

**Developing Play-Based Learning Experiences with Integrated Technology: Research-Informed
Approaches for Face-to-Face and Blended Early Childhood Classrooms**

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settings; incorporating digital tools into instruction; TPACK; Digital Play Framework;
developmentally appropriate practice**

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an integrative review of the literature focused on how digital technologies are purposefully integrated to enhance play-based learning experiences for children aged 3 to 8 in both traditional and blended early childhood classroom settings (Marsh et al., 2016). This study draws upon both the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the Digital Play Framework (DPF) (Bird & Edwards, 2015) to analyze peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical literature, aiming to explore three primary research questions: (1) What technology integration strategies for play-based early childhood classrooms are supported in the research literature? (2) What learning theories align with those strategies? (3) What evidence-based recommendations can be synthesized into practical strategies for educators and instructional designers?

Findings are organized thematically to reveal key strategies including child-centered digital play, adaptive learning technologies, multimedia content delivery, immersive environments, and scaffolded support systems. The research aligns these strategies with major learning theories such as constructivist, cognitive developmental, social constructivist, psychosocial, and play-based learning theories. Six evidence-based recommendation categories emerge from the analysis: strategic integration approaches, child-centered pedagogies, intentional instructional design, professional development, developmentally appropriate practices, and assessment frameworks that maintain the centrality of play while leveraging technology to enhance rather than replace hands-on, relational, and exploratory learning.

The study highlights both the promise and challenges of technology use in ECE, emphasizing the critical importance of pedagogical intentionality, broad access to digital tools, and comprehensive

professional development. The conclusions demonstrate that effective technology integration requires intentional pedagogical planning, deep understanding of developmental theory, and careful attention to maintaining play-based learning principles. This dissertation contributes a practical, theory-informed roadmap offering actionable guidance for educators, instructional designers, researchers, and policymakers aiming to enhance early learning through thoughtful, play-driven digital integration.

Developing Play-Based Learning Experiences with Integrated Technology: Research-Informed Approaches for Face-to-Face and Blended Early Childhood Classrooms

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

As digital tools become increasingly common in early childhood classrooms, educators face important questions about how to integrate technology in ways that support—rather than disrupt—play-based learning for children ages 3 to 8. Many teachers aren't sure how to use tablets, interactive apps, and educational games while preserving the joyful, hands-on experiences that play provides. This dissertation explores how technology can thoughtfully enhance play experiences in early learning environments.

Informed by foundational learning theories and supported by key educational models, this review explores more than ten years of scholarly work on the integration of technology within early childhood education. The study identified effective strategies such as child-centered digital play, interactive storytelling, adaptive tools, and physical-digital play combinations. The review illustrates how these approaches correspond with key areas of child development—thinking, social interaction, and emotional well-being—demonstrating that, when thoughtfully applied, technology can positively contribute to children's growth.

The findings offer practical recommendations for teachers, schools, and curriculum designers seeking to create engaging, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate digital learning environments. Key areas include child-centered pedagogies, professional development, assessment strategies, and addressing challenges like screen time concerns and digital access. This work supports early childhood education professionals in making informed decisions about technology use while preserving the essential role of play—helping children learn, explore, and create through technology without losing the heart of early learning: joyful, hands-on, and meaningful play.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, whose unwavering love, sacrifices, and belief in me have sustained me throughout this journey. Their support—both emotional and practical—gave me the strength to persevere through every challenge.

I also dedicate this work to my dear friends, Jingjing Huang and Xiao Zhu, for their companionship and encouragement during moments of uncertainty.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my mentors, especially Dr. Johnson and Dr. Potter, whose wisdom, patience, and guidance inspired me to pursue my passion with courage and purpose.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER ONE	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose Statement	3
Research Questions	4
Theoretical Framework	4
Organization of the Dissertation	5
Significance of the Study	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
Literature Review	8
Introduction to Technology Integration in Play-Based Early Childhood Education	8
Emerging Patterns and Applications of Digital Tools in Early Learning Environments	8
Importance and Challenges of Play-Based Learning in the Digital Age	11
Brief Overview of the Chapter Structure	15
Theoretical Foundations of Early Childhood Education	16
Developmental Theories Relevant to Technology and Play	17
Constructivist Approaches and Knowledge Construction	28
Play-Based Learning Frameworks and Digital Environments	30
Technology Integration Models in Play-Based Early Childhood Education	33
Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) in Play-Based Settings	34
SAMR Model in Early Childhood Technology Integration.....	36
Frameworks Specific to Early Childhood and Play-Based Contexts.....	39
Research-Supported Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Learning	41
Interactive and Multimodal Learning Approaches	41
Collaborative and Social Play with Technology	44
Scaffolded Technology Experiences and Differentiation	49

Developmentally Appropriate Digital Tools and Resources	52
Learning Theories and Their Alignment with Technology Integration Strategies in Play-Based Learning	57
Constructivist Theory and Digital Play.....	58
Social Learning Theory in Technology-Supported Play	60
Connections Between the Theories and Specific Integration Strategies	61
Barriers and Facilitators to Effective Technology Integration in Play-Based Learning.....	63
Teacher Preparation and Professional Development.....	63
Disparities in Access, Participation, and Representation in Digital Play-Based Learning.....	66
Institutional and Policy Support.....	71
Balancing Digital and Non-Digital Play Experiences	73
Gap Analysis: From Research to Practice in Play-Based Learning	77
Gaps Between Research and Classroom Implementation	78
The Need for Synthesized, Practical Guidance for Educators.....	79
Justification for an Integrative Literature Review Methodology	81
Summary and Transition to Methodology	82
Synthesis of Key Findings from the Literature.....	82
Identification of Knowledge Gaps to be Addressed	84
Connection to the Proposed Integrative Review Methodology.....	85
CHAPTER THREE	87
Methodology.....	87
Integrative Literature Review	87
Conducting the Integrative Review	89
Stages 1: Formulate Purpose and Research Questions.....	89
Stage 2: Systematic Literature Search and Selection	90
Stage 3 Quality Appraisal.....	94
Stage 4: Data Extraction Analysis and Synthesis	96
Stage 5: Discussion and Conclusion.....	115
Limitations	116
CHAPTER FOUR	117
Findings.....	117
Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Early Childhood Classes.....	117
Technology-Supported Play: Foundational Integration Approaches	117
Child-Centered Digital Play: Preserving Agency and Autonomy.....	118
Adaptive Learning Technologies: Personalization Through Artificial Intelligence	120
Scaffolding with Technology: Dynamic Support Systems	121
Multimedia Content Delivery: Multimodal Learning Experiences	123
Physical-Digital Play Combinations: Hybrid Learning Environments	125
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences: Emerging Technologies	126

Aligned Learning Theories with the Strategies	129
Cognitive Development Theory	129
Psychosocial Development Theory	132
Social Constructivism Theory	134
Constructivist Learning Theory	136
Play-Based Learning Theory	138
Evidence-Based Recommendations for Practical Educator Strategies	140
Thematic Category 1: Strategic Technology Integration Approaches	140
Thematic Category 2: Child-Centered Digital Pedagogies	141
Thematic Category 3: Intentional Instructional Design and Implementation	141
Thematic Category 4: Professional Development and Educator Capacity Building.....	142
Thematic Category 5: Developmentally Appropriate Technology Practices	143
Thematic Category 6: Assessment and Documentation in Digital Learning Environments	143
CHAPTER FIVE	145
Discussion.....	145
Interpretation of Major Findings by Research Question	145
Research Question 1: What Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Early Childhood Classes Are Supported in the Research Literature?.....	145
Research Question 2: What Learning Theories Align with Those Strategies?	149
Research Question 3: What Evidence-Based Recommendations Can Be Synthesized into Practical Strategies for Educators?.....	151
Theoretical Integration: TPACK and the Digital Play Framework	154
Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK).....	154
Digital Play Framework (DPF).....	156
Integration of TPACK and DPF	158
Practical Implications for Educators and Instructional Designers	158
Professional Development and Educator Preparation	158
Curriculum Design and Implementation.....	159
Assessment and Documentation	160
Considerations for Access, Inclusion, and Ethical Technology Use	160
Access Gaps and Inclusive Digital Learning	161
Privacy and Safety Considerations	161
Screen Time and Developmental Appropriateness	162
Limitations and Directions for Future Research	163
Methodological Limitations	163
Contextual and Cultural Limitations	164
Theoretical and Conceptual Gaps	165
Future Research Directions	165
Longitudinal Studies.....	165
Comparative Research	165

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Research	166
Family and Community Engagement Research.....	166
Professional Development Research	166
Implications for Policy and Practice	167
Conclusion	167
References	170
Appendix A	192
Codebook for Data Extraction and Coding	192
Appendix B	204
Technology Integration Strategies Initial Excerpts Tableb Sample.....	204
Appendix C	218
Technology Integration Strategies Thematic Codes Sample	218
Appendix D	221
Technology Integration Strategies Aligned Learning Theories Sample	221
Appendix E.....	253
Evidenced-Based Recommendations Strategies Theme Sample	253
Appendix F.....	261
PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process	261

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Inclusion Criteria for Data Set.....	91
Table 2: Exclusion Criteria for Data Set.....	92
Table 3: Summary, Selection Actions, Articles for Data Set.....	92
Table 4: Alignment of Technology Integration Strategies with Learning Theories	103

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Frequency of Identified Technology Integration Strategies	97
Figure 2: Frequency of Learning Theories	100
Figure 3: Flow of Recommendations to Thematic Areas	113
Figure 4: Detailed Flow Diagram: Top 8 Sources to Thematic Areas	114

CHAPTER ONE

Bringing digital tools into early childhood education has sparked a significant shift, reshaping how children between the ages of 3 and 8 experience teaching and learning (Marsh et al., 2016). This transformation has gained unprecedented momentum as educational institutions worldwide recognize the potential of technology to enhance developmentally appropriate, play-based learning experiences across diverse instructional modalities, including traditional face-to-face, remote, and hybrid classroom environments (Blackwell et al., 2013; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2022; Sakir, 2024). The convergence of technological advancement and pedagogical innovation has created both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges that demand careful examination and evidence-based guidance.

Learning through play is widely regarded by both researchers and educators as a foundational approach in early childhood education, supporting young children's growth across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains (Edwards, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). This pedagogical approach aligns with children's natural learning processes and has been consistently associated with enhanced creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, language acquisition, socio-emotional competence, and executive functioning skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). The theoretical foundation for play-based learning draws from constructivist learning theories, which emphasize children's active role in constructing knowledge through exploration, experimentation, and social interaction.

In this context, *play* is broadly defined as an intrinsically motivated, self-directed, and imaginative activity in which children engage for its own sake, often without external goals or outcomes (Burghardt, 2005; Rubin et al., 1983; Zosh et al., 2017). It is process-oriented and marked by freedom of choice, symbolic thinking, and flexibility. In contrast, *play-based learning* refers to a pedagogical strategy that integrates academic or developmental objectives into playful contexts, guided by teacher scaffolding while maintaining the essential characteristics of play (Golinkoff et al., 2006; Pyle et al., 2017). This distinction is important, as play emphasizes autonomy and open-ended exploration, whereas play-based learning

strategically balances child agency with intentional instructional design to foster both engagement and learning outcomes.

The advent of sophisticated digital tools—including tablets, programmable robots, augmented reality (AR) applications, virtual reality (VR) environments, interactive storytelling platforms, and artificial intelligence-powered educational applications—has introduced unprecedented possibilities for enriching children's play experiences while maintaining their inherently open-ended, exploratory, and child-directed nature (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Marsh et al., 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2013). These technological innovations offer potential pathways for extending traditional play activities, supporting differentiated learning approaches, fostering collaboration across physical and virtual spaces, and providing multimodal learning experiences that accommodate varied cognitive process preferences and developmental needs.

However, the incorporation of digital tools within early learning environments has also generated significant concerns and debates within the educational community. Persistent apprehensions regarding excessive screen time exposure, developmental appropriateness of digital tools, potential negative impacts on children's attention spans and social skills, and access issues continue to influence policy decisions and pedagogical practices (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Institute, 2012). These concerns are particularly pronounced in under-resourced educational contexts, where disparities in technology access and digital literacy may exacerbate existing educational inequalities.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly advocates for intentional, evidence-based approaches to technology integration that are firmly grounded in established early childhood developmental theory and pedagogy (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Falloon, 2013; Lim et al., 2023). Theoretical frameworks such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the Digital Play Framework (DPF) (Bird & Edwards, 2015) provide educators with conceptual tools for navigating the inherent complexity of technology integration within play-based learning environments. These frameworks emphasize the critical importance of maintaining pedagogical intentionality while leveraging technological affordances to support children's holistic development.

Problem Statement

Despite the proliferation of digital tools in educational settings and the growing body of research examining their implementation, early childhood educators frequently encounter substantial uncertainty and challenges when attempting to integrate technology in ways that are developmentally appropriate, pedagogically sound, and theoretically grounded (Blackwell et al., 2013). The existing research landscape remains fragmented, with limited comprehensive synthesis of evidence-based strategies that educators can readily implement to align technology use with established child-centered pedagogical principles and developmental considerations.

Furthermore, the rapid emergence and widespread adoption of hybrid instructional models that strategically blend in-person and remote learning experiences—accelerated by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic—have created an urgent need to explore how technology-supported play can function effectively across diverse instructional contexts (Reich & Mehta, 2020). Traditional approaches to early childhood education, which have historically relied on face-to-face interactions and physical manipulatives, require substantial reconceptualization to accommodate the possibilities and constraints of hybrid learning environments while maintaining the essential characteristics of high-quality play-based pedagogy.

Purpose Statement

This integrative review aims to systematically investigate and bring together existing studies focused on how play-oriented technologies are chosen, applied, and assessed within early childhood education settings, including both face-to-face and blended learning environments. Specifically, this study investigates evidence-based approaches for designing and developing instruction that promotes children's holistic learning and development within play-based environments through appropriate and intentional technology integration. The study synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed empirical and theoretical sources to generate practical, theoretically grounded strategies for educators, instructional designers, curriculum developers, and educational leaders working in early childhood contexts.

Research Questions

This study systematically addresses the following research questions:

1. What technology integration strategies for play-based early childhood classrooms are supported in the research literature?
2. What learning theories align with those strategies?
3. What evidence-based recommendations can be synthesized into practical strategies for educators and instructional designers?

Theoretical Framework

This study is conceptually guided by two complementary and mutually reinforcing theoretical frameworks that provide a comprehensive lens for examining technology integration in early childhood play-based learning environments.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), posits that effective educational technology integration requires the dynamic and intentional interplay between educators' knowledge domains of content, pedagogy, and technology. In the particular setting of early learning environments, the TPACK framework encourages educators to critically consider how technological tools can authentically support play-based content delivery and pedagogical objectives, rather than focusing primarily on superficial tool utilization or technology for its own sake.

The Digital Play Framework, developed by Bird and Edwards (2015, 2017), offers a focused theoretical perspective for exploring how digital tools can enrich and sustain purposeful play within early childhood learning environments. The framework identifies three interconnected core dimensions of digital play: inquiry-based exploration, collaborative interaction, and imaginative expression. Additionally, the DPF (Bird & Edwards, 2015) underscores the essential role of adult facilitation and support, while also maintaining children's autonomy and decision-making capacity during digitally enriched play scenarios.

The integration of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and DPF frameworks (Bird & Edwards, 2015) provides a robust theoretical foundation for systematically evaluating how technology integration strategies

can effectively align with the complex developmental, pedagogical, and technological requirements of contemporary early childhood educational settings.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is systematically organized into five interconnected chapters, each serving a specific focus while collectively advancing the understanding of technology integration within play-based early childhood education environments. The following organizational structure provides readers with a clear roadmap for navigating the comprehensive examination of this complex topic.

Chapter 1: Introduction provides an overview of the study by establishing the foundational context through an examination of the background literature, articulating the research problem and its significance, defining the purpose statement, and introducing the guiding research questions. This chapter also delineates the theoretical frameworks that inform the study and discusses the significance of the research for multiple stakeholder groups, creating the essential foundation for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review presents an initial background literature review that provides a preliminary examination of the research landscape related to the study's focus areas. This comprehensive review serves as both a standalone analysis of existing scholarship and an introduction to the more detailed findings presented in Chapter 4. The literature review explores seminal and contemporary research on digital play, evidence-based instructional strategies, and supporting theoretical frameworks, establishing the knowledge base that informs the integrative review methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology describes the methodology employed in this study, including the integrative literature review design, systematic search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction protocols, and quality assessment measures. This chapter also acknowledges and addresses the limitations inherent to the integrative literature review approach, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor throughout the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings presents the comprehensive findings of the literature review, organizing the results according to the research questions and providing detailed synthesis of technology integration

strategies, aligned theoretical frameworks, and evidence-based recommendations. This chapter builds upon the preliminary literature review presented in Chapter 2, offering a deeper analysis of patterns, themes, and relationships identified across the reviewed literature.

Chapter 5: The final chapter offers a synthesis of principal insights and reflects on their significance for advancing theoretical understanding, guiding future research, and informing practical applications within early childhood education. This chapter synthesizes insights generated through the literature review process and provides concrete suggestions for implementation by educators, instructional designers, and other stakeholders, while also proposing directions for future research to advance the field.

Together, these five chapters create a cohesive narrative that guides readers from the initial problem identification through methodological considerations to comprehensive findings and practical applications, ultimately contributing to the broader understanding of strategic incorporation of digital tools within exploratory learning contexts for young children.

Significance of the Study

This study offers multiple valuable insights that advance understanding in both early childhood education and the integration of digital technologies in teaching. First, it provides a comprehensive and systematic synthesis of empirical evidence regarding effective technology integration strategies within play-based learning environments, addressing a significant gap in the existing literature. Second, the study offers practical, theoretically grounded implementation strategies for educators, instructional designers, curriculum developers, and educational leaders seeking to enhance early childhood learning experiences through research-based technology integration.

