learning.

Fourth, EFL teachers need to take several roles in classes. It's effective to be a manager when an activity needs to be organized; a doer when adult modeling and guidance are needed; a player when there is a demand to raise interest in activities; an observer when control should be handed to learners.

Fifth, it is vital to build a genuine connection with young learners to make them love the language through the teacher. It is recommended to be friendly with children, greet them individually at the beginning of each class, and track their individual learning through teacher-student interactions.

5.3 Limitations and Delimitations

The study confronted several limitations and delimitations.

A key limitation of the study was the duration and sample size of the research. Because of the time constraints, the data was not extensive and detailed. There is also a limitation in terms of the small sample size, as a vigorous variety of skills was not observed.

The study encountered several delimitations. First is the type of preschool, which is private. Public preschools were eliminated initially, as there are no English classes offered. The second delimitation was the age of the participants, which was defined by the research needs. Finally, the results of this research are not generalizable because of the nature of the research design.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

This research illustrates further potential research in implementing guided play at a young age in a private preschool, which can contribute to this research. Longitudinal action research could be designed to determine the impact of guided play in one academic year or semester. The latter can answer the question of which areas of language learning and teaching would benefit from guided play: literacy, vocabulary learning, speaking, or other skills. It would be insightful to be able to measure the degree of motivation and see whether guided play can impact student well-being.

Another research could be designed to target EFL teachers to find out how resourceful and applicable guided play is to incorporate in daily classes. An interesting question can be whether preparations and finding creative activities are time-consuming and may become a burden or cause burnout to some extent.

5.5 Conclusion

      The results of this action research disclose the positive impact of guided play on foreign language learning at a young age and changes in EFL teacher's perceptions about guided play. The findings propose that guided play can be applicable and beneficial in EFL classes. It reinforces vocabulary learning, boosts student autonomy, facilitates language input, and makes learning more relevant and meaningful. Importantly, play and learning are not perceived as a dichotomy by children, proving that guided play creates a natural atmosphere for learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Holistic rubrics for mid-course and end-of-the-course assessment taken and adapted from

Outeiral (2014)

Criteria for assessing performance					
Points	Language and delivery	Pronunciation & Production	Comprehension	Vocabulary knowledge	Attitude towards classes
3	• Can say one sentence with minor hesitations • Has proper intonation	• Can utter the words clearly or with minor mistakes • Pronounce the sounds correctly • Can produce a two-sentence talk	• Understand what the teacher says and asks • Respond to the questions	• Can identify flashcards • Know the target vocabulary • Can form simple sentences	• Is motivated to finish earlier • Is eager to have the best result
2	• Can say one sentence with hesitations and breaks • Has proper intonation	• Utter the words with mistakes, • Pronounce the sounds correctly, • Can produce one whole sentence	• Usually understand what the teacher says and asks • Responds to the questions with some help	• Identifies flashcards with little help • Know most of the target vocabulary • Can form one simple sentence	• Is fairly motivated to finish the task • Is satisfied with results
1	• Can't say one sentence • Doesn't have proper intonation	• Utter the words with major mistakes, • Can't produce one whole sentence	• Doesn't understand what the teacher says and asks • Can't respond to the questions	• Can't identify flashcards • Doesn't know the target vocabulary • Can't form one simple sentence	• Is not motivated to finish the tasks • Doesn't look for any results

Appendix B

Interview questions for the semi-structured interview with the preschoolers

1.   What classes did you like? Why?

Ո՞ր դասերը հավանեցիր: Ի՞նչու:

2.   What was your favorite class?

Ո՞րն էր քո ամենասիրած դասը:

3.   What was your favorite game? What did you learn from this game?

Ո՞րն էր քո ամենասիրած խաղը: Ի՞նչ սովորեցիր դրանից:

4.   What would happen if we learned without games?

Ի՞նչ կլիներ, եթե մենք սովորեինք առանց խաղերի:

5.   What topic was your favorite and why?

Ո՞ր թեման էր քո ամենասիրածը: Ի՞նչու:

Appendix C

Reflection questions for the semi-structured reflection with the main EFL teacher

First reflection

1.   What was successful, effective, or made a difference for the students?

2.   What do you think went well? Please, specify with examples.

3.   How did it feel to be a part of the class?

4.   How comfortable do you think the children were during the classes?

Second Reflection

1.   Tell me about a time when you saw learning happen.

2.   How can you prove that the children were learning?

3.   Did you notice any problems? If yes, how can they be addressed?

4.   What did you learn as a teacher?

Third Reflection

1.   What might have happened if this research had never been conducted?

2.   What might have happened if the students and the language classes were taught without
        games?

3.   Will you use the games in your classes? Why? Do you think it will be more challenging
        or time-consuming for you?