Third, the findings contribute valuable insights for policymakers and institutional administrators who are tasked with making informed decisions about technology adoption, professional development initiatives, and resource allocation in early childhood educational contexts. Finally, this study addresses critical gaps in the literature by explicitly connecting established learning theories with practical

implementation strategies across both traditional face-to-face and emerging hybrid classroom configurations, providing a foundation for future research and practice in this rapidly evolving field.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction to Technology Integration in Play-Based Early Childhood Education

Digital technologies have become a visible and influential part of today's early childhood classrooms, reshaping how many children experience play, exploration, and learning. As tablets, interactive whiteboards, and educational applications become increasingly prevalent in early childhood settings, the need for thoughtful integration that preserves the fundamental principles of child-centered pedagogy has never been more critical (Blackwell et al., 2013; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This integration requires educators to navigate complex decisions about how digital tools can enhance rather than replace traditional play experiences, while also ensuring that all children have access and maintaining a focus on their overall development (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Hatzigianni et al., 2023). The following sections provide an overview of current discussions in the field, highlighting major trends, the evolving role of play in digital environments, and key theoretical frameworks that inform effective practice.

Emerging Patterns and Applications of Digital Tools in Early Learning Environments

In recent years, digital technologies have shifted from being optional tools in early childhood education to becoming essential elements embedded within everyday teaching practices. This transformation is driven by a broader shift in educational discourse, which increasingly views technology not as an isolated innovation, but as an embedded tool situated within developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and play-based frameworks (Paciga & Donohue, 2017). In this context, technology is understood as encompassing not only devices and software, but also pedagogical strategies, theoretical foundations, and curricular standards that shape children's experiences and educators' instructional decision-making (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

A key trend in the literature is the alignment of technology use with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning (Lawrence, 2018; Li et al., 2024). These theoretical perspectives emphasize the role of children as active participants in constructing their knowledge through exploration, social interaction, and

meaningful engagement with their environments. Technology integration grounded in these perspectives often takes the form of authentic, play-based activities. For example, Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2008) describe how planning a pretend birthday party can involve counting, writing invitations, and collaborative problem-solving—practices that may be enhanced through digital tools such as drawing apps or multimedia storyboards. In such contexts, the use of digital technology is not focused on passive content consumption but rather on supporting children’s engagement in complex, socially mediated tasks.

To support intentional technology integration, conceptual frameworks such as the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model have gained widespread traction (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Rosenberg & Koehler, 2015; Yue, Jong, & Ng, 2024). TPACK highlights the dynamic interplay among content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge, and calls for thoughtful consideration of how these domains intersect in practice (Park & Hargis, 2018). Within early childhood education, this model is instrumental in helping educators identify how digital tools can complement existing curricular objectives while remaining aligned with developmental appropriateness (Lim et al., 2024; Park & Hargis, 2018). Similarly, the SAMR framework (Puentedura, 2013), which includes the stages of Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition, is frequently employed to evaluate the transformative potential of technology use, moving beyond simple task substitution to opportunities for meaningful innovation in classroom practice (Blackwell et al., 2016).

Another emergent practice involves the design of multimodal and collaborative learning environments that leverage digital technologies to support interactive storytelling, visual expression, and cooperative problem-solving. For instance, children may co-construct digital narratives using tablets or engage in group-based design activities on interactive whiteboards (Bird & Edwards, 2015). These practices reinforce the centrality of play while integrating digital tools that expand the modalities through which children represent, explore, and negotiate meaning. Importantly, this approach aligns with the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and supports multiple domains of child development, including cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic growth (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

Despite these advancements, the literature points to ongoing challenges in implementation. Barriers such as limited educator preparation, disparities in access to resources, and the absence of robust assessment frameworks tailored to digital play are frequently cited (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Paciga & Donohue, 2017; Hatzigianni et al., 2023). To address these challenges, tools such as the Digital Play Framework have been developed to guide educators in observing, documenting, and interpreting children's digital engagement in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

Issues surrounding access, inclusion, and balanced participation have emerged as critical dimensions in today's discussions on technology in early childhood education (OECD, 2023). Researchers highlight the importance of ensuring that all children—regardless of socioeconomic status, language background, or ability—can fully participate in and benefit from high-quality digital learning experiences (Li et al., 2024; Paciga & Donohue, 2017). This includes not only access to devices and internet connectivity but also the opportunity to participate in technology-enhanced learning activities that are culturally responsive and pedagogically sound. The concept of the educator as a “media mentor” has gained prominence in this context, encouraging practitioners to guide children and their families in navigating digital environments thoughtfully and responsibly (Donohue, 2022; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

Another area of consensus in the literature is the importance of maintaining a balanced curriculum that integrates digital and non-digital play (Marsh et al., 2016; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Scott et al., 2023). While digital tools offer opportunities for creativity, problem-solving, and collaborative engagement, researchers caution against allowing screen-based experiences to supplant physical, imaginative, or outdoor play. Instead, the emphasis is placed on intentional integration, where technology enhances rather than replaces the foundational elements of early learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Paciga & Donohue, 2017). Educators are thus tasked with curating and sequencing learning opportunities that reflect a whole-child approach, blending spontaneous play, guided inquiry, and developmentally appropriate digital exploration.

Assessment practices are similarly evolving to reflect these changes (Bird & Edwards, 2017; NAEYC, 2020). Traditional summative measures are increasingly supplemented with observational tools that capture children's ongoing interactions with digital tools in naturalistic settings (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Hatzigianni et al., 2023). The Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015) offers one such approach, supporting formative assessment of children's engagement in digital contexts while remaining grounded in play-based pedagogy (Bird & Edwards, 2015; 2017). However, more research is needed to validate these tools across diverse early childhood contexts and ensure their reliability and cultural responsiveness.

Finally, there is growing emphasis on the role of professional development in preparing educators to integrate technology in ways that are responsive to children's needs and grounded in evidence-based practice (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Dardanou et al., 2023). Effective professional learning programs prioritize reflective thinking, theoretical grounding, and critical engagement with digital tools—not merely technical competence (Park & Hargis, 2018; Paciga & Donohue, 2017). This reflective stance equips teachers to make informed decisions regarding how digital tools are utilized within their teaching environments and to continually adapt their practices in response to emerging tools and evolving understandings of child development.

Technology use in today's early childhood classrooms is shaped by a complex and dynamic mix of practices—rooted in constructivist thinking, framed by instructional models, and influenced by issues of accessibility, inclusion, and teacher agency. By centering play, aligning digital tools with developmental principles, and engaging in reflective and inclusive practice, early childhood educators can harness technology's potential to enrich learning while preserving the integrity of play-based education.

Importance and Challenges of Play-Based Learning in the Digital Age

Play-based learning has long been regarded as a cornerstone of early childhood education, with a rich theoretical and empirical foundation highlighting its centrality to young children's holistic development. Rooted in developmental psychology and constructivist learning theory (DeLoache, 2000; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978), play acts as a central pathway for young children to understand their surroundings,

connect with others socially, and strengthen their thinking, emotional, and physical abilities (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Weisberg et al., 2013). The integration of technology into early childhood settings introduces new possibilities for enriching learning experiences but also presents conceptual, practical, and ethical challenges that require critical reflection to ensure alignment with developmentally appropriate practice.

The foundational importance of play is underscored by research demonstrating its essential role in supporting the development of intelligence, personality, and social-emotional well-being (Van Hoom et al., 2014). As NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center (2012) affirm, play should remain central to early childhood programs, as it reflects not only developmental theory but also contemporary understandings of how children grow within social and cultural contexts (Haugland, 1999; Heft & Swaminathan, 2002; Plowman & Stephen, 2005). According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the concept of developmentally appropriate practice supports designing learning experiences that are engaging, joyful, and responsive to young children's individual needs, interests, and stages of growth.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates the pedagogical value of play in fostering language and literacy development during early childhood. For example, Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2008) found that spontaneous peer interactions during free play are strong predictors of oral language proficiency and print knowledge among kindergarten-aged children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Similarly, Dickinson and Tabors (2001) observed that play-based social exchanges support vocabulary growth and emergent literacy skills by providing children with meaningful opportunities to use and experiment with language in context. In contrast, narrowly focused print instruction that lacks opportunities for social and playful interaction has been shown to limit conceptual development and hinder children's motivation to engage with literacy activities (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Weisberg et al., 2013).

Despite this substantial body of evidence supporting play-based approaches, accountability-driven educational reforms have contributed to their devaluation in many early childhood classrooms. Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and similar global movements toward standardization have led to the marginalization of play in favor of direct instruction, even in early childhood classrooms (Golinkoff et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2013). This shift reflects a persistent tension between didactic models of instruction

and constructivist, child-centered pedagogy—a debate that remains highly relevant as educators navigate the role of digital technology in early learning environments (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

In the digital age, play-based learning faces new opportunities and challenges. Digital technologies—including tablets, touchscreen devices, and educational apps—offer novel affordances for multimodal expression, narrative construction, and collaborative exploration (Fleer, 2019; Marsh et al., 2016). When integrated skillfully, these tools can enhance children’s agency, extend their imaginative capacities, and support inclusive learning practices. Fleer (2019) emphasizes that digital technologies, when situated within a culturally responsive and pedagogically intentional framework, can create new conditions for play and learning that resonate with children’s lived experiences.

However, the integration of technology into play-based contexts is not without risk. Ensuring that digital experiences remain developmentally appropriate is a key concern. As Fleer (2023) and Plowman and Stephen (2013) argue, not all digital tools are designed with early childhood learners in mind, and educators must be discerning in selecting technologies that support open-ended, child-initiated play rather than rote engagement or passive consumption. This challenge is exacerbated by disparities in educator training and digital fluency, with many teachers reporting limited support in adapting their practice to incorporate digital media effectively (Park & Hargis, 2018; Palaiologou, 2016).

Access remains a pressing issue in discussions of digital play. While technology has the potential to bridge achievement gaps—especially for children with disabilities or those from marginalized communities—persistent digital divides continue to influence the quality and frequency of children’s technology-mediated learning experiences (Paciga & Donohue, 2017; Mayer et al., 2023). Moreover, ethical concerns related to children’s privacy, data protection, and screen time management require vigilant adherence to institutional and national guidelines (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Pimienta et al., 2023).

Social-emotional development in digital play contexts is another area of complexity. Digital media can both support and hinder interpersonal dynamics depending on how they are designed and facilitated. As Marsh et al. (2018) demonstrate, apps that encourage collaboration and storytelling can scaffold

meaningful peer interactions and imaginative engagement. Yet, poorly designed applications or overly competitive game structures may provoke conflict, inhibit cooperation, or narrow the focus of play to procedural tasks (Eriksson et al., 2021; Lawrence, 2017; Plowman, 2015). Given these varied outcomes, Fleer (2019) emphasizes that effective digital play mediation requires teachers to be responsive to individual differences in children's temperaments, social skills, and developmental readiness.

Assessment of children's engagement with technology is an emerging area of inquiry. Bird and Edwards' (2015) Digital Play Framework offers educators a structured way to interpret children's engagement with digital media by distinguishing between exploratory (epistemic) and imaginative (ludic) forms of play. This framework, grounded in Vygotskian theory, emphasizes the importance of tool mediation and guided interaction in digital learning environments. However, further research is needed to validate such frameworks across diverse cultural and educational contexts (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

Finally, there is a persistent gap between academic recommendations and family practices regarding technology use. While some scholars advocate for restrictive screen time policies based on concerns about attention and health (Christakis et al., 2004; Hutton et al., 2019; Yamamoto et al., 2023), others argue for a more nuanced view that considers the quality, context, and content of digital engagement (Janakiefski, Guicherit, & Saylor, 2024; Neumann, 2018; Strouse & Ganea, 2017). In real-world settings, children's digital play often occurs in unsupervised or informal contexts, highlighting the need for continued research on children's everyday interactions with media and how these shape learning and development (Plowman, 2015; Fleer, 2018).

Together, these findings underscore the complex and evolving nature of play-based learning in digitally mediated environments. While technology offers the potential for enhancing children's learning experiences, its integration must be approached with pedagogical intentionality, ethical awareness, and a commitment to developmental appropriateness. The interplay between digital media and early childhood education demands ongoing research, thoughtful practice, and sustained dialogue among educators, researchers, and policymakers. Play-based learning remains a foundational pillar of early childhood education, even amid the proliferation of digital tools and environments. Bring technology into play-based

learning demands a focus on age-appropriate use, professional development, responsive assessment, and inclusive access for diverse learners. By engaging critically with both theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, educators and researchers can navigate the complexities of digital childhoods while preserving the core values of play, agency, and holistic development.

Brief Overview of the Chapter Structure

This literature review examines the integration of technology in play-based early childhood education, presenting a structured overview of theoretical, practical, institutional, and developmental considerations. The chapter is organized into several thematic sections to guide the reader through the current state of research and identify gaps relevant to educational practice and future inquiry.

The chapter begins by outlining theoretical foundations, drawing on frameworks such as constructivism, social constructivism, experiential learning, and play-based learning theory. It also incorporates applied models like TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) to establish a conceptual basis for evaluating digital technology use in early childhood settings.

Building on this foundation, the review then explores classroom-level strategies for technology integration. It highlights how digital tools are used to support technology-supported play, child-centered learning, scaffolding, adaptive learning systems, and combinations of physical and digital play. These strategies are analyzed for their alignment with developmental goals and learning theories.

The next section focuses on institutional and administrative supports, including the role of leadership, infrastructure, policy development, and professional learning in enabling or limiting effective technology use. It emphasizes the systemic conditions necessary for sustainable integration in early learning environments.

The review continues by addressing screen time guidelines and developmental considerations, synthesizing best practices and position statements from professional organizations. It discusses how digital engagement can be managed in manners that nurture young learners' overall wellness, foster intellectual progression, and encourage positive social interaction.

Community and family engagement is then examined as a crucial factor in supporting inclusive and effective technology integration. This section discusses home-school partnerships, community-based access points, and strategies for supporting families in digital learning practices.

The chapter concludes with a gap analysis that synthesizes findings across the literature. It identifies key disconnections between research and practice, highlights the limited availability of clear, actionable guidance for educators, and establishes the rationale for conducting an integrative literature review as the methodological approach.

This structure provides a comprehensive and organized examination of the literature, setting the stage for the methodology chapter that follows.

Theoretical Foundations of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education draws on a rich tradition of theoretical perspectives that explain how young children learn, develop, and engage with their surroundings through play and social interaction. Foundational theories developed by influential scholars such as Piaget (1952, 1962), Vygotsky (1978), and Erikson (1950) continue to shape contemporary educational practice by offering insights into cognitive development, social learning, and psychosocial growth (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 2015). As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into early childhood settings, these established theoretical perspectives serve as critical guides for ensuring that technology use remains developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sound (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Donohue, 2022;). Constructivist and play-based learning frameworks derived from these theories emphasize children as active participants in knowledge construction, highlighting the importance of hands-on exploration, social collaboration, and meaningful engagement (Golinkoff et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2013). These perspectives collectively provide a strong foundation for educators to make thoughtful decisions about integrating digital tools in ways that preserve the principles of holistic child development.

Developmental Theories Relevant to Technology and Play

The integration of digital technologies into early childhood play environments requires careful consideration of foundational developmental theories that explain how children learn, grow, and construct meaning through their interactions with the world. Classic frameworks from Piaget (1952, 1962), Vygotsky (1978), and Erikson (1950) provide essential insights into cognitive, social, and psychosocial development that remain highly relevant as educators navigate the complexities of technology-enhanced learning experiences. Understanding these theoretical perspectives enables practitioners to make informed decisions about how thoughtfully implemented digital technologies may reinforce, rather than interfere with, the innate developmental processes nurtured through play-based experiences.

Cognitive Development and Digital Play Piaget (1952) theory of cognitive development has had a profound and enduring impact on early childhood education, particularly in shaping foundational understandings of how children construct knowledge through play and interaction with their environment. Piaget (1962) theory emphasizes that children play an active role in their learning journey, advancing through a series of distinct developmental phases—ranging from sensorimotor to formal operational—that each reflect more advanced ways of thinking and understanding (Crain, 2014; Piaget, 1952, 1962). This stage-based framework offers a lens through which to interpret how children engage not only with traditional materials but also with emerging digital modalities of play.

According to Piaget (1962), significant learning occurs outside formal instruction, particularly as children manipulate objects, explore their surroundings, and solve problems independently. Such self-directed engagement is conceptually aligned with the core principles of play-based learning and resonates with contemporary constructivist educational practices. The integration of digital technologies into early learning environments invites a critical re-examination of Piagetian ideas, particularly in terms of how digital media may support or constrain processes of exploration and symbolic representation.

The work of Seymour Papert (1980), a student of Piaget, extended constructivist theory into the digital age through his development of environments such as the Logo programming language. Papert

argued that well-designed digital tools can scaffold children's transitions from concrete to abstract reasoning by providing dynamic, manipulable representations of complex ideas (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012). His contributions underscore the potential for technology to function as a mediating artifact in cognitive development, facilitating processes of experimentation, hypothesis generation, and concept visualization that may surpass the affordances of traditional physical materials.

The distinction between "home-style" (naturalistic, child-directed) and "school-style" (formal, adult-directed) learning experiences (Smidt, 2013), a theme implicit in Piaget (1962) writings, is also relevant when evaluating children's digital play. In home contexts, where digital technologies are often used more flexibly, children frequently engage in spontaneous problem-solving and creative exploration that mirror Piaget's descriptions of authentic learning processes (Crain, 2014; Piaget, 1962). Constructivist-oriented educators have drawn upon these principles to advocate for play-based curricula that emphasize active, experiential learning over rote instruction.

When applied to digital contexts, these theoretical perspectives suggest that technology should be positioned not as a tool for passive information transmission but rather as an interactive medium that promotes cognitive engagement, discovery, and collaboration. Research supports this stance, indicating that high-quality educational technologies are those that foster "minds-on" participation, facilitate connections to prior knowledge, and encourage social interaction around shared tasks (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). These characteristics align with Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation, the cognitive mechanisms through which children incorporate new information or adjust existing cognitive structures in response to novel experiences (Piaget, 1962).

Nevertheless, the application of Piagetian theory (Piaget, 1962) to digital play also necessitates careful consideration of developmental appropriateness. While digital tools can support symbolic representation and inquiry—hallmarks of preoperational and concrete operational thought—they must be intentionally designed to align with children's cognitive capabilities at different developmental stages. Educators with a strong grounding in developmental theory are better positioned to critically evaluate the

affordances and constraints of various technologies, and to scaffold children's interactions in ways that support meaningful learning (Crain, 2014; Howland et al., 2012).

Absent such pedagogical intentionality, there is a risk that digital technologies may be misapplied, leading to superficial engagement or cognitive overload rather than constructive learning. The challenge for researchers and practitioners alike is to design and implement digital experiences that remain faithful to the constructivist tenets of Piagetian theory (Piaget, 1952) while leveraging the affordances of contemporary technology. This includes creating learning environments that promote open-ended inquiry, virtual manipulation, hypothesis testing, and collaborative problem-solving, all calibrated to individual differences in developmental readiness (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Howland et al., 2012).