4.   What is the difference between then and now?

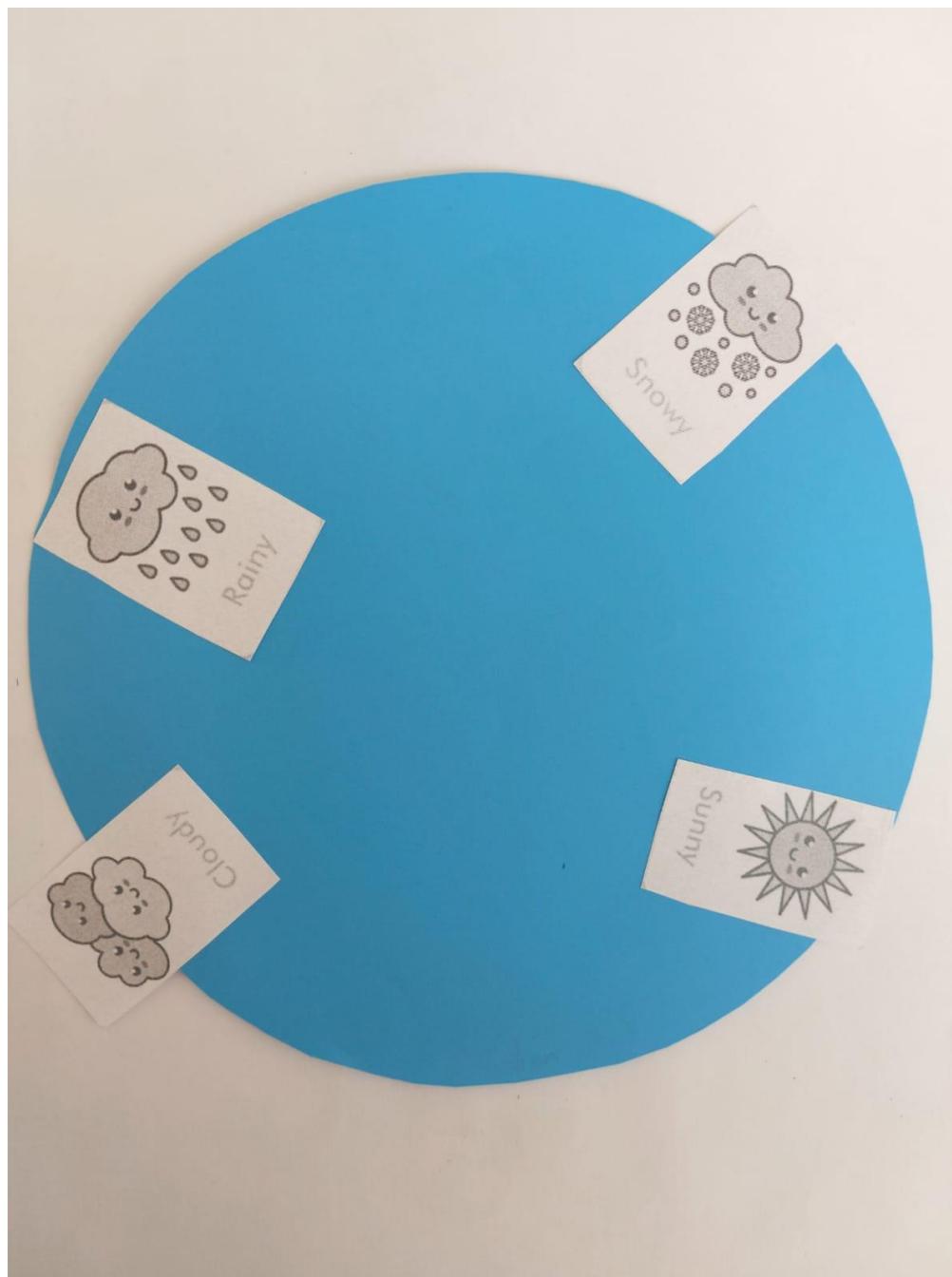**Appendix D**

Emotions: Draw the emotion you hear.
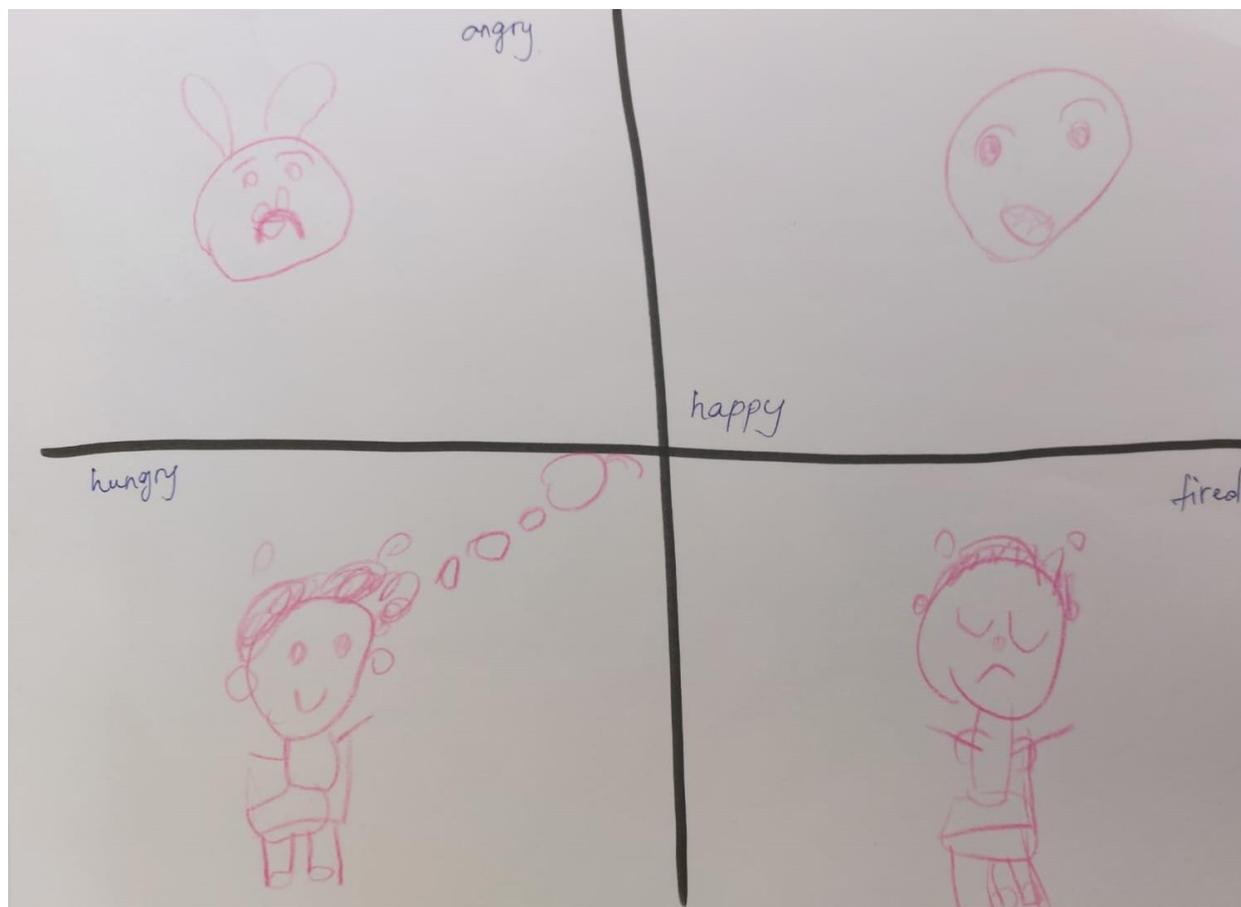
Appendix E

Finger Family: Stick one family member on each finger according to the song.

Appendix F

Weather wheel: Stick the pictures of weather on the wheel.

Appendix G

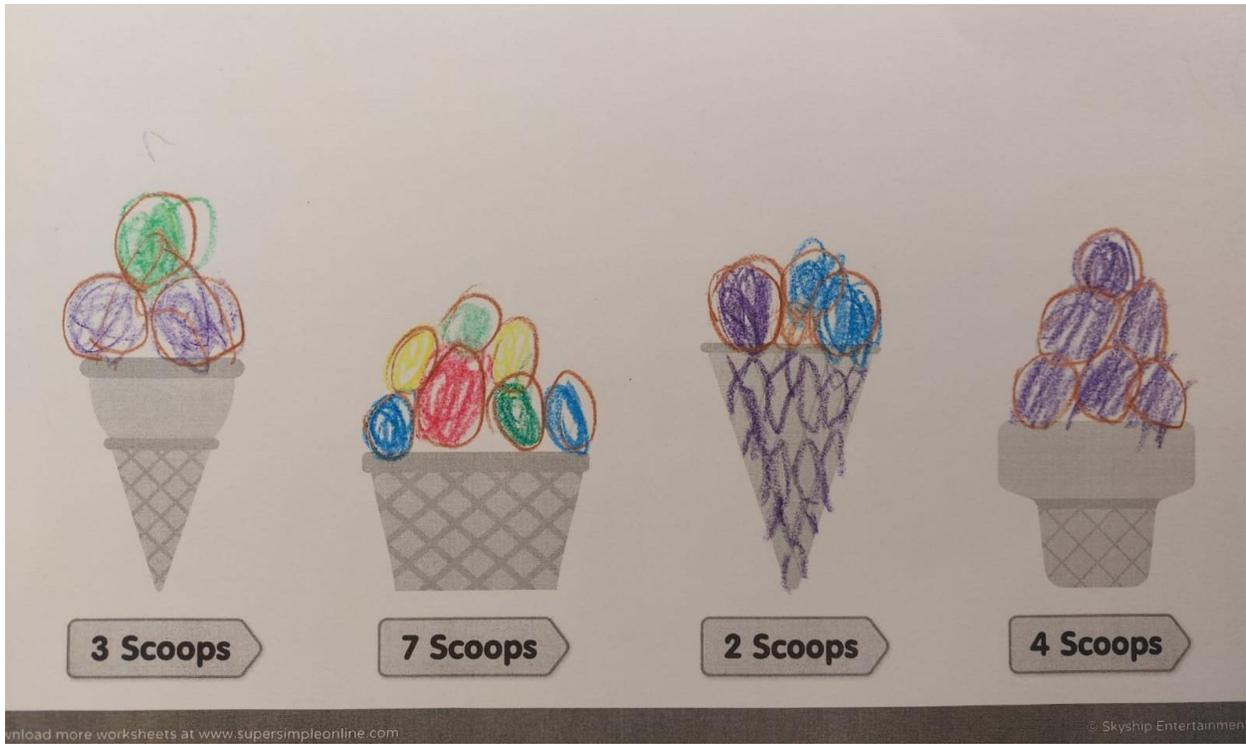Rainbow heart: Draw a rainbow heart using different colors.

Appendix H

Fruit Basket: Stick your favorite fruits on the basket.

Appendix I

Ice cream scoops: Draw ice cream scoops according to the numbers.

Appendix J

A sample lesson plan

Ani Sargsyan
04.03.2022
Fruit

Topic/Theme: Fruit

Duration of Lesson: 20 minutes
Learners' ages: young learners
# of students: 8
Target language proficiency level: true beginner
Native language: Armenian
Prior learning related to this lesson: apple, banana

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the class, students will be able to (SWBAT):

LO1	• Identify four types of shapes (apple, banana, orange, kiwi)
LO2	• Tell the names of the fruits by tasting them
LO3	• Make a fruit basket

Materials:
Flashcards, real fruit (an apple, a banana, an orange, a kiwi) cut into small pieces, pictures of fruits, papers with a basket already drawn, glue

Anticipated Problems: absent students

Procedures:
1. "Greeting & Flashcards" → LO # 1 (5 minutes)
   Mode: Group
   Steps:
      i. Greet the students.
      ii. Revise the previous fruit (apple, banana).
      iii. Show real fruits: orange and kiwi.
      iv. Ask the students to touch the fruit and say its name.

   Assessment techniques: Ts interaction

2. "Tasting fruit" → LO#2 (5 minutes)

Mode: individual
Steps:

    i.   Ask the students that they are going to close their eyes, and the teacher will give them a piece of fruit to try.
    ii.   Taste the fruit and tell its name.
    iii.   Continue till the last student tries.

Assessment techniques: Ts interaction, Ss sharing response

3. "Sand shapes" craft → LO#3 (10 minutes)
        Mode: individual
        Steps:

    i.   Distribute each student a piece of paper with a basket already drawn.
    ii.   Tell them they need to make a fruit basket (see Appendix 1).
    iii.   Give them pictures of different fruit.
    iv.   Ask them to stick the pictures using glue.
    v.   Invite them to tell the names of the fruit out loud.

Assessment techniques: Ts interaction, Ss sharing response

Appendix 1.