Moreover, the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) serves as a valuable conceptual tool for informing and supporting decisions around effective technology integration in educational settings (Yilmaz & Naci, 2017). TPACK emphasizes the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, urging educators to make intentional, context-sensitive decisions about technology integration that are rooted in both theoretical understanding and practical expertise (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Piagetian theory (Piaget, 1962) demonstrates its continued significance through its capacity to guide the meaningful incorporation of technology within early childhood educational settings, where digital resources serve to enhance children's active discovery and intellectual growth. This theoretical foundation offers crucial insights into how young learners build understanding through play-based experiences, providing enduring principles that remain valuable as educational environments increasingly embrace digital innovations. When technology is purposefully woven into play-centered learning contexts, it opens new pathways for fostering developmental processes that are consistent with Piaget (1952, 1962) emphasis on hands-on learning and exploration. However, realizing these benefits requires that educators and technology designers maintain careful attention to developmental appropriateness, pedagogical design, and the nature of interactions between children and digital tools in these enhanced learning environments.

Social Constructivism and Mediated Play Vygotskian social constructivism offers a robust theoretical foundation for examining the integration of technology into play-based early education. At the heart of Vygotsky's theory is the principle that cognitive development is inherently social, emerging through participation in culturally meaningful activities and interactions with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk & Winsler, 1995). From this perspective, learning is not an isolated, internal process but is mediated by cultural tools and practices—among them, language, symbols, and increasingly, digital technologies (Crain, 2014; Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012).

A central tenet of Vygotsky's (1978) theory is the notion of mediation, which posits that psychological tools fundamentally shape cognitive development. These tools, traditionally including speech and symbolic systems, now encompass digital technologies that serve as mediational means to expand children's capacities for exploration, communication, and conceptual understanding (Howland et al., 2012). The integration of such tools into play environments aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, wherein knowledgeable others support learners in achieving tasks beyond their current capabilities. In contemporary classrooms, this scaffolding may involve educators modeling the use of digital devices, gradually reducing their guidance as children's confidence and competence grow (Crain, 2014; Plowman & Stephen, 2007, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).

This dynamic is particularly evident in interactions situated within the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—a conceptual space where learners perform tasks with assistance that they could not complete independently. For instance, through guided engagement with digital tools, educators structure learning contexts in which children assume increasing responsibility over time, reflecting the ZPD in action (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993; Rogoff, 2003; Howland et al., 2012). Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on authentic sociocultural practices underscores the value of technology-mediated play that mirrors real-world contexts. When children engage in collaborative problem-solving or co-construct narratives using digital platforms, they participate in communities of practice that foster both cognitive and identity development (Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 1993).

Digital play often unfolds within richly social environments, as children negotiate meanings, share strategies, and collaborate to achieve shared goals. Such peer-based interactions support the development of essential social competencies, including communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution—skills that Vygotskian theory deems central to learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Research further indicates that child–child collaboration during digital gameplay can be as developmentally significant as adult-facilitated interactions (Amott, 2016; Göncü & Gaskins, 2007).

The concept of guided play—a pedagogical approach in which adults design structured learning environments while allowing for child agency—resonates with Vygotskian principles. In such settings, educators act as facilitators who enable children to draw upon appropriate cognitive tools, engage in exploratory learning, and exercise autonomy within a supportive scaffolded framework (Crain, 2014; Plowman & Stephen, 2007, 2013). This balanced approach reinforces the idea that meaningful learning occurs when children are active participants, guided but not controlled by adults.

Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the potential for technology to undermine social interaction or diminish the richness of traditional play experiences. Critics have pointed to instances of solitary screen engagement or the apparent reduction of verbal interaction during digital activities (Crain, 2014). However, ethnographic and observational studies challenge such concerns, demonstrating that when intentionally integrated, digital technologies can promote, rather than impede, social participation. For example, shared digital tasks often become sites of joint attention, collaborative inquiry, and co-construction of meaning (Amott, 2016; Rogoff et al., 1993).

The crux of the issue lies not in the technology itself but in its pedagogical application. To ensure developmentally appropriate integration, educators must assume the role of intentional mediators—individuals who design learning environments where digital tools complement rather than supplant hands-on, imaginative, and social play (Plowman & Stephen, 2007, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). In doing so, they align with Vygotsky’s vision of learning as a socially situated and tool-mediated process, one that is deeply rooted in cultural context and shaped by interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Crain, 2014).

Vygotskian social constructivism highlights the critical importance of scaffolding, meaningful participation in sociocultural practices, and deliberate facilitation of guided interaction within technology-enhanced play environments. The presence of these essential components enables digital technologies to function as effective mediational tools, supporting and enhancing both the cognitive and social aspects of early learning in ways that are developmentally significant. This theoretical perspective demonstrates how thoughtful integration of technology can amplify children's learning experiences by leveraging the social nature of knowledge construction and the power of mediated activity. Through careful attention to these Vygotskian principles, educators can harness digital tools to create rich learning environments that honor the collaborative and culturally situated nature of children's development.

Psychosocial Development and Technology Engagement Erikson's psychosocial theory offers a nuanced developmental framework for interpreting young children's engagement with technology within play-based educational contexts. His model delineates eight stages of psychosocial development across the lifespan, with the first four—trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority—being particularly salient during early childhood (Erikson, 1950; Crain, 2014). These stages are not viewed as rigid or discrete; rather, Erikson proposed that individuals continually revisit and renegotiate these developmental tasks across time, especially in response to novel sociocultural conditions—such as the increasing presence of digital technologies in children's lives.

Within Erikson's theory, play is central to psychosocial development in early childhood. He contended that through play, children explore their social worlds, express emotional themes, and practice resolving developmental challenges (Erikson, 1950; Crain, 2014). Thus, play serves not merely as recreation but as a symbolic arena for negotiating identity, agency, and competence. In technology-mediated learning environments, play becomes an important lens through which to examine how children work through psychosocial tensions while engaging with digital tools.

At the stage of trust versus mistrust, infants build foundational trust when caregivers offer consistent, nurturing, and responsive interactions. In the context of digital media, this translates into adults introducing technology in ways that are emotionally secure and developmentally attuned. For example,

modeling safe, responsive interactions with digital tools fosters not only interpersonal trust but also confidence in the mediated environments themselves (Crain, 2014). These early experiences can shape children's willingness to explore and engage with new technological contexts.

As children move into the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage, they seek opportunities to assert independence while navigating boundaries set by adults. Interactive digital technologies can support this striving for autonomy by enabling children to make choices, manipulate virtual objects, and explore cause-and-effect relationships. However, such autonomy must be supported through intentional scaffolding, particularly when digital environments present complex interfaces or ambiguous feedback. Without adult mediation, children may experience frustration or self-doubt, potentially leading to feelings of shame (Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Thus, the adult's role is not only to provide access to developmentally appropriate technologies but also to guide their use in a way that fosters competence and self-regulation.

The initiative versus guilt stage is marked by a growing desire to take initiative, assume new roles, and test personal limits. Digital tools that encourage creative expression, problem-solving, and narrative construction can powerfully support this developmental task. When educators provide children with opportunities to initiate projects using open-ended apps or gamified platforms, they affirm children's agency and sense of purpose. Moreover, adult modeling of responsible digital citizenship and ethical online behavior further reinforces children's ability to take initiative within safe boundaries (Crain, 2014). These actions cultivate both personal responsibility and the internalization of prosocial norms around digital engagement.

During the industry versus inferiority stage, children strive to demonstrate competence and master skills that are socially valued. Technology can function as both a medium for learning and a platform for demonstrating achievement, particularly when integrated into collaborative tasks such as coding, multimedia storytelling, or digital art. However, disparities in access to devices or uneven instructional support can limit participation, placing some children at risk of internalizing feelings of inferiority relative to their peers (Crain, 2014; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Ensuring broad access and providing tailored

guidance are therefore essential to fostering a sense of industry and ensuring that all children can meaningfully participate in digital learning experiences.

Across these stages, Erikson's framework underscores the critical importance of balancing protection with empowerment. Educators and caregivers must not only safeguard young children in digital environments but also foster skills for independent, confident, and ethical participation. This includes supporting children's development of social-emotional competencies, such as self-regulation, cooperation, and ethical decision-making—skills increasingly essential in a digitized learning landscape (Erikson, 1950; Crain, 2014).

Importantly, Erikson emphasized that developmental resolution is not fixed; individuals continually revisit earlier challenges in light of new experiences and contexts. Applied to digital learning, this implies the need for flexible and culturally responsive approaches to technology use. Children bring varied temperaments, backgrounds, and prior experiences to digital play, which must be acknowledged when designing or facilitating such experiences. In some cases, promoting healthy skepticism or critical media literacy may be as vital as cultivating trust in digital systems.

Erikson's psychosocial theory reveals the intricate relationship between developmental needs and technology-enhanced learning environments when applied to digital play contexts. Digital technologies offer considerable potential for fostering identity development, autonomy, and competence throughout early childhood years. However, actualizing these benefits demands purposeful design, broad access, and consistent adult involvement to ensure that children's navigation of digital environments promotes psychosocial wellness and healthy identity formation. This theoretical lens emphasizes how technology can either support or hinder critical developmental tasks, depending on how thoughtfully it is integrated into children's play experiences and social interactions.

Contemporary Perspectives on Play and Technology Contemporary perspectives on play in the early years increasingly recognize the influence of digital technologies as integral to children's daily interactions and learning contexts. These perspectives are deeply rooted in developmental and constructivist theories that emphasize active, meaningful engagement as foundational to learning (Hirsh-

Pasek et al., 2008). Within this theoretical framing, digital technology is not conceptualized as a replacement for traditional play but as a complementary tool that can extend and enrich children's exploratory experiences when integrated thoughtfully and developmentally appropriately (Edwards, 2013; Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

The resilience and adaptability of play remain central in modern theoretical discourse. Play supports children's growth across physical, cognitive, emotional, and social domains, and these benefits remain salient even in digitally mediated contexts (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). For example, collaborative play facilitates emotional regulation and social skill development, while physically active play supports motor development and health. Accordingly, the integration of technology into early childhood settings should prioritize preserving core attributes of play, including agency, creativity, exploration, and social interaction.

Building on Vygotsky's (1978) notion that play leads development, Fleer (2011) proposed the concept of "conceptual play," highlighting how imagination and cognition merge during play episodes. Fleer argued that digital tools could mediate concept formation by engaging children in imaginative contexts that scaffold abstract thinking. Similarly, Egan's (as cited in Crain, 2014) work on imaginative education emphasizes narrative elements such as oral storytelling, binary oppositions, and wonder—features that remain critical even as play enters digital spaces. When implemented effectively, digital technologies can enhance rather than replace these essential processes of imaginative engagement (Arnott, 2016; Yelland & Gilbert, 2017).

The integration of digital technologies must also align with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), a principle grounded in developmental theory and research. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009), DAP entails intentionally designing learning environments that reflect children's cultural contexts and individual developmental readiness. Within this framework, technology is viewed as one among many tools that can support learning when applied in ways that are responsive to children's needs, experiences, and capabilities. Bird and Edwards (2014, 2015) emphasized

that educators' ability to scaffold interactions with technology plays a pivotal role in ensuring that digital engagement aligns with developmental goals.

Constructivist theory further reinforces the need for intentional technology integration that supports active learning, hands-on exploration, and relationship-building. From this perspective, digital tools should promote inquiry-based experiences and collaboration rather than passive consumption. Edwards (2013) highlighted the importance of contextualizing digital play within culturally and pedagogically responsive environments. Her research shows that when digital play is integrated within play-based curricula, it can contribute meaningfully to children's social and cognitive development.

Emerging studies have also drawn attention to the social and ecological dimensions of digital play. Arnott (2016), for instance, explored how children form flexible "digital play clusters" in which interactions with peers and devices are fluid and contextually situated. These findings suggest that, contrary to concerns about isolation, digital play can be inherently social and relational when embedded in collaborative contexts. Bird and Edwards (2015) elaborated on this dynamic through their Digital Play Framework, which outlines a developmental progression from epistemic engagement—where children explore device functionality—to ludic engagement, where they creatively manipulate digital tools for expressive or problem-solving purposes.

Guided interaction has been identified as a key pedagogical strategy in facilitating meaningful digital play. Plowman and Stephen (2005, 2013) differentiated between proximal and distal forms of adult mediation: proximal support involves real-time scaffolding during digital activity, while distal support includes decisions about which technologies to introduce and how to structure their use. The timing and nature of adult interventions can significantly influence how children internalize digital skills and concepts.

Yelland and Gilbert (2017) argued for a re-imagining of play that incorporates multimodal and technology-rich experiences. Their work demonstrates how children use digital tablets and styluses to transition seamlessly between physical and digital modes of learning, creating hybrid spaces that facilitate novel forms of conceptual understanding. These environments expand the traditional boundaries of play, offering children new ways to represent and engage with ideas.

From a pedagogical perspective, the TPACK framework provides meaningful direction for incorporating digital technologies into early learning environments. Mishra and Koehler (2006) emphasized the interplay between technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, arguing that teachers must understand how these domains intersect to design effective learning experiences. More recent scholarship has extended the TPACK model to include affective knowledge, recognizing that educators' attitudes toward technology significantly influence their integration practices (Park & Hargis, 2018).

Despite the promise of digital play, challenges persist. Educator confidence and professional development remain essential for ensuring technology is used purposefully and effectively within play-based curricula (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013). Professional learning communities and collaborative networks can support educators in navigating issues related to classroom management, instructional design, and curricular alignment. Furthermore, ensuring consistent and inclusive access to digital tools is a critical concern. As Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) noted, disparities in access and support can lead to uneven opportunities for learning and development, potentially exacerbating existing educational challenges.

Contemporary scholarship highlights the value of integrating digital tools in ways that sustain the core developmental benefits of play - including active involvement and imaginative expression – while ensuring extending access and embracing the unique possibilities that technological innovation brings to early learning environments. This integrative approach honors the enduring importance of traditional play experiences while recognizing how digital technologies can expand and enrich children's developmental opportunities. When grounded in developmental theory and supported by frameworks like TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), these digital integrations align with principles of developmentally appropriate practice and constructivist learning to create meaningful play experiences. Through thoughtful embedding of technology within early childhood settings, educators can harness digital tools to promote holistic development while preserving the essential qualities that make play such a powerful medium for learning.

Constructivist Approaches and Knowledge Construction

Constructivist approaches to learning emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through meaningful engagement with their environments rather than passively absorbed from instruction. This epistemological stance, shaped by theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, and Bandura, positions the learner as a central agent in the learning process (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jonassen & Land, 2012). In contemporary educational contexts, particularly those involving digital technologies, constructivist principles continue to guide the design of learning experiences that promote inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and authentic knowledge construction.

At the core of constructivist thought is the belief that knowledge emerges through interaction with others and with cultural tools. Digital technologies can serve as powerful mediating tools that support this process by facilitating communication, collaborative meaning-making, and the creation of shared digital artifacts (Jonassen & Land, 2012). For instance, collaborative tasks—such as co-producing digital stories, animations, or multimedia presentations—require learners to engage in joint problem-solving, negotiate meaning, and co-construct understandings. These practices mirror the core tenets of social constructivism and reflect the essential role of peer and adult interaction in the learning process (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Göncü et al., 2007).

Within early childhood education, digital technologies integrated into play-based learning environments provide rich opportunities for constructivist knowledge construction. Activities involving tablets, digital drawing tools, or multimodal storytelling apps allow children to experiment, explore, and represent ideas through various modalities. These experiences promote conceptual development by enabling children to manipulate virtual objects, express ideas symbolically, and receive feedback from peers and adults (Yelland & Gilbert, 2017). The educator's role in this context shifts toward scaffolding children's engagement—observing emerging schemas, extending children's thinking through timely interaction, and providing access to relevant tools and resources (Plowman & Stephen, 2005, 2013).

Authenticity is another hallmark of constructivist learning environments. Learning is most meaningful when rooted in real-world contexts or modeled after expert practices (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Edwards, 2013). In digitally enriched settings, children engage in authentic activities such as virtual shopping, storytelling, or digital communication with family members—contexts that reflect their lived experiences. These interactions not only foster knowledge construction but also bridge the divide between home and school learning environments, making learning culturally relevant and personally significant (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

Formative assessment, grounded in sociocultural theory, complements constructivist practices by emphasizing continuous documentation and reflection. Tools such as digital portfolios, learning stories, and multimedia documentation capture the dynamic, social, and situated nature of children's thinking (Bird & Edwards, 2015). Rather than relying solely on summative metrics, these methods enable educators to assess how children construct knowledge over time through interactions with people, tools, and contexts.

The constructivist integration of digital tools requires thoughtful pedagogical planning that aligns technology use with educational goals and developmental appropriateness. As the history of educational technology demonstrates, tools themselves do not guarantee improved outcomes. Instead, it is the intentional, responsive, and developmentally informed use of these tools within constructivist frameworks that fosters deep learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jonassen & Land, 2012). Educators must be equipped not only to select and implement appropriate digital resources but also to create environments that encourage experimentation, inquiry, and co-construction of knowledge.

Constructivist approaches to knowledge construction emphasize the critical role of learner agency, authentic and socially situated experiences, and the thoughtful integration of mediating tools in the learning process. Within digital contexts, these foundational principles offer a comprehensive framework for creating early childhood learning environments that support children's active construction of understanding through play, collaboration, and engagement with meaningful tasks (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Jonassen & Land, 2012; Plowman & Stephen, 2007; Yelland & Gilbert, 2017). This theoretical perspective demonstrates how digital technologies can serve as powerful mediational tools when integrated purposefully into learning

environments that prioritize children's natural ways of exploring and making sense of their world. Through careful attention to constructivist principles, educators can design technology-enhanced experiences that honor children's developmental needs while expanding opportunities for creative expression and collaborative inquiry.

Play-Based Learning Frameworks and Digital Environments

Play-based pedagogy is grounded in the recognition that play is a fundamental mode of learning for young children, supporting their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Dewey, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Within this framework, play is not merely a leisure activity but a primary context through which children construct knowledge, develop symbolic thought, and engage in problem-solving. The integration of digital environments into this framework extends the potential of play by providing novel affordances for representation, collaboration, and creativity.

Over time, the definition of play in child development has evolved across disciplines, reflecting diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. Early psychological and psychoanalytic theories viewed play as a mechanism for processing internal conflict or rehearsing adult roles, while Piaget (1962) emphasized its role in advancing symbolic and cognitive development (Rubin et al., 1983). Vygotskian and sociocultural perspectives later framed play as a socially situated activity that facilitates learning within the zone of proximal development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). From an ethological standpoint, Burghardt (2005) proposed a five-criteria model defining play as voluntary, non-functional in immediate context, and distinct from serious behavior. Contemporary scholars increasingly define play as an intrinsically motivated, self-directed, and exploratory activity through which children construct meaning, rehearse skills, and engage in socio-emotional navigation in developmentally rich ways (Pellegrini, 2009; Rubin et al., 1983; Zosh et al., 2017). Despite nuanced distinctions across frameworks, there is broad agreement that play is flexible, symbolic, active, and culturally shaped.

Play and play-based learning are interconnected yet conceptually distinct constructs in early childhood education. *Play* is characterized by spontaneity, child initiation, and freedom from external goals,

emphasizing autonomy, symbolic engagement, and process-oriented experience (Burghardt, 2005; Rubin et al., 1983). In contrast, *play-based learning* represents a pedagogical strategy that intentionally integrates academic goals within playful contexts, preserving the spirit of play while incorporating structured teacher guidance to support developmental and curricular outcomes (Pyle et al., 2017; Zosh et al., 2017). While play centers on the child's self-directed experience, play-based learning strategically balances child agency with adult scaffolding to foster both engagement and academic growth (Golinkoff et al., 2006). The key distinction lies in purpose: play promotes development through freedom and exploration, whereas play-based learning applies these same qualities toward intentional educational aims.

The foundational principles of play-based pedagogy are deeply informed by developmental and constructivist theories, particularly those articulated by Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978). These theorists emphasized the active role of the child in meaning-making and the significance of social interaction in learning (Dewey, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). From this perspective, play enables children to explore symbol systems, language, logical-mathematical thinking, and creativity within environments that value both spontaneous exploration and guided participation (Kolb, 2015; Golinkoff et al., 2009).

A key tenet of the play-based learning framework is the dynamic balance between child-initiated activity and teacher-guided interaction. Guided play, described as a two-way process, involves adults scaffolding children's learning through shared goals and mutual understanding, without undermining child agency (Plowman & Stephen, 2005, 2013; Weisberg et al., 2013). Within digital environments, this balance is maintained as educators facilitate engagement with interactive tools, encouraging exploration while providing strategic support.

Digital tools, when thoughtfully integrated, offer children diverse ways to engage in narrative construction, symbolic play, and problem-solving. For instance, digital storytelling apps and construction games allow for the expression of imagination and the development of collaborative skills (Amott, 2016; Danby et al., 2018). These activities mirror traditional play practices while expanding opportunities for multimodal expression and shared inquiry.

Cultural responsiveness is another foundational principle within play-based digital environments. Children's learning is most effective when it reflects their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds (Rogoff, 2003; Van Hoom et al., 2015). Digital tools can be used to create inclusive experiences, where children's languages, heritage, and identities are represented through personalized content or collaborative projects. Educators play a critical role in selecting and curating technologies that respect and affirm children's diverse social contexts.

The play-based learning framework also emphasizes advocacy for the value of play within increasingly digitized educational landscapes. Educators must articulate the developmental benefits of play in policy discussions and school leadership dialogues to ensure its central role is preserved (Golinkoff et al., 2006; Golinkoff et al., 2009). This is particularly important as digital environments become more prevalent in early childhood classrooms and expectations for academic readiness increase.

Autonomy and decision-making are core developmental goals supported through digital play. According to the Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015), children progress from epistemic play—where they explore the affordances of digital tools—to ludic play—where they manipulate these tools creatively and independently. Educators must provide opportunities for both modes of play by allowing children to make choices, set goals, and solve problems within digital contexts.

Teacher beliefs and digital competence significantly influence how autonomy unfolds in digital environments (Palaiologou, 2016). Educators who perceive technology as compatible with play-based learning are more likely to design open-ended, child-directed tasks. Conversely, rigid or skeptical attitudes can constrain children's agency. Effective digital pedagogy therefore involves not only technical skill but also a willingness to support inquiry and experimentation.

Imagination and creativity also flourish within digitally enriched play environments. Digital tools can extend the boundaries of pretend play by offering resources for role-play, animation, and artistic expression (Arnott, 2016; Danby et al., 2018). Guided digital play, in which educators introduce narrative prompts or scaffold collaborative activities, leads to more complex and sustained imaginative engagement. The

physical and virtual environment, including device configuration and screen sharing, influences whether play becomes socially enriched or solitary (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Concerns remain about the potential for digital tools to undermine developmental goals, particularly when screen time becomes passive or isolating. However, research suggests that when embedded in a play-based framework and used intentionally, digital tools can act as a “third teacher” (Arnott, 2016), promoting exploration, communication, and co-construction of knowledge. Educators’ mediation, digital literacy, and reflective practice are key to ensuring that digital environments remain developmentally appropriate and aligned with pedagogical goals (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

The play-based learning framework demonstrates how digital environments can be integrated to maintain the essential developmental functions of play while expanding children's capacity for symbolic expression, social interaction, and self-directed exploration. This perspective reinforces play as the fundamental mode of early learning across all mediums and illuminates the potential for digital technologies to enhance rather than substitute the hands-on, relational, and imaginative aspects that define quality early childhood education. When digital tools are thoughtfully incorporated within this framework, they serve to amplify the natural learning processes that occur through play, creating new pathways for children to engage with ideas, peers, and their environment. Such integration preserves the core principles of early childhood pedagogy while leveraging technology's unique affordances to deepen and extend traditional play experiences.

Technology Integration Models in Play-Based Early Childhood Education

Integrating technology into play-based early childhood education requires thoughtful consideration of models that guide educators in making informed decisions about digital tool use. These models provide structured frameworks for understanding how technology can enhance learning without disrupting the fundamental principles of developmentally appropriate, play-centered pedagogy. By outlining the relationships between pedagogy, content, and technology, as well as offering strategies to assess the depth and quality of integration, these models help educators design intentional and meaningful digital

experiences for young learners (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Puentedura, 2014). The following discussion explores three key models—TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013), and frameworks specific to early childhood and play-based contexts—to illustrate how theoretical and practical approaches can guide the effective use of technology in supporting children’s exploration, collaboration, and creativity through play.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) in Play-Based Settings

The integration of technology into play-based early childhood education requires a nuanced and contextualized understanding of how content, pedagogy, and digital tools converge with early learning practices to enrich developmental outcomes in young children. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework offers a comprehensive lens for this integration, emphasizing that effective teaching with technology necessitates the orchestration of three domains: content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and technological knowledge (TK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Within TPACK, meaningful integration is achieved when educators fluidly synthesize these domains to design learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, play-driven, and pedagogically robust (Koehler et al., 2014).

In early learning environments, where play is the cornerstone of learning, the application of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) poses both unique opportunities and significant challenges. Educators must not only hold robust disciplinary knowledge but also understand how to design play-based environments that incorporate digital tools without undermining core principles of developmental theory and child agency. As Park and Hargis (2018) argue, there is a growing need for targeted professional development to help early childhood educators shift their dispositions toward technology, build confidence in its pedagogical use, and develop strategies for selecting high-quality digital content suited for young learners.

Despite increased availability of digital devices in early learning settings, research suggests that a disconnect persists between the theoretical potential of technology integration and its actual implementation. Blackwell et al. (2016) found that although early childhood educators often have access to

tablets and other tools, many do not employ them in ways that create student-centered, inquiry-based environments—largely due to limited training and contextual support. Similarly, Edwards (2013) highlights the ongoing tension between play-based pedagogy and the perceived structure of digital tools, noting that teachers often struggle to align open-ended play with the affordances of technological platforms.

The TPACK model (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) promotes a balanced role for educators—moving beyond either direct instruction or unstructured free play. Rather than advocating for directive instruction, this perspective aligns with the principles of guided play, emphasizing adult facilitation that enriches children’s exploration without overt control (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). This participatory stance aligns with constructivist views of learning as a socially mediated and exploratory process (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012). In practice, this might include using tablets to document outdoor investigations or co-constructing stories using digital storytelling tools, thus allowing children to express knowledge in multimodal ways (Yelland & Gilbert, 2018).

Furthermore, the affordances of digital technologies expand traditional play opportunities. For example, Howland et al. (2012) emphasize how technology can facilitate meaningful learning through collaboration, community-building, and knowledge co-construction. These affordances are particularly valuable in play-based contexts where children are encouraged to take initiative, make choices, and engage with peers in dynamic environments.

However, realizing the promise of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) in early childhood education depends heavily on educator preparedness and the systems that support professional growth. Park and Hargis (2018) stress the need for professional learning communities and embedded coaching models to help teachers internalize the complex interplay between content, pedagogy, and technology. Moreover, Koehler et al. (2014) note that developing TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is an iterative, practice-based process that requires reflection and sustained experimentation in authentic classroom settings.

Ensuring inclusive and contextually responsive implementation is essential to the meaningful application of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). As Rowsell et al. (2017) emphasize, broader access to technology does not eliminate persistent differences in how children engage with and experience digital

learning environments. Educators must be attuned to differentiated access and culturally responsive implementation to ensure that TPACK-based practices do not inadvertently reinforce existing disparities.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that technology should enhance rather than displace the tactile, imaginative, and social aspects of early learning. As Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2008) caution, digital innovation must be grounded in evidence-based frameworks that preserve the developmental appropriateness of early childhood pedagogy. In this sense, TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) becomes a tool not for replacing traditional play, but for enriching it with new forms of expression, collaboration, and inquiry.

The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provides a comprehensive model for integrating technology into play-based early childhood education while maintaining pedagogical integrity and developmental appropriateness. Its effectiveness depends on continuous professional development, responsiveness to the varied contexts and needs of learners, careful digital tool selection, and unwavering adherence to the developmental integrity of playful pedagogy (Blackwell et al., 2016; Edwards, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008, 2015; Howland et al., 2012; Koehler et al., 2014; Park & Hargis, 2018; Rowsell et al., 2017; Yelland & Gilbert, 2017). When educators successfully navigate the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, they create learning environments that harness digital tools to enhance rather than replace the fundamental elements of early childhood education. This approach ensures that technology serves as a meaningful extension of play-based learning rather than a substitute for the hands-on, imaginative, and socially rich experiences that characterize quality early childhood programs.

SAMR Model in Early Childhood Technology Integration

The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) model, developed by Puentedura, offers a structured framework for evaluating the depth of technology integration in educational settings, including early childhood education (Puentedura, 2013; 2014). This model conceptualizes technology integration as a continuum from enhancement to transformation. At the enhancement level, Substitution involves using technology as a direct replacement for traditional tools without functional

change, whereas Augmentation includes slight functional improvements. At the transformational level, Modification allows for significant redesign of tasks, and Redefinition enables the creation of entirely new learning experiences that were previously inconceivable (Puentedura, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2016).

In early childhood settings, where pedagogies are guided by play-based, child-centered, and developmentally appropriate principles, the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) must be applied with particular care. At the Substitution level, for instance, a digital storybook accessed via tablet merely replaces its print counterpart with no significant pedagogical shift. However, at the Augmentation level, embedded features such as audio narration, word highlighting, or animation begin to support multimodal learning and may enhance emergent literacy skills (Puentedura, 2013).

More advanced integration occurs at the Modification and Redefinition stages. At the Modification level, technology is used to redesign learning experiences—for example, enabling children to collaborate in creating digital storybooks using voice recordings and illustrations. Redefinition, the most transformative tier, allows for activities such as virtual field trips or video exchanges with children in other geographic locations, experiences that could not exist without digital tools (Falloon, 2013; Puentedura, 2014).

Nevertheless, the SAMR model's (Puentedura, 2013) application in early childhood education has drawn critical scrutiny. Hamilton et al. (2016) argue that the model is often misused as a rigid hierarchy rather than a flexible framework. This prescriptive usage may inadvertently encourage educators to prioritize moving “up” the model rather than making developmentally informed

choices that prioritize children's learning needs and interests. In early childhood contexts, where play is a core developmental activity (Fleer, 2011), such misinterpretation may result in a disconnect between technological innovation and pedagogical appropriateness.

Research also highlights that effective implementation of SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) in early learning environments depends on contextual factors such as teacher beliefs, classroom culture, and the specific needs of young learners (Hamilton et al., 2016). For example, a substitution-level activity may still support children's agency and emergent skills when integrated intentionally within a play-based setting. Conversely, higher-level tasks like redefinition must not be pursued solely for their novelty but should be

rooted in sound pedagogical principles—such as promoting collaboration, creativity, and inquiry—that align with the developmental needs of young children (Falloon, 2013; Puentedura, 2014).

A significant challenge in applying the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) in early childhood is educator preparedness. Many teachers report lacking the confidence or training to implement higher-level SAMR activities effectively (Hamilton et al., 2016). Professional development programs that incorporate reflection, contextualization, and modeling of best practices are essential to bridge this gap. Mouza and Barrett-Greenly (2015) emphasize that such training should focus not only on technical proficiency but also on pedagogical reasoning, encouraging teachers to make thoughtful decisions about technology use.

Importantly, SAMR should not be treated as a ladder to be climbed but as a lens to guide decisions based on instructional goals and learner needs. As Puentedura (2014) himself noted, coupling SAMR with frameworks like Bloom's Taxonomy can encourage deeper reflection on learning goals, but educators must remain vigilant against equating more complex technologies with inherently better learning experiences.

While the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) provides a valuable tool for thinking about technology integration, its effectiveness in early childhood education depends on flexible, context-sensitive application. Educators should prioritize developmental appropriateness and pedagogical intent over hierarchical progression when implementing this framework. When aligned with play-based frameworks and supported through robust professional development, SAMR-informed integration can meaningfully enrich early learning environments (Hamilton et al., 2016; Puentedura, 2013, 2013b, 2014; Fler, 2011; Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015). This approach recognizes that meaningful technology integration in early childhood settings requires careful consideration of children's developmental needs and learning processes rather than simply pursuing higher levels of the SAMR hierarchy. Through thoughtful application of SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) principles within developmentally appropriate contexts, educators can create technology-enhanced experiences that truly support and extend children's natural learning through play.

Frameworks Specific to Early Childhood and Play-Based Contexts

Frameworks designed for early childhood and play-based learning environments must account for the distinct ways young children interact with digital technologies, as well as the pedagogical priorities of developmentally appropriate practice. Among the most prominent frameworks is the Digital Play Framework, developed by Bird and Edwards (2015), which integrates Vygotskian cultural-historical theory and Hutt's (1979) distinction between *epistemic* and *ludic* play. According to this model, children initially engage in exploratory digital interactions—classified as epistemic play—to investigate the features and affordances of a given technology. As they gain familiarity and control, their engagement transitions into ludic play, characterized by creative expression, narrative construction, and goal-directed activity.

This progression underscores the dual developmental value of digital exploration and imaginative engagement. The framework also reframes digital play not simply as a context for learning about technology but as a transformative dimension of play itself, where digital tools can enhance symbolic meaning-making. For example, a child might first explore a drawing app to understand its tools (epistemic phase) and later use it to create a storybook involving characters and events (ludic phase), thereby integrating the digital into their broader imaginative world (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

The Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015) aligns closely with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, viewing learning as a process of meaning construction through interaction with tools, environments, and peers. Research by Verenikina and Kervin (2011) further supports this view, showing that children's digital experiences often permeate their physical play environments. Children commonly draw on digital narratives and characters in their face-to-face social play, indicating a dynamic interplay between digital and non-digital modalities in meaning-making processes.

In parallel, Arnott's (2016) ecological exploration framework situates digital play within a broader social and environmental context. Based on an extensive observational study, Arnott demonstrated that young children's digital engagements are deeply shaped by peer collaboration, teacher mediation, and the physical learning environment. Digital play is seen not only as a cognitive or symbolic activity but also as a

social practice embedded in group dynamics and power relations. This ecological framing highlights the need for early childhood frameworks to accommodate both individual and collective aspects of technology-mediated learning.

Despite these theoretical advancements, gaps remain in the practical application of such frameworks. Plowman and Stephen (2005) found that while educators often allowed children to engage freely with digital tools in preschool settings, adult guidance was typically minimal. Children were expected to “play with the computer,” yet there were few structured interventions to scaffold learning. When adult-child interaction did occur—what they termed *guided interaction*—it significantly enhanced children’s engagement and learning outcomes. Their findings emphasize the need for frameworks that move beyond developmental trajectories and include actionable strategies for educators to support digital play through intentional pedagogical scaffolding.

Moreover, early concerns that digital technologies might displace imaginative play have largely shifted in scholarly discourse. Contemporary perspectives recognize digital literacy as an integral part of early learning, provided it is approached thoughtfully and within developmentally appropriate bounds (Bird & Edwards, 2015). The tension now lies in balancing traditional play values with the realities of a digital culture in which young children are immersed from an early age.

Effective frameworks for early childhood and play-based technology integration must be theoretically grounded, empirically supported, and practically applicable to ensure meaningful learning outcomes. These frameworks should reflect how children evolve from exploration to symbolic use of digital tools, recognize the permeability between digital and physical domains of play, and guide educators in providing supportive, intentional, and context-sensitive interactions. When these essential elements are successfully integrated, digital play becomes a productive and meaningful component of contemporary early childhood education (Amott, 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2017, 2015; Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Verenikina & Kervin, 2011). This comprehensive approach ensures that technology integration honors children’s natural learning processes while expanding opportunities for creative expression, collaborative inquiry, and conceptual development. Through careful attention to both theoretical foundations and

practical implementation, educators can create technology-enhanced environments that truly support holistic child development within play-based learning contexts.

Research-Supported Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Learning

Designing effective technology integration in play-based early childhood education requires a careful balance between developmental appropriateness, pedagogical intent, and meaningful engagement. Research in this field has highlighted multiple strategies that support young children's exploration, collaboration, and creativity when digital tools are intentionally embedded into play environments. These strategies encompass diverse approaches such as multimodal storytelling, sensory-rich technologies, immersive augmented and virtual reality experiences, collaborative digital play, scaffolded learning frameworks, and adaptive technologies tailored to individual needs (Arnott, 2016; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Marsh et al., 2016). The following sections synthesize these research-supported strategies, presenting evidence-based practices that help educators integrate technology in ways that enhance—not replace—the core qualities of play. Through these approaches, digital tools can serve as catalysts for curiosity, social connection, and hands-on learning experiences that align with children's natural ways of exploring the world.

Interactive and Multimodal Learning Approaches

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Play Digital storytelling and narrative play have become pivotal tools in technology-enhanced, play-based early childhood education. These practices allow children to co-construct stories through multimodal interaction, a process in which meaning is created and communicated through the coordinated use of multiple modes—such as touch-based gestures, spoken language, images, sounds, and movement—within a digital environment (Kress, 2009; Jewitt, 2013). For example, children may tap, swipe, or drag to animate narratives on a screen while simultaneously providing voice input for narration (Wohlwend, 2015). Such affordances of tablet technologies support the development of digital literacy while expanding children's opportunities for self-expression, aligning with constructivist

theories that emphasize active meaning-making through diverse semiotic modes (Kress, 2009; Wohlwend, 2015).

Research confirms the collaborative nature of digital storytelling, which can foster peer interaction, negotiation, and joint problem-solving. Tablet interfaces facilitate shared screen time, enabling co-construction of stories and encouraging children to alternate between authorship roles (Wohlwend, 2015). These interactions are enriched by features such as animation, audio layering, and image manipulation, which enhance narrative creativity and emotional control—particularly valuable when stories involve imaginative or intense content (Marsh et al., 2016).

Digital narratives often provide real-time feedback that helps children develop metacognitive awareness of narrative structure and decision-making. Tools that allow immediate revision or branching choices in storytelling support reflective thinking and autonomy. As such, they shift the role of children from passive recipients to active designers of story experiences, promoting engagement and motivation (Wohlwend, 2015; Yelland, 2018).

Educators assume a pivotal role in shaping children's engagement with digital storytelling by providing scaffolding that addresses both the operational mechanics and the creative communicative potential of the medium. Effective mediation involves scaffolding operational skills while allowing space for exploratory and creative play. Studies stress that focusing solely on digital fluency is insufficient; instead, pedagogical attention should center on fostering children's narrative dispositions and multimodal communication skills (Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Wohlwend, 2015).

Sensory Engagement and Multisensory Technologies Sensory engagement remains a cornerstone of early childhood development, closely tied to brain growth, language acquisition, and emotional regulation. Within this context, multisensory digital technologies refer to interactive tools that engage two or more senses simultaneously—such as touch, hearing, vision, and sometimes smell or proprioception—to support deeper cognitive processing and embodied learning experiences (Amott, 2016; Marshall & Homecker, 2013). These technologies offer new dimensions of interactive, sensory-rich learning. Technologies such as screen-free robotics, haptic feedback devices, and tangible user interfaces

invite children to engage touch, movement, sound, and sometimes smell to construct knowledge through embodied experiences (Arnott, 2016).

These technologies support collaborative and social learning by enabling multiple users to share, manipulate, and respond to digital tools in real-time. This is especially salient in play-based environments where negotiation and role distribution are key aspects of group dynamics (Yelland, 2018). According to Fleer (2011), sensory-rich digital environments should scaffold transitions between guided, spontaneous, and structured learning experiences to optimize both exploration and instruction.

Importantly, sensory learning tools must be implemented with developmental appropriateness in mind. Teachers require hands-on professional development that focuses on meaningful integration rather than novelty. This includes designing environments that combine traditional tactile materials with interactive media, thus honoring the sensory needs and cultural contexts of diverse learners (Arnott, 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2005).

Augmented and Virtual Reality Applications in Play Technologies like augmented and virtual reality are becoming influential in shaping how young children engage in play-centered learning environments (Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordey, 2017). These technologies enable immersive and embodied interactions, which enhance conceptual understanding by anchoring abstract knowledge in concrete, manipulable experiences. AR overlays digital content onto the real world, while VR immerses children in 3D simulations, allowing for deep engagement with narrative, spatial, and scientific content (Marsh et al., 2016; Yelland, 2018).

Applications of AR/VR in early childhood include interactive exploration of artworks, ecological systems simulations, and virtual construction tasks—all of which integrate multimodal elements such as sound, animation, and gesture-based input. These environments are not only cognitively stimulating but also supportive of emotional regulation and social collaboration (Danby et al., 2018; Wohlwend, 2015). AR and VR also demonstrate potential in inclusive education. Research has shown these tools can support students with intellectual disabilities by enabling scaffolded, game-based learning experiences—for example, simulating real-life routines like using an ATM (Marsh et al., 2016). Furthermore, child-friendly

programming platforms like CoSpaces Edu allow even young learners to design interactive 3D spaces, developing creativity and higher-order thinking without advanced coding requirements (Yelland, 2018).

However, effective implementation of AR/VR in early learning environments requires careful alignment with pedagogical goals and developmental needs. Educators must evaluate content for appropriateness, ensure a balanced mix of digital and hands-on activities, and promote access to quality resources across different socioeconomic backgrounds. Professional development and classroom support remain essential to realizing the transformative potential of immersive technologies in early childhood education (Amott, 2016; Wohlwend, 2015; Yelland, 2018).

Collaborative and Social Play with Technology

Peer Interaction and Shared Digital Experiences Peer interaction and shared digital experiences are increasingly recognized as integral components of technology-enhanced play-based learning in early childhood education. When young children engage with digital devices such as tablets or iPads, their interactions often mirror the collaborative and imaginative qualities of traditional play (Lawrence, 2017). Rather than being solitary users, children frequently converse, share ideas, negotiate roles, and assist one another during digital play. These collaborative moments include testing new apps, exploring features, and co-creating digital narratives—activities that support social skill development and peer bonding (Lawrence, 2017; Verenikina & Kervin, 2011).

The nature and quality of peer collaboration during digital play are influenced by both the design of technological tools and the pedagogical strategies employed by educators. Open-ended apps that encourage creative exploration often promote more diverse and sustained peer engagement. Through contingent interactions—responses that are sensitive to each child's input—young children acquire vocabulary and problem-solving abilities, highlighting the importance of social negotiation and co-construction of meaning, as emphasized in constructivist theory (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015).

Importantly, research has found that technology does not necessarily diminish traditional social behaviors. Studies show that cooperation, negotiation, and imaginative role-playing during shared device

use closely resemble those found in other centers of a play-based classroom (Lawrence, 2017).

Technology can serve as a powerful catalyst for joint attention and collective meaning-making, rather than causing social withdrawal. Educators play a vital role in guiding this process by modeling collaborative practices and fostering inclusive, supportive play contexts (Fleer, 2019).

Multimodal collaboration is further enabled through digital tools. For instance, students co-authoring multimedia stories can bring unique contributions to the collective project, enhancing their technological competence while also practicing communication, empathy, and emotional regulation. Cloud-based platforms extend this cooperation beyond the physical classroom, allowing children to see and value each other's input (Amott, 2016).

Developmentally appropriate app design is critical to ensuring these experiences are meaningful. Features that provide relevant feedback, avoid unnecessary distractions, and align with pedagogical goals support the coherence of shared digital interactions (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Equally, well-chosen tools create inclusive environments where learners of different backgrounds and abilities can engage meaningfully (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008).

While collaborative digital play offers numerous developmental benefits, educators and caregivers must also ensure that screen-based experiences complement rather than displace traditional physical and social play. Guidelines emphasize limiting digital media use and encouraging co-use with adults, thereby reinforcing the importance of social interaction and physical activity (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011).

Peer interaction around digital play supports key elements of social constructivist learning in early childhood by creating opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and shared problem-solving. When combined with thoughtful app selection and educator mediation, these shared digital experiences can foster collaborative learning while preserving the developmental richness that characterizes quality play (Amott, 2016; Fleer, 2019; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Lawrence, 2017; Verenikina & Kervin, 2011). This approach demonstrates how digital technologies can serve as mediational tools that enhance rather than replace the social dimensions of learning that are fundamental to early childhood development. Through careful orchestration of peer interactions within digital play contexts, educators can

harness technology's potential to deepen collaborative learning experiences and support children's natural tendency to learn through social engagement.

Online Platforms for Cooperative Play Online platforms for cooperative play are becoming increasingly relevant in early childhood education, offering both synchronous and asynchronous modalities for interaction. Tools such as Google Docs, digital storytelling apps, and simulations enable children to collaborate creatively, even across distances. These platforms support not just content delivery, but also the development of procedural and social knowledge (Blackwell et al., 2016).

The presence of tablets in classrooms has been associated with increased paired learning and self-directed creation activities. When supported by appropriate digital tools and pedagogical planning, such technologies can become catalysts for cooperative learning (Palaiologou, 2014). However, success depends on school-level support and the intentional selection of apps that promote group engagement rather than solo consumption (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014).

The Digital Play Framework offers a developmental lens for understanding how children's interactions with digital platforms evolve from exploration to symbolic and collaborative play (Bird & Edwards, 2015). This progression requires adult guidance to scaffold engagement, ensuring that play remains age-appropriate and socially enriching. Educators must allocate time and resources to facilitate these interactions and observe children's collaborative processes.

Concerns about reduced peer interaction due to screen time have been mitigated by findings that, when integrated with pedagogical intention, digital platforms enhance collaboration rather than hinder it (Wood et al., 2008). For example, children working together in digital storytelling tasks must negotiate roles, share decision-making, and co-construct narratives, closely mirroring traditional forms of social play (Palaiologou, 2014).

Yet challenges remain, particularly concerning consistent access to technology. Without addressing disparities in internet connectivity or device availability, efforts to promote cooperative digital play may unintentionally widen existing gaps (Amott, 2016). Moreover, software must be selected with care to avoid surveillance-based features or designs that limit inclusion.

Researches demonstrate that teachers who conceptualize technology as an essential element of constructivist learning environments, rather than simply as a supplement, achieve more meaningful integration outcomes (Blackwell et al., 2016; Ertmer et al., 2012; Hermans et al., 2008; Judson, 2006). This perspective requires ongoing professional development in digital pedagogy and thoughtful integration of collaborative tasks (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014). Furthermore, researchers advocate for studying digital play in naturalistic school and community settings, to better understand how these environments shape children's social learning (Arnott, 2016).

Online platforms hold significant potential for enriching cooperative play within early learning environments, particularly when they are broadly accessible, grounded in sound pedagogy, and designed to foster meaningful social connections in digital contexts (Arnott, 2016; Blackwell et al., 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2015; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014; Palaiologou, 2014; Wood et al., 2008). The success of these digital cooperative experiences depends heavily on educators' ability to create inclusive environments where all children can participate meaningfully, regardless of their technological background or access to devices. By thoughtfully integrating online platforms into play-based curricula, educators can expand the boundaries of traditional cooperative play while maintaining the essential social and collaborative elements that support children's development across multiple domains.

Technology-Mediated Communication and Social Skills Technology-mediated communication plays a growing role in shaping children's social skills, especially in collaborative and play-based settings. Digital tools such as blogs, wikis, and photo-sharing platforms allow children to co-create content, share experiences, and engage in communal meaning-making (Arnott, 2016).

During technology-mediated dramatic play, children coordinate actions, clarify ideas, and assume group roles. These interactions promote language development and mirror adult conversational structures, enhancing social cognition and negotiation skills (Danby et al., 2018). As children manage turn-taking, problem-solving, and expressive behaviors in digital tasks, they gain competencies in communication and collaboration (Edwards, 2013).

Digital environments also foster ethical and socially responsible behavior. Projects involving multimedia creation or remote peer collaboration help children consider attribution, positive online conduct, and mutual respect—key elements of digital citizenship (Polly et al., 2010). By participating in digitally mediated communities, children develop perspective-taking skills and cultural awareness through diverse, shared experiences.

From a pedagogical standpoint, digital communication must be intentionally guided to ensure developmental alignment. A relational model of digital pedagogy highlights the interplay between child agency and educator mediation (Fleer, 2019). Teachers can support social goals by modeling communication strategies, encouraging reflective dialogue, and creating opportunities for shared evaluation of digital group work.

However, for these benefits to be realized, educators must receive adequate training in both the technical and pedagogical aspects of technology use. Frameworks such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) support this dual focus, preparing teachers to scaffold children's social experiences within digital environments (Polly et al., 2010).

A balanced approach remains essential. While digital tools offer powerful avenues for social learning, they must be integrated alongside traditional play to support holistic development. A technoeological perspective emphasizes that children's social experiences are shaped by interconnected factors such as family, community, and policy (Arnott, 2016).

Technology-mediated communication demonstrates significant potential for enriching young children's social development when implemented with careful pedagogical consideration and developmental awareness. The effectiveness of these digital communication experiences relies on the strategic coordination of multimodal tools and evidence-based pedagogical strategies that work together to support children's active participation, meaningful relationship-building, and collaborative problem-solving across both digital and physical learning spaces (Arnott, 2016; Danby et al., 2018; Edwards, 2013; Fleer, 2019; Polly et al., 2010). This integrated approach ensures that technology serves as a bridge rather than a

barrier to social connection, enabling children to develop essential communication skills while engaging with peers and adults in authentic, purposeful interactions that span multiple modalities and contexts.

Scaffolded Technology Experiences and Differentiation

Gradual Release of Responsibility in Digital Play The gradual release of responsibility (GRR) framework offers a developmentally responsive approach to technology integration in early childhood, transitioning learners from adult-supported to autonomous digital engagement. Grounded in constructivist learning theory, GRR positions children as active meaning-makers who benefit from scaffolded interactions tailored to their unique developmental trajectories (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Amott (2016) frames early childhood classrooms as techno-ecological systems where digital play emerges through the complex interplay of cultural practices, educator intentions, and child agency. Within this dynamic, GRR manifests as educators calibrate their involvement—initially modeling and guiding use of open-ended apps, then stepping back to encourage peer interaction and self-directed exploration. This shifting of responsibility is not linear but contingent, requiring practitioners to remain responsive to both group dynamics and individual readiness (Amott, 2016).

Yelland (2018) reinforces this view by advocating for pedagogies that blend guided participation with learner autonomy in digital contexts. For instance, when children explore touchscreen apps collaboratively, initial adult co-participation sets expectations for turn-taking and shared control. As confidence grows, educators reduce their presence, allowing children to lead creative or problem-solving endeavors (Yelland, 2018). Lawrence (2018) similarly documents how preschoolers' iPad play evolves from teacher-structured sessions into spontaneous, peer-supported learning episodes characterized by negotiation and self-regulation.

However, researchers caution that premature withdrawal of adult support may result in exclusionary peer dynamics or disengagement, particularly when digital tools are not thoughtfully designed or implemented to support broad participation (Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Thus, the effective implementation of GRR requires teachers to observe closely and intervene strategically, scaffolding not

only operational skills but also social and communicative competencies essential to collaborative digital play.

Teacher Facilitation and Guidance Teacher facilitation is pivotal in creating developmentally appropriate digital play experiences. Rather than acting as mere supervisors of screen time, effective educators serve as intentional designers and adaptive guides who align technology use with pedagogical goals and children's diverse needs (Plowman & Stephen, 2007; Wood et al., 2008).

Fleer (2019) emphasizes the relational dimension of facilitation, arguing that teachers must co-construct learning environments with children by integrating digital tools into meaningful play scenarios. In her research on collaborative slowmotion projects, Fleer observed that educators mediated peer interactions, supported narrative development, and encouraged multimodal expression without dominating the process—showcasing a fluid and responsive model of teacher engagement.

Blackwell et al. (2016) report that teachers who adopt student-centered beliefs are more likely to use tablets to differentiate instruction and extend play-based learning. These teachers emphasize child agency, provide choice, and scaffold engagement through tools that align with children's interests and home literacies. Their role encompasses curating apps, adapting content complexity, and facilitating dialogue around digital activities.

Polly et al. (2009) advocate for sustained professional development that equips teachers with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) required to navigate this complexity. Programs that incorporate mentoring, modeling, and reflective inquiry have shown to enhance early childhood educators' confidence and competence in using digital tools to support diverse learners.

Additionally, Wood et al. (2008) highlight the importance of redesigning classroom layouts, routines, and assessment strategies when integrating technology. Effective facilitation involves balancing structured objectives with open-ended exploration, ensuring broad access to digital resources, and maintaining a healthy mix between screen-based and hands-on learning experiences.

Adaptive Technologies for Individualized Learning Adaptive technologies offer flexible, responsive learning opportunities that accommodate children’s individual profiles and evolving needs. Drawing on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), these technologies promote inclusion by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Daley, & Rose, 2013).

Mouza and Barrett-Greenly (2015) argue that apps with embedded scaffolds—such as adjustable difficulty levels and personalized feedback—can reinforce skill development while honoring the constructivist principle of learner agency. These features allow children to explore content at their own pace, make choices, and receive just-in-time guidance, mimicking effective adult scaffolding in digital environments.

Neumann and Neumann (2014) highlight the value of touchscreen tablets in emergent literacy development, particularly when apps adapt content complexity based on user interaction. In their study, children used drawing and phonics apps to construct meaning through multimodal practices that combined visuals, touch, and auditory cues. These interactions supported both literacy acquisition and symbolic representation.

Guided play pedagogies align well with adaptive technologies. Weisberg et al. (2013) describe guided play as an instructional mode in which adults set up enriched environments and provide subtle cues while allowing children to direct the flow of activity. Adaptive digital tools can extend this model by providing individualized prompts or scaffolds that respond to each child’s interests and performance in real-time.

Ensuring inclusive access remains a central concern. While mobile devices offer potential for closing gaps in access, disparities in funding, educator expertise, and institutional infrastructure still constrain the widespread and inclusive deployment of adaptive tools (Plowman & Stephen, 2007; Wood et al., 2008). To address this Bird and Edwards (2015) call for school-wide support systems, ongoing professional development, and policy efforts that prioritize access to high-quality adaptive technologies.

The integration of digital technologies in early childhood education benefits significantly from scaffolded approaches that align with developmental and constructivist principles. The Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model emphasizes transitioning from adult-guided to child-initiated digital

engagement, fostering autonomy and active learning (Arnott, 2016; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Central to this process is the teacher's role as a facilitator who intentionally selects tools, supports collaborative play, and adapts strategies to meet diverse learner needs (Blackwell et al., 2016; Flear, 2019). Adaptive technologies further enhance individualized learning by offering flexible pathways aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), allowing children to engage through varied modalities and levels of support (Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015; Yu et al., 2021). Collectively, these strategies emphasize the need for thoughtful implementation, strong educator guidance, and a commitment to reaching all learners so that technology supports rather than supplants play-centered developmental learning.

Developmentally Appropriate Digital Tools and Resources

Criteria for Selecting Age-Appropriate Technologies Selecting age-appropriate technologies in play-based early childhood education involves consideration of developmental, pedagogical, and contextual factors to ensure that digital tools align with children's cognitive, social, and emotional needs. According to the 2012 guidance from NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center, digital tools should be used in ways that nurture children's growth, learning, and social connections. Visual activities and multimodal tools help connect abstract ideas to real-world contexts, promoting collaboration, exploration, and the demonstration of competence across sensory modalities (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Kress, 2009).

Developmentally appropriate technologies promote playful learning, whether guided by adults or independently explored by children. Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2008) and Marsh et al. (2016) suggest that playful contexts foster flexible experimentation and knowledge construction. For example, tablets equipped with drawing or storytelling applications can offer open-ended, creative opportunities, mirroring the qualities of free play (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). When children explore unfamiliar digital tools, they often engage in epistemic play—testing the functions of technology—before transitioning into ludic play where they use the tool symbolically (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

A crucial selection criterion is adaptability—tools must accommodate diverse developmental levels and be customizable to provide challenge and support as needed (Falloon, 2013; Wood et al., 2008).

Effective apps embed scaffolding such as modeling and feedback, which promotes engagement and deeper learning. Educators orchestrate play to match digital content with children's existing abilities and growth zones (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Context also shapes the effectiveness of digital technologies. Integrating them into existing play environments (e.g., adding tablets to dramatic play centers) ensures that tools extend rather than displace traditional activities (Wohlwend, 2015; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This encourages multimodal expression and collaboration, especially when digital resources support constructivist practices—those that are active, engaging, and socially mediated (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012; Jonassen, Carr, & Yueh, 1998).

Guided play, where educators provide structure while allowing autonomy, is most effective when digital tools respond dynamically to children's interests (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Weisberg et al., 2013). Importantly, tools should not enforce rigid pathways or single correct answers, as developmentally appropriate practice emphasizes multiple valid responses. Excessive emphasis on direct instruction without room for exploratory play can suppress creativity and dampen enthusiasm for learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008).

Practical considerations—such as fine motor compatibility, usability, cultural relevance, and inclusivity—are also vital (Edwards, 2013; Marsh et al., 2016). Technologies must be physically accessible, emotionally supportive, and culturally meaningful. As children increasingly participate in virtual economies or narrative-based digital environments, reflection on how technologies mediate both present experiences and future preparedness becomes imperative (Edwards, 2013).

Effective technology selection for early childhood education requires careful consideration of tools that are developmentally appropriate, support playful engagement, offer adaptability, and align with constructivist learning principles while encouraging creativity, inclusive access, and engagement across multiple modalities (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Falloon, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Plowman & Stephen, 2007; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This comprehensive approach to technology selection ensures that digital tools serve as meaningful extensions of children's natural learning processes rather than isolated technological experiences that disconnect from core developmental

principles. When educators apply these selection criteria systematically, they create learning environments where technology enhances rather than replaces the hands-on, imaginative, and socially rich experiences that characterize high-quality early childhood education, ultimately supporting all children's access to engaging and developmentally meaningful digital learning opportunities.

Evaluation of Apps, Games, and Interactive Media The evaluation of apps, games, and interactive media in play-based early childhood education must go beyond superficial engagement features to assess alignment with developmental theory, constructivist pedagogy, and social learning opportunities. High-quality digital tools should support active, meaningful, and collaborative experiences. According to Arnott (2016), the nature of children's digital play is fluid and socially situated, influenced by peer interactions, educator facilitation, and contextual design features. Marsh et al. (2015) observe that while many apps are designed for individual use, collaborative engagement often depends on intentional design or adult mediation, as most children tend to interact with apps in solitary or parallel play unless scaffolding promotes shared participation.

Effective evaluation begins with analyzing whether a digital resource enables diverse forms of social interaction—ranging from fleeting individual engagement to sustained cooperative play. Arnott (2016) emphasizes that cooperative play with technology is contingent on both app design and adult facilitation, which mediate the extent to which children co-construct meaning. Evaluators must therefore assess how digital tools foster or constrain modes of participation, communication, and peer collaboration.

Developmentally appropriate apps must also allow for exploration, creativity, and open-ended inquiry rather than passive consumption (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). Tools that support problem-solving, representational thinking, or artifact creation—such as those allowing children to draw, build, or narrate—align closely with constructivist approaches (Howland et al., 2012; Jonassen, Carr, & Yueh, 1998). Mouza and Barrett-Greenly (2015) argue that meaningful learning occurs when children manipulate variables and construct knowledge through multimodal digital engagement.

Inclusivity is another key consideration. Not all learners interact with digital tools in the same way. Children with disabilities may find some digital content inaccessible or overwhelming (Plowman & Stephen,

2005), and apps that rely heavily on fine motor control, symbolic interpretation, or socio-dramatic elements may pose barriers (Amott, 2016). Evaluators must critically assess how apps accommodate diverse needs, including accessibility features, flexible modes of input, and culturally responsive content.

Concerns have also been raised about digital tools' limitations in supporting sensory-rich, embodied experiences. Palaiologou (2016) notes that screens cannot replicate the full multisensory environment children experience in physical play—such as touching water or hearing birdsong. Therefore, technology should complement rather than replace sensory-rich learning, ensuring that digital play enhances rather than restricts real-world engagement.

Evaluation frameworks such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) offer structures for assessing technology integration, but must be applied critically. Merely substituting traditional materials with digital tools does not guarantee improvement. Instead, meaningful transformation occurs when apps reconfigure learning experiences to include interaction, reflection, and creativity (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Puentedura, 2014).

Finally, continuous reflection and formative evaluation are essential. Arnott (2016) advocates for iterative observation to identify how children actually use technology in practice. Qualitative methods—such as observational data, teacher reflections, and child interviews—offer rich insights into whether digital tools are achieving intended learning outcomes.

Effective evaluation of apps, games, and interactive media in early childhood settings demands comprehensive consideration of multiple critical factors, including developmental appropriateness, constructivist potential, inclusivity, multimodal engagement, social participation, and alignment with pedagogical goals. Rather than selecting digital tools based solely on novelty or entertainment value, educators must prioritize resources that demonstrate clear potential for supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and creative growth within rich, play-based learning contexts (Amott, 2016; Clark & Mayer, 2016; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Jonassen, Carr, & Yueh, 1998; Marsh et al., 2015; Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015; Palaiologou, 2014; Puentedura, 2013;). This systematic evaluation approach ensures that technology serves as a meaningful catalyst for learning rather than a superficial addition to the

curriculum, ultimately creating digital experiences that honor children's natural ways of exploring, creating, and making sense of their world through interactive and collaborative engagement.

Integration of Coding and Robotics in Play The integration of coding and robotics into play-based early childhood education offers developmentally rich opportunities when aligned with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning. These technologies are most effective when they support hands-on, exploratory learning that is embedded in meaningful play contexts. Rather than positioning coding as a rigid skill set, effective implementation involves framing coding and robotics as creative tools for problem-solving, inquiry, and collaboration (Howland et al., 2012; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). For example, when children program a robot to navigate a path they designed, they engage in computational thinking, spatial reasoning, and narrative construction, all within a playful and developmentally appropriate setting (Yelland & Gilbert, 2017).

A key principle in developmentally appropriate technology integration is the tailoring of coding and robotics activities to children's interests, abilities, and social contexts. Projects must be flexible and varied in complexity to allow inclusive participation. Blackwell et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of offering roles suited to different developmental stages and communication styles, particularly for multilingual learners and children with diverse abilities. Multimodal approaches—such as combining tactile robotics kits with visual storytelling or physical construction—allow children to express understanding through multiple channels, enhancing engagement and accessibility (Yelland & Gilbert, 2018).

Guided interaction and adult mediation are essential for productive engagement with robotics in early learning environments. Plowman and Stephen (2007) highlight the role of "guided interaction," where educators support children's digital play through demonstration, co-participation, and nonverbal cues. This scaffolding helps children build confidence and agency as they navigate new technologies. Unlike direct instruction, guided interaction values children's initiative and fosters co-construction of knowledge—a core element of constructivist pedagogy (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978).

Integrating robotics within broader thematic or project-based curricula deepens its pedagogical value. When coding activities are embedded in imaginative play—such as designing a robotic mail carrier

within a pretend post office—children make interdisciplinary connections across literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning (Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This approach not only sustains children’s interest but also reinforces real-world relevance and contextualized meaning-making.

Educator preparation and inclusive access are also critical to effective implementation. According to Blackwell et al. (2016), teacher attitudes and self-efficacy significantly influence how and whether coding and robotics are adopted. Professional development must go beyond technical training to include pedagogical strategies for integrating these tools into play-based curricula in ways that honor young children’s developmental needs. Moreover, ensuring access to appropriate materials and the use of inclusive design features is essential to prevent deepening existing disparities (Amott, 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

The integration of coding and robotics in early childhood education achieves optimal success when these technologies are embedded within inclusive, play-rich environments that prioritize exploration, collaboration, and creative expression. When these digital tools are thoughtfully aligned with constructivist learning theory and supported through responsive teaching practices, they demonstrate remarkable potential for fostering diverse learning outcomes that span from computational literacy to social-emotional development, all while preserving play as the central organizing principle of early education (Blackwell et al., 2016; Howland et al., 2012; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Plowman & Stephen, 2007; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This approach transforms coding and robotics from isolated technical skills into meaningful learning experiences that connect with children’s natural curiosity and desire to understand how things work, creating opportunities for deep engagement that bridges the digital and physical worlds through hands-on exploration and collaborative problem-solving.

Learning Theories and Their Alignment with Technology Integration Strategies in Play-Based Learning

Understanding how children learn in early childhood settings is fundamental to designing meaningful and developmentally appropriate uses of technology in play-based learning environments.

Learning theories provide essential insights into the processes through which young learners acquire knowledge, interact with others, and make sense of their experiences. Grounding technology integration strategies in these theoretical perspectives ensures that digital tools enhance rather than replace the natural ways children learn through exploration, creativity, and social interaction (Bandura, 2001; Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Marsh et al., 2015). The following discussion focuses on three key areas: Constructivist Theory and Digital Play, which examines how children actively build knowledge through interaction with digital tools; Social Learning Theory in Technology-Supported Play, which highlights the role of observation, modeling, and collaboration in digitally mediated learning; and Connections Between the Theories and Specific Integration Strategies, which demonstrates how these perspectives converge to guide intentional, evidence-based approaches for integrating technology into play-based education.

Constructivist Theory and Digital Play

Constructivist theory, particularly as articulated through social constructivism and cognitive constructivism, offers a well-grounded conceptual basis for examining how digital play contributes to early learning experiences. Central to constructivism is the idea that learners actively build knowledge through interaction with their environment, rather than passively absorbing information (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). In digital contexts, this necessitates technologies that foster inquiry, experimentation, and collaboration—allowing children to construct meaning rather than merely consume content (Jonassen, 1999). Digital tools aligned with these principles enable children to manipulate virtual environments, create stories, and collaboratively solve problems, thereby facilitating experiential and discovery learning (Jonassen, 1999; Marsh et al., 2015).

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development and Bruner's (1966) theory of discovery learning support the idea that adults or peers can scaffold children's digital play experiences to extend learning. Such scaffolding is evident in educational software that includes interactive prompts, modeling, or peer-to-peer feedback (Jonassen, 1999; Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Additionally, digital environments designed as “microworlds” or simulations—concepts championed by Papert (1993)—allow

children to test hypotheses and engage in iterative problem-solving, thereby fostering deep conceptual understanding and creative exploration.

Children's creative expression during digital play also reflects constructivist ideals. Apps that allow children to draw, compose music, or animate stories support personal meaning-making and divergent thinking—key goals of constructivist learning (Marsh et al., 2015; Papert, 1993). Furthermore, when digital play occurs in social contexts, it supports cognitive growth through language use, negotiation, and shared problem-solving, echoing Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the social origins of cognition (Amott, 2016; Lawrence, 2018).

Educators play a critical role in guiding these experiences, selecting developmentally appropriate digital tools and facilitating connections between children's digital activities and broader conceptual knowledge (Fleer, 2011; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is particularly useful for supporting teachers in designing constructivist-aligned digital experiences, as it emphasizes the interplay between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge. However, consistent access to high-quality digital tools and sustained professional development remain challenges (Blackwell et al., 2016). To address these concerns, professional learning should focus on how to use technology to enhance inquiry-based instruction and support diverse learners (Fosnot & Perry, 2005).

Constructivist theory offers a compelling theoretical foundation for understanding how digital play can be meaningfully integrated into early childhood education in ways that honor children's natural learning processes. When implemented with pedagogical intentionality and developmental awareness, digital technologies transcend their role as mere delivery mechanisms to become dynamic environments where young children actively construct knowledge through exploration, creativity, collaboration, and guided reflection (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Papert, 1993; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Jonassen, 1999; Marsh et al., 2015;). This constructivist approach positions children as active agents in their learning journey, using digital tools to experiment with ideas, test hypotheses, and build understanding through hands-on engagement that mirrors the fundamental principles of how young minds naturally develop and grow within supportive, interactive learning communities.

Social Learning Theory in Technology-Supported Play

Social learning theory, as developed by Bandura (2001), emphasizes that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling in social contexts, with individuals actively shaping and being shaped by their environment. In early childhood settings, where play and exploration dominate the learning landscape, technology-supported play offers fertile ground for social learning by enabling children to engage with peers and adults in collaborative, mediated experiences. As Buckingham (2013) notes, digital media are not isolated instructional tools but are embedded within broader social practices that shape children's identity and learning.

Plowman and Stephen (2007) argue that the educational potential of technology in early years lies not in the device itself, but in the interaction among the child, the adult, and the technological artifact. Their "guided interaction" framework positions learning as a co-constructed process, where thinking and doing emerge through dialogic and relational engagement with others. This sociocultural orientation situates digital play within the broader ecology of social participation and shared meaning-making, reinforcing Bandura's (2001) agentic view of learners as co-participants in shaping their environments.

Further supporting this view, Neumann and Neumann (2014) found that integrating digital tools such as tablets into early childhood classrooms fostered communication, collaborative problem-solving, and literacy development, particularly when children worked in pairs or small groups. These findings highlight how technology can provide shared spaces for observation, turn-taking, and joint attention—core processes in social learning. Similarly, Arnott (2016) observed that digital play often unfolds in layered social contexts where children negotiate roles, challenge norms, and co-author digital narratives, offering opportunities to practice social-emotional skills in situ.

The role of educators in facilitating such social learning is critical. Park and Hargis (2018) describe how teachers' technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) evolves through reflective practice, as they observe children's digital interactions and adapt tools and strategies to enhance collaborative engagement.

This adaptive expertise is essential for ensuring that digital media promote inclusive participation rather than reinforcing solitary or passive behaviors.

Moreover, intentional technology integration within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012) requires educators to consider each child's cultural and linguistic background. Technology use should be embedded in socially meaningful contexts that reflect children's lived experiences and foster peer learning, rather than being treated as a separate instructional tool. Social learning theory thereby offers a robust theoretical lens for understanding how technology-supported play, when guided appropriately, can foster both cognitive and interpersonal growth in early childhood.

Connections Between the Theories and Specific Integration Strategies

Effectively integrating technology into play-based early childhood education requires a thoughtful convergence of constructivist theory, developmental principles, and practical instructional frameworks such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). At the heart of this approach is the design of student-centered learning environments (SCLs) that foster authentic, inquiry-driven, and contextually meaningful experiences. These environments promote active engagement with digital and physical materials, encourage peer collaboration, and support children's individual perspectives and exploratory learning paths (Jonassen & Land, 2012). Grounded in the belief that knowledge is constructed through interaction and discovery, this perspective aligns with constructivist assumptions that learning unfolds through meaningful play and guided exploration (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Papert, 1993).

Play, as a core developmental activity, offers a natural setting for integrating digital tools that support memory, language, communication, and symbolic representation. When thoughtfully selected, technologies can enhance these competencies by providing opportunities for children to experiment, reflect, and share ideas in meaningful ways (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Guided interaction frameworks demonstrate how adult mediation—whether through modeling, questioning, or

collaborative participation—can support children’s learning during digital play while remaining responsive to individual needs and classroom contexts (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

The TPACK framework complements constructivist perspectives by emphasizing that effective technology integration depends on the dynamic interplay between technological tools, pedagogical methods, and content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Instead of advocating for a uniform method applicable to all contexts, TPACK encourages teachers to develop adaptive strategies customized to accommodate a wide range of individual learning preferences and abilities and to reflect on their practice as part of ongoing professional growth. For instance, incorporating multimodal tools such as video, digital art, or coding apps can align with children’s developmental stages while fostering creativity, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary thinking (Papert, 1993; Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Practical integration strategies grounded in theory include bridging home and school experiences, designing leveled digital challenges, facilitating child-led exploration with educator support, and using varied forms of assessment to capture children’s learning across modalities (Amott, 2016; Yelland & Gilbert, 2017). These approaches demonstrate a commitment to holistic development by intentionally balancing screen-based activities with tactile, imaginative, and socially interactive forms of play, ensuring all children have opportunities to benefit from diverse learning experiences (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Neumann & Neumann, 2014). At the same time, professional development must equip educators with both technical fluency and pedagogical judgment to make informed decisions about when and how to use technology effectively (Park & Hargis, 2018).

Finally, integrating theory with practice requires flexible research methodologies that can account for evolving tools and emergent learning outcomes. As Jonassen and Land (2012) suggest, learning environments must remain open to revision and innovation, especially as new technologies afford different forms of interaction and representation. By grounding technology integration in constructivist theory and applying frameworks like TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) within guided interaction models, early childhood educators can foster meaningful, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive learning experiences for all children.

Barriers and Facilitators to Effective Technology Integration in Play-Based Learning

Preparing educators to effectively integrate technology in play-based early childhood education requires more than familiarity with digital tools. Successful implementation depends on a deep understanding of how technology can complement child-centered pedagogies and foster meaningful, developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014; Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Research shows that while access to hardware and software is essential, the true challenge lies in equipping teachers with the skills, confidence, and reflective practices needed to use technology purposefully within play-rich environments (Blackwell et al., 2016; Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015). Professional development must therefore go beyond technical training, focusing on pedagogical application, culturally responsive strategies, and long-term support systems that help educators navigate evolving digital landscapes (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Polly, 2011). This section explores the essential components of teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning that support effective and inclusive technology use in early childhood classrooms.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Training Needs for Effective Technology Integration Effective technology integration in play-based early childhood education hinges on comprehensive educator training that prioritizes pedagogical application over technical proficiency. Research emphasizes that familiarity with hardware or software alone is insufficient; educators must understand how to apply digital tools within constructivist and developmentally appropriate frameworks to enhance child-centered learning (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Training should focus on integrating technology in ways that foster inquiry, creativity, and cognitive development rather than replacing traditional forms of play (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Professional development must support educators in aligning technology with learning goals through documentation, individualized instruction, and facilitation of multimodal learning experiences. This involves scaffolding children's digital literacy and helping them navigate educational media in socially and

culturally responsive ways (Blackwell et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2008). Moreover, effective training programs address barriers such as time constraints, limited access to digital infrastructure, and inadequate technical support (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014).

Teacher attitudes also significantly shape technology integration outcomes. Educators with constructivist pedagogies are more inclined to adopt technology for open-ended inquiry and collaboration, while those with didactic tendencies may favor skill-based software (Blackwell et al., 2016). Therefore, training must include reflective components that help teachers interrogate their beliefs and reshape their instructional vision (Hew & Brush, 2007; Plowman & Stephen, 2007). These reflective spaces support attitudinal shifts from perceiving technology as a supplement to viewing it as a transformative learning tool.

Models such as TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provide a useful structure for supporting these training goals. The framework underscores the need for integrated knowledge across technological, pedagogical, and content domains (Koehler et al., 2014), allowing educators to make nuanced decisions based on learner needs, contextual realities, and developmental appropriateness (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Ongoing Support and Reflective Practice Sustained professional development, mentorship, and reflective practice are foundational for long-term success in technology integration. Teachers benefit most when professional learning is ongoing and embedded in real classroom contexts, supported by collaboration with peers through professional learning communities or lesson study models (Polly, 2011; Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015). Such collaborative environments promote shared inquiry, experimentation, and capacity-building through regular observation, feedback, and joint reflection on technology use.

Reflective practice enables educators to assess their instructional choices, understand their learners' responses, and refine their use of digital tools in alignment with pedagogical principles. This process may be guided by structured tools such as video analysis, self-assessment rubrics, or professional learning portfolios (Blackwell et al., 2016; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014). Reflection helps reconcile

tensions between screen-based play and traditional interactions by fostering intentional and developmentally appropriate implementation.

Mentorship during initial technology use is also critical. Support staff and expert peers help scaffold educators' early experiences and encourage risk-taking with new tools. When professional development is aligned with teachers' preexisting beliefs and instructional needs, it is more likely to result in meaningful, sustained changes (Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Integration across preservice preparation, methods courses, and fieldwork further reinforces the centrality of digital literacy in contemporary teaching (Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015).

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Competencies of Early Childhood Educators The beliefs and competencies of early childhood educators play a pivotal role in determining how technology is adopted and used within play-based curricula. Educators with progressive, constructivist views are more likely to use digital tools to support collaboration and creativity, while more traditional educators may restrict technology to rote functions (Blackwell et al., 2016). These underlying pedagogical beliefs influence not only what tools are chosen but how they are used during play.

Competence in educational technology includes more than operational skills; it requires the ability to select, adapt, and evaluate digital tools through the lens of developmental appropriateness and curricular relevance. The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) clarifies this intersection by showing that true expertise lies in the ability to integrate child development theory, pedagogical knowledge, and technology design into meaningful instruction (Koehler et al., 2014).

Concerns around the social impacts of screen time—such as reduced eye contact or disrupted conversational turn-taking—have led some educators to resist digital integration (Plowman et al., 2007). These concerns underscore the need for critical reflection and training in socially supportive uses of technology. For instance, tools designed to foster group problem-solving or joint media engagement can counteract these issues when carefully implemented (Blackwell et al., 2014).

Teacher preparation programs vary in how thoroughly they address these issues. Many preservice educators report limited exposure to research-based models for using technology with young learners

(Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015). Professional development must therefore create spaces for examining how beliefs about play, child development, and technology intersect, while policy frameworks must support consistent expectations and practical guidance for classroom use (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Advancing effective and inclusive technology integration in early childhood education requires comprehensive attention to the complex interplay among educators' attitudes, their pedagogical competencies, sustained professional learning opportunities, and culturally responsive instructional design practices. These interconnected elements work together to create the foundation necessary for meaningful technology integration that truly serves children's developmental needs. Educator support systems that are both theoretically grounded and responsive to the realities of classroom practice play a crucial role in ensuring that digital tools function as enhancers rather than obstacles to play-based developmental learning. Through this holistic approach to educator preparation and support, technology integration can achieve its potential to create more inclusive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences that honor both the possibilities of digital innovation and the enduring principles of quality early childhood education.

Disparities in Access, Participation, and Representation in Digital Play-Based Learning

Digital Access Gaps and Infrastructure Challenges Persistent digital divides and uneven distribution of resources continue to pose major barriers to inclusive and consistent integration of technology in play-based early childhood education. Although digital devices and internet connectivity have become more widespread, significant gaps persist—especially among children from lower-income households. As Mouza and Barrett-Greenly (2015) reported, only 61% of lower-income families in the United States owned a mobile internet-enabled device, compared to 91% of higher-income families. This gap is more pronounced for tablets, with ownership at 20% and 63% respectively. Moreover, the “app gap” reveals a significant disparity: only 35% of lower-income parents had downloaded educational apps for their children, in contrast to 75% among higher-income families. These statistics reveal that disparities

encompass both access and quality of digital engagement, limiting children's opportunities to benefit from developmentally appropriate, play-based digital learning.

Beyond ownership, meaningful digital inclusion also depends on critical infrastructural and human factors – such as broadband availability, affordability, access to technical support, and opportunities for digital literacy development. Rowsell, Morrell, and Alvermann (2017) pointed out that idealized notions of children as “digital natives” can mask the significant disparities that influence how young learners access and engage with digital technologies. Many children, especially from rural or low-income communities, lack foundational exposure to digital literacies. These gaps are not limited to hardware; they reflect broader disparities in access to content that is linguistically and culturally appropriate and to environments that support digital resilience and critical engagement (Rowsell et al., 2017).

Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) emphasizes that access alone – particularly within school settings – does not necessarily reflect the quality or inclusiveness of students' digital learning experiences. Disparities in the pedagogical uses of technology—how and for what purposes it is integrated—often correlate with race, socioeconomic status, and teacher preparedness. Similarly, Judge et al. (2006) found that despite federal investments such as the No Child Left Behind initiative, wide variations in meaningful computer use persist. These findings align with the view that access must be reconceptualized beyond mere presence of devices to include the capacity to use them for learning, exploration, and collaboration (Warschauer, 2011).

Addressing these disparities also requires recognizing cultural contexts and leveraging community engagement. Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2008) argued for greater investment in family and community partnerships to support digital play and emphasized outreach to build awareness of the value of play-based learning with technology. Similarly, Rowsell et al. (2017) advocated for a shift in focus from technological tools to the multimodal literacy practices they enable, particularly for marginalized learners whose literacies often go unrecognized in formal educational settings.

Public education systems play a crucial role in bridging these divides. However, systemic inequalities remain entrenched, necessitating comprehensive strategies across infrastructure, policy,

educator development, and cultural responsiveness (Bird & Edwards, 2015). Effort to expand the benefits of educational technology will remain limited without strategic investments in connectivity, device availability, instructional support, and curriculum that reflects the needs of all learners.

Access and Pedagogy in Digital Play-Based Learning Achieving inclusive and effective technology integration in play-based learning environments demands attention to both access-related infrastructure and the pedagogical conditions necessary for success. A foundational strategy is improving school-based access through flexible deployment models. For instance, mobile laptop carts and wireless connectivity can help schools achieve one-to-one student-to-device ratios without incurring the high costs associated with fixed computer labs, thereby enabling contextualized technology use within varied classroom activities (Hew & Brush, 2007).

Given the socioeconomic disparities in digital exposure before formal schooling, structured digital experiences in classrooms are especially crucial for marginalized learners. Children from Black, Latinx, or lower-income families often depend on schools as their primary access point to digital media (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). School-based initiatives that intentionally address such gaps—through inclusive curricula and thoughtful access policies—are essential for leveling the playing field.

Professional development plays a pivotal role in ensuring that technology integration supports developmental and pedagogical goals. As Polly (2010) and Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) noted, teacher confidence and pedagogical knowledge are more predictive of effective technology use than prior experience or availability of resources alone. High-quality support systems—marked by individualized mentoring, sustained engagement, and access to instructional materials—are essential to cultivating teacher agency and promoting diverse uses of technology (Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015).

Designing digital tools to be developmentally appropriate is another critical component of ensuring inclusive and effective technology use. Marsh et al. (2018) emphasized that applications for very young children must accommodate limited fine-motor skills and support co-engagement with adults. Tools like Minecraft, though rich in learning potential, require scaffolding to be accessible to early learners. Culturally

and linguistically relevant content is equally essential, especially for multilingual learners or children with disabilities (Larson et al., 2022; More & Travers, 2013).

In addition, strategies must support digital citizenship and online safety. Children require guided experiences to understand responsible technology use and the consequences of their actions online. Adults must secure parental consent and protect children's privacy while modeling critical evaluation of digital content (Edwards, 2013). Training in these areas should be embedded into both teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning.

Importantly, access dynamics are also shaped by trends in family technology ownership. Although the proliferation of tablets and touchscreen devices has increased digital exposure among young children, patterns of usage vary by socioeconomic and cultural context (Rowse et al., 2017). Schools must remain vigilant to these trends and ensure institutional practices do not inadvertently exacerbate inequalities.

Finally, inclusive technology integration must validate children's diverse communicative repertoires. Opportunities for children to share their creations, receive feedback, and engage with peers foster social inclusion and support identity formation. These practices align with constructivist and sociocultural theories that emphasize agency, representation, and culturally embedded meaning-making in learning (Jonassen & Land, 2012; Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Culturally Responsive Technology Integration Culturally responsive technology integration in play-based early childhood education emphasizes the necessity of aligning digital tools and instructional strategies with the diverse cultural, linguistic, and developmental backgrounds of children. Effective integration must go beyond a one-size-fits-all approach by acknowledging that technologies are socially situated and deeply intertwined with children's lived experiences. Digital resources should reflect the values, communication styles, and home languages of the children they are intended to serve, particularly for those from minoritized, multilingual, or neurodiverse populations (Edwards, 2013; More & Travers, 2013).

Rather than treating digital play as a uniform experience, culturally responsive approaches consider how children's interactions with technologies are shaped by family expectations, community

norms, and broader cultural discourses. For example, Ji Eun Kim and colleagues (as cited in Edwards, 2013) illustrated how parent-child e-book reading in minority households can support literacy development while maintaining home language use and cultural identity. This form of digital engagement situates learning in a culturally meaningful context, facilitating intergenerational literacy practices and expanding opportunities for expression.

However, achieving culturally responsive integration also requires addressing systemic barriers related to access and representation in digital learning environment. As Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) noted, while hardware ownership may have increased, disparities persist in the quality of children's digital experiences. Non-English-speaking families, those lacking reliable internet, or communities without localized content often face structural barriers to meaningful technology use. This reinforces the importance of developing digital content that is not only developmentally appropriate but also linguistically and culturally relevant.

App and content selection plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusion. Developers and educators must ensure that educational technologies accommodate diverse needs, including accessibility for young children with disabilities and linguistic supports for emergent bilinguals. More and Travers (2013) emphasized that culturally responsive apps should include multimodal features—such as audio in multiple languages, visuals that reflect a range of sociocultural backgrounds, and interfaces that support different cognitive and engagement preferences. Similarly, Montelongo and Hernández (2012) advocated for instructional materials that support Latino English learners through cognate recognition and culturally relevant text selection.

Teacher preparation and professional development are essential to the successful implementation of culturally responsive technology practices. Educators need opportunities to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and to learn how technology can be used to support rather than homogenize diverse learning experiences (Koehler et al., 2014; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014). Professional learning communities and collaborative networks can help teachers share best practices, reflect on classroom

experiences, and adapt strategies to better meet the needs of children from various backgrounds (Plowman & Stephen, 2007).

Frameworks like TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provide a useful lens for considering how cultural responsiveness intersects with teachers' understanding of content, pedagogy, and technology. Through this integrated framework, teachers are better positioned to design technology-enhanced play experiences that are both developmentally appropriate and socially meaningful (Koehler et al., 2014; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Importantly, professional development aligned with TPACK should support educators in translating abstract theoretical principles into culturally grounded classroom practices.

Finally, digital play environments can serve as bridges between children's cultural worlds and formal learning. Edwards (2013) emphasized that young children's digital participation often mirrors broader cultural practices and social realities. Therefore, culturally responsive integration must include opportunities for children to bring their home experiences into the classroom, such as sharing digital stories, participating in multilingual media creation, or exploring content that affirms their identities. When thoughtfully implemented, technology can support inclusive, empowering learning environments that promote both individual growth and collective belonging.

Institutional and Policy Support

Administrative and Leadership Roles Administrative and leadership roles are pivotal in enabling effective technology integration in play-based early childhood education. Effective leaders articulate a shared vision grounded in developmental and constructivist theories, fostering environments where digital tools enhance, rather than replace, play-based pedagogies (Dexter, 2017). Such leadership involves not only crafting supportive policies but also managing infrastructure—ensuring broad availability of devices, reliable connectivity, and technical support (Hew & Brush, 2007). Administrative support further includes the implementation of safety protocols, such as protecting digital identities and ensuring data privacy, to foster safe digital learning spaces (Dexter, 2017). Leadership significantly shapes school culture,

influencing teacher beliefs and readiness to integrate technology through encouragement, professional development, and reflective communities (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013, 2014). Research confirms that alignment between school-level practices and district-level visions, including distributed leadership and team-based planning, improves implementation outcomes (Anthony, 2012). Frameworks like TPACK serve as tools that leaders can promote to help educators make informed decisions about developmentally appropriate digital integration (Hamilton et al., 2016). Leadership is essential in promoting inclusive technology use by addressing the varied needs of learners and ensuring support for students with disabilities or those lacking reliable access at home (Dexter, 2017; Hew & Brush, 2007). Strong administrative leadership establishes the structural and cultural foundations necessary for meaningful technology integration aligned with play-based and constructivist principles.

Policy Frameworks for Early Childhood Technology Use Policy frameworks for technology use in early childhood education are evolving to support the integration of digital media within developmentally appropriate, play-based pedagogies. Rather than positioning technology as an isolated add-on, effective policies embed it within instructional goals that align with constructivist learning theories (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). These frameworks often draw upon models such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and SAMR (Puentedura, 2013), which stress the importance of teachers having both technological and pedagogical competencies (Hamilton et al., 2016). National and organizational guidelines, including those from the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend limited and high-quality screen time, emphasizing the importance of adult co-engagement and alignment with learning goals for young children (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Policy documents consistently emphasize the importance of broad-based access to digital tools, educator training, and support systems, aiming to overcome both infrastructure-related challenges and deeper issues related to teacher beliefs and knowledge (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013). Effective policies promote developmentally appropriate integration, allowing flexibility for spontaneous and guided play while recognizing variation in cultural backgrounds and local educational contexts within learning environments (Rowell et al., 2017). As technologies and educational paradigms

continue to evolve, responsive policy design remains essential, grounded in research, developmental theory, and practical implementation realities (Dexter, 2017).

Community and Family Engagement in Technology Integration Family and community engagement is essential for extending the developmental benefits of technology-supported learning beyond the classroom. Schools that model effective use of technology for communication with parents foster co-educational relationships and support shared digital experiences at home, such as co-viewing or interactive reading (Plowman et al., 2012; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Community spaces like libraries and community centers play a complementary role by providing access to high-quality digital resources and creating spaces for informal, social technology use, especially for families with limited home access (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). However, socioeconomic disparities persist in digital literacy, device ownership, and internet access, necessitating school-based support structures and technical assistance for families (Judge et al., 2006). Studies also highlight the need for cultural responsiveness—recognizing parental beliefs, home language use, and varied levels of comfort with technology—to ensure inclusive engagement strategies (Rowell et al., 2017). Despite widespread acknowledgment of its importance, research on structured strategies for involving families in technology integration remains limited. Emerging approaches include using shared data systems for collaborative decision-making and offering technology-rich parent engagement events (Dexter, 2017). Fostering authentic school-family-community partnerships can enhance the developmental relevance of digital learning tools in early childhood education and promote inclusive implementation across diverse settings.

Balancing Digital and Non-Digital Play Experiences

Screen Time Guidelines and Best Practices Screen time guidelines in early childhood education are informed by a growing body of research that emphasizes a developmentally appropriate balance between digital engagement and traditional forms of play. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center (2012) emphasize that technology and interactive media should not displace hands-on, exploratory, and social experiences but should serve

as tools that support children's development across domains. They recommend intentional use of media aligned with learning goals, stressing that digital tools should only be integrated when they enhance rather than hinder developmental outcomes.

Notably, not all screen time is equal in terms of developmental benefit. Interactive and collaborative uses of digital media—such as co-viewing or engaging in digital games with peers or adults—can promote communication and social engagement. For example, Verenikina and Kervin (2011) found that siblings often engaged together with digital games in ways that mimicked traditional social play, illustrating that shared screen time can foster meaningful interactions. Similarly, Plowman et al. (2010) observed that children's engagement with computers varied during free play, highlighting the importance of adult mediation to guide productive use. Without structure, children might rapidly cycle through apps or abandon activities, diminishing the educational potential of screen-based interactions.

Best practices therefore emphasize the quality of digital media rather than the quantity of screen exposure. High-quality content should be intentionally selected to align with learning objectives, support exploration and creativity, and complement traditional classroom experiences (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). Screen time should never replace critical developmental activities like outdoor play, tactile manipulation, or direct social interactions, which remain foundational to cognitive, emotional, and physical growth (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) reinforces this developmental perspective by recommending that screen use for children aged 2 to 5 be limited to one hour per day of high-quality programming, co-viewed with caregivers who can help interpret and contextualize content. For children younger than 18–24 months, screen use should be limited to video chatting with family members. These recommendations highlight the need for active adult involvement and suggest that passive or solitary screen time may offer limited developmental value.

Educators play a pivotal role in implementing screen time guidelines. Research by Blackwell et al. (2016) indicates that teachers' confidence and belief in the educational value of digital tools significantly influence how they use technology in early learning settings. Professional development should thus

prepare educators to critically evaluate digital resources, apply screen time limits judiciously, and integrate digital tools within developmentally appropriate pedagogical frameworks (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

Finally, flexibility in screen time policies is essential to accommodate individual learners. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles suggest that technology use should offer multiple means of engagement, expression, and representation, enabling educators to personalize learning experiences while maintaining a balanced curriculum (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Plowman et al., 2010). Ongoing reflection and assessment are key to ensuring that screen time supports—not compromises—children’s developmental needs and learning outcomes.

Integrating Technology with Traditional Play Integrating technology with traditional play in early childhood education involves blending digital tools with hands-on, imaginative, and social activities in ways that support children's holistic development. Rather than replacing traditional play, technology should complement and extend it by offering new opportunities for creativity, expression, and collaboration.

For instance, Plowman et al. (2010) found that children used digital cameras to document personal experiences and create digital stories, reinforcing identity formation and family connection. These artifacts often became prompts for intergenerational dialogue and social interaction, extending traditional storytelling practices into the digital domain.

In classroom settings, consistent and intentional technology use can be supported through structured routines that ensure all children have meaningful opportunities to engage. Lawrence (2018) observed that grouping children into pairs or small teams to share devices such as iPads not only ensured balanced access to technology but also facilitated collaborative problem-solving, negotiation, and peer teaching. Similarly, Yelland and Gilbert (2019) noted that shared device uses in kindergartens fostered social skills and cooperative learning through tasks like creating e-books or conducting digital observations of science experiments.

Constructivist perspectives support this approach, viewing learning as socially constructed through active engagement with people and materials. When digital tools are embedded in play-based contexts,

they can serve as mediating artifacts that facilitate co-construction of knowledge (Polly et al., 2010). Adult facilitation plays a key role in maximizing the value of digital experiences. Active co-engagement—where educators guide app selection, scaffold interactions, and participate in play—enhances learning and ensures alignment with developmental goals (Plowman et al., 2010). However, this support must preserve children's agency and autonomy, allowing them to make meaningful choices in their play.

The TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) offers a useful lens for evaluating the effectiveness of technology integration. Polly et al. (2009) argue that successful implementation requires teachers to draw upon intersecting domains of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Rather than isolating technology as a discrete subject, educators should thoughtfully integrate it with core curricular content and pedagogical strategies.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Disparities in infrastructure, variations in teacher readiness, and ongoing debates about age-appropriate use of technology continue to present obstacles to inclusive and effective implementation (Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015). Concerns about premature or inappropriate use of digital tools have prompted calls for cautious, intentional approaches that consider cognitive milestones and cultural values. Integrating technology with traditional play is most effective when guided by reflective practice, grounded in theory, and responsive to individual and contextual needs.

Addressing Developmental Appropriateness and Wellbeing Balancing digital and non-digital experiences in early childhood education requires a developmental lens that prioritizes children's wellbeing and holistic growth. Effective technology use should be active, engaging, and play-based, promoting creativity, exploration, and collaboration rather than passive consumption (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012).

Imaginative play, a critical domain of early childhood development, supports self-regulation, perspective-taking, and social bonding. Digital tools must be carefully selected and used to preserve these functions. Lawrence (2018) documented how creativity apps facilitated collaborative storytelling and imaginative play, allowing children to jointly construct narratives without competition or coercion. In these settings, digital media became a conduit for symbolic expression, similar to traditional play materials.

Still, critics caution against the overreliance on screens in early childhood settings. Some researchers argue that unstructured digital experiences may undercut sensory-rich and physically active play, potentially inhibiting cognitive and social-emotional development (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). Educators must therefore critically assess digital content to ensure it offers open-ended opportunities, supports problem-solving, and aligns with developmental milestones.

Parental attitudes also shape children's experiences with digital media. Verenikina and Kervin (2011) noted that many parents are hesitant to encourage digital play unless they perceive a direct educational benefit, often viewing digital tools as instruments for work rather than play. This perception can limit children's opportunities to explore technology creatively unless educators help parents understand the developmental value of playful digital engagement.

Technology technology remains complex due to varying levels of access and support among learners. Children with special needs or from linguistically diverse families may require tailored digital resources to fully engage in learning. Plowman et al. (2010) emphasized the need to provide inclusive digital environments that support varied cognitive profiles and sociocultural backgrounds. Universal Design for Learning offers one model for ensuring that digital tools accommodate variability in learner profiles while promoting engagement and participation.

Ultimately, supporting developmental appropriateness involves aligning technology use with children's interests, cultural values, and individual growth trajectories. Ongoing professional development, reflective teaching, and continuous evaluation are critical to maintaining this balance. As technologies evolve, educators must remain vigilant, ensuring that digital tools continue to support—not supplant—the core experiences that define high-quality early childhood education (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Lawrence, 2017; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Plowman et al., 2010).

Gap Analysis: From Research to Practice in Play-Based Learning

Bridging the divide between research and real-world teaching practices remains a central challenge in early childhood education, particularly in the area of technology integration (Blackwell et al.,

2016; Donohue & Schomburg, 2017). Although a growing body of literature has established principles for developmentally appropriate and play-based uses of digital tools (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Bird & Edwards, 2017), the translation of these insights into everyday classroom practices is often inconsistent (Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Marsh, 2010). Evidence suggests that educators face barriers ranging from insufficient training to institutional constraints, resulting in fragmented and sometimes superficial uses of technology (Dexter, 2018; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014). These disconnects highlight the need for closer alignment between theory, policy, and classroom practice (Hamilton et al., 2016; Hew & Brush, 2007). The following section examines these gaps in depth, outlining the factors that contribute to mismatches between research recommendations and implementation in early learning settings.

Gaps Between Research and Classroom Implementation

Research over the past two decades consistently emphasizes that technology integration in early childhood education should be intentional, developmentally appropriate, and supportive of play-based pedagogies (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Plowman et al., 2010). Yet, field studies and classroom observations reveal a widespread tendency to use technology in ways that are disconnected from these principles. For instance, Plowman and Stephen (2005) reported that in many preschool classrooms, digital tools are often used in isolated, skill-based activities that mirror traditional didactic instruction, rather than as integrated tools to enrich open-ended play. Similarly, Marsh (2010) and Flewitt et al. (2015) found that while children demonstrate competence and creativity with digital media, educators frequently lack the confidence or training to harness this potential within play-based frameworks.

Moreover, research has revealed that teachers tend to perceive technology as an add-on to traditional learning rather than as an integral part of the learning environment (Blackwell et al., 2016). This perception results in limited or superficial uses of technology that do not align with constructivist or developmental theories. For example, children may be allowed to play educational games during free time but are not provided with structured opportunities to use digital tools as part of collaborative projects or

creative storytelling, both of which are encouraged in the literature (Lawrence, 2017; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018).

Several studies have also highlighted misalignments between the design of digital technologies and the pedagogical aims of early childhood education. Technologies marketed as "educational" often promote passive consumption rather than active engagement, undermining core principles of child-centered, exploratory learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Plowman et al., 2010). Even when educators recognize the limitations of such tools, structural constraints such as limited professional development, inadequate digital infrastructure, and rigid accountability frameworks impede the adoption of more innovative, play-aligned practices (Dexter, 2018; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014).

Furthermore, despite theoretical models such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) encouraging nuanced integration of digital tools into curricular goals, research shows that these frameworks are underutilized in early childhood contexts (Hamilton et al., 2016; Polly et al., 2010). Educators often lack practical examples of how to apply these frameworks within the fluid, dynamic nature of play-based learning. Consequently, there is a disconnect between the frameworks valued in research literature and the day-to-day practices observed in preschool settings (Anthony, 2012; Hew & Brush, 2007).

This research-practice gap is further exacerbated by variations in educators' digital competence and institutional support. While some teachers are eager to experiment with new technologies, others feel constrained by lack of training, fear of deviating from mandated curricula, or concerns over screen time guidelines (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). As a result, technology use in early childhood settings remains inconsistent, often driven by individual teacher preference rather than guided by cohesive pedagogical strategies grounded in evidence.

The Need for Synthesized, Practical Guidance for Educators

The fragmented nature of existing research contributes to the limited utility of evidence for practice. Although various studies have identified promising strategies—such as shared device use to promote

collaboration (Lawrence, 2017) or co-viewing practices with families (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017)—these insights are dispersed across disciplines and presented in ways that are often inaccessible to practitioners. Bird and Edwards (2015) proposed a Digital Play Framework to bridge this gap, but uptake in professional practice remains limited, partly due to the absence of accompanying implementation tools or training materials.

Professional guidelines, such as those developed by the NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center (2012), advocate for developmentally appropriate use of interactive media, emphasizing the need for adult mediation, intentionality, and alignment with pedagogical goals. However, these standards are broad and do not offer granular, context-specific guidance needed for real-world application. Studies show that educators continue to express uncertainty about what constitutes high-quality digital engagement in early childhood, especially in play-based contexts where learning objectives are often emergent and fluid (Blackwell et al., 2016; Plowman, 2015).

Furthermore, access and support remain pressing concerns. Children from under-resourced communities often experience reduced access to high-quality digital tools or lack supportive environments for digital learning both at school and at home (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010; Judge, Puckett, & Cabuk, 2004). While research underscores the role of leadership in addressing digital divides through policy and infrastructure (Dexter, 2018; Hew & Brush, 2007), practitioners frequently report an absence of institutional support for these efforts. A clear need exists for actionable, contextually grounded guidance that responds to both instructional and systemic challenges affecting balanced and responsive technology integration within play-based early childhood settings.

Without systematic tools to help educators translate research into practice, technology integration efforts often lack coherence and sustainability. This is especially problematic in early childhood environments, where teaching practices are expected to be flexible, responsive, and rooted in relationships. Teachers need not only access to technology, but also contextualized examples, lesson ideas, and professional development that illustrate how to incorporate digital tools into play-rich, child-centered environments.

Justification for an Integrative Literature Review Methodology

To address these persistent gaps between research and practice, an integrative literature review methodology offers a compelling and appropriate approach. Unlike systematic reviews, which often limit inclusion to narrowly defined empirical studies, integrative reviews accommodate a diversity of methodologies—including qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical work—thereby enabling a holistic synthesis of the literature (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). This is particularly important in the context of early childhood education, where understanding the intersection of developmental science, instructional design, and socio-cultural factors requires engagement with varied forms of evidence.

Snyder (2019) and Torraco (2016) both argue that integrative literature reviews are particularly valuable for emerging or interdisciplinary fields where conceptual clarity is lacking, or where the knowledge base is diffuse. Given that research on technology in play-based learning spans fields such as developmental psychology, educational technology, teacher education, and literacy studies, an integrative review enables the synthesis of these disparate strands into a cohesive framework that can inform both scholarship and practice.

Moreover, the integrative review method allows researchers to identify conceptual inconsistencies, synthesize best practices, and develop evidence-based recommendations tailored to real-world conditions (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Snyder, 2019). It also supports the development of middle-range theories or practical frameworks that bridge the divide between academic theory and classroom implementation (Torraco, 2016). This makes the integrative review especially well-suited for generating actionable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to implement technology in ways that enhance, rather than compromise, the principles of play-based learning.

Unlike meta-analyses that focus solely on effect sizes or intervention efficacy, integrative reviews can examine contextual and process-oriented issues such as teacher beliefs, school leadership, parental involvement, and policy constraints—all of which shape the feasibility and fidelity of technology implementation. By adopting this approach, this dissertation aims to go beyond what works, and instead

explore how, when, and why specific technology integration strategies succeed or fail within play-based educational settings.

While the research literature provides a rich foundation of theoretical models, pedagogical principles, and isolated examples of effective technology use in play-based settings, the field currently lacks synthesized, practitioner-ready guidance that can drive systemic change in early childhood education. This gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation represents a significant barrier to achieving meaningful technology integration that serves children's developmental needs. Integrative review methodology offers a uniquely powerful approach to address this deficiency by systematically drawing together insights across diverse methodologies and disciplines to produce coherent, actionable strategies that can guide educational practice. This study uses a well-rounded research approach to highlight the core principles, proven strategies, and supportive conditions needed for developmentally appropriate and meaningful technology use in early childhood classrooms—helping to connect research insights with real-world teaching practices.

Summary and Transition to Methodology

This section concludes the literature review, synthesizing the major findings and highlighting how they shape the focus of the present study. It brings together insights from multiple strands of research to illustrate how technology can enhance, challenge, or transform play-based learning in early childhood education. The discussion also pinpoints areas where research remains fragmented or inconsistent, leaving practitioners without clear, evidence-informed guidance. This synthesis sets the foundation for the following methodology section, where the integrative review approach is outlined as a structured means of addressing these gaps.

Synthesis of Key Findings from the Literature

The reviewed literature reveals a complex, evolving landscape regarding the integration of technology into early childhood education, particularly in play-based learning environments. Theoretical and empirical contributions from multiple domains—including developmental psychology, constructivist and

sociocultural learning theories, digital literacy, teacher preparation, leadership and policy, access to technology, and child development—collectively emphasize the potential for technology to enrich play when appropriately designed, scaffolded, and contextualized. Research consistently highlights that technology, when aligned with developmentally appropriate practices, can support cognitive and social-emotional development, foster creativity and collaboration, and extend the boundaries of traditional play (Blackwell et al., 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2017; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008; Plowman et al., 2010; Yelland & Gilbert, 2017).

Across the reviewed scholarship, several recurring themes emerge. First, studies stress the importance of aligning technology use with constructivist and play-based pedagogies that privilege exploration, imagination, and child agency (Fleer, 2011; Amott, 2016; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). Second, there is strong consensus on the role of educators as mediators of digital experiences—through intentional design, adult-child interaction, and reflective practice (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2005). Third, multiple studies converge on the significance of contextual factors, such as administrative support, institutional culture, and policy frameworks, in shaping technology integration practices (Dexter, 2017; Hew & Brush, 2007; Anthony, 2012). Lastly, findings underscore the critical need to balance digital engagement with developmental needs, ensuring that screen time complements—rather than displaces—rich, embodied, and socially grounded forms of play (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Plowman, 2015; Verenikina & Kervin, 2011).

Despite these advances, the literature also reveals persistent contradictions and inconsistencies. While conceptual frameworks such as TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and SAMR (Puentedura, 2013) provide structured lenses for technology integration (Koehler et al., 2014; Hamilton et al., 2016), they are often implemented inconsistently in early childhood contexts or inadequately adapted to the realities of play-based pedagogy. Furthermore, while policies advocate for developmentally appropriate practices, practical guidance for teachers on how to translate these principles into daily routines remains fragmented and underdeveloped (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Marsh, 2010).

Identification of Knowledge Gaps to be Addressed

This divergence between research recommendations and classroom realities gives rise to several critical knowledge gaps. First, there is a gap in clear, practical strategies that help educators confidently bring digital tools into play-based learning in ways that are thoughtful, age-appropriate, and support both teaching and children's development. Although the literature describes a range of promising practices—such as using tablets for collaborative storytelling or digital documentation—these insights remain dispersed across studies and are not readily translated into practitioner-friendly frameworks (Flewitt et al., 2015; Lawrence, 2017; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). Second, while many studies acknowledge barriers such as teacher beliefs, infrastructure limitations, and policy constraints (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010), few offer integrated approaches that address these challenges holistically in the context of early childhood play.

Third, the literature reveals limited attention to the socio-cultural dimensions of technology integration, such as how children's diverse backgrounds and home digital practices intersect with classroom experiences (Plowman, 2015; Judge, Puckett, & Cabuk, 2004; Rowsell et al., 2017). This oversight may reinforce disparities in how digital tools are implemented and which populations are positioned to benefit from their use. Additionally, the disconnect between institutional mandates and classroom-level implementation suggests the need for research that not only synthesizes current strategies but also bridges the divide between theory and application in early learning contexts (Anthony, 2012; Dexter, 2017).

These gaps are significant for both research and practice. Educators are under increasing pressure to integrate technology meaningfully, yet often lack the conceptual clarity and practical tools necessary to do so in ways that uphold the integrity of play-based learning. For researchers, the absence of a coherent synthesis limits the field's capacity to build cumulative knowledge and inform evidence-based professional development and policy. As digital technologies continue to evolve rapidly, the urgency for a

unified, research-informed understanding of how to support young children's learning through technology in play-based settings becomes even more pronounced.

Connection to the Proposed Integrative Review Methodology

To address these challenges, the present study adopts an integrative literature review methodology. This approach, as defined by Whitemore and Knaf (2005), enables the synthesis of diverse empirical and theoretical sources to generate new frameworks, insights, and recommendations. Unlike traditional systematic reviews that prioritize methodological homogeneity or scoping reviews that merely map existing research, the integrative review is uniquely suited to address complex, multidimensional questions—such as how to design developmentally appropriate, pedagogically sound technology integration strategies in early childhood education.

The rationale for selecting this method is threefold. First, it allows for the inclusion of studies with varied methodologies, populations, and theoretical lenses—reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the topic (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). Second, it supports critical evaluation and synthesis of findings, facilitating the identification of patterns, contradictions, and emerging trends that might otherwise remain obscured. Third, the integrative review provides a foundation for theory building and practical application, which is essential given the lack of consolidated guidance currently available to practitioners and policymakers (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Bird & Edwards, 2017).

Moreover, this methodology is particularly appropriate for bridging research and practice. As Torraco (2016) notes, integrative reviews are often used to “inform practice and policy” by bringing together insights from disparate literatures. Given the goal of this dissertation—to inform the design of actionable, research-based strategies for technology integration in play-based early childhood settings—no other methodology offers the same degree of flexibility, depth, and applied relevance.

In the following methodology chapter, this dissertation will outline the specific steps taken to conduct the integrative review. These include: identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria; developing search strategies across relevant databases; analyzing and coding selected studies; synthesizing findings

into themes; and ensuring rigor through transparency, replicability, and critical reflection. This methodological framework provides the structure necessary to generate a cohesive synthesis of knowledge that is both theoretically grounded and practically actionable.

Through this approach, the dissertation seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice by offering educators, researchers, and policymakers consolidated evidence based to support the thoughtful, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive integration of technology into play-based early childhood education.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology for conducting this integrative review on technology integration. The review aims to explore effective strategies for incorporating technology into play-based learning environments in early childhood education (ECE) classrooms. The study focuses on identifying key learning theories, analyzing documented pedagogical approaches, and synthesizing evidence-based recommendations to develop practical strategies for educators and other stakeholders. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how technology can enhance play-based learning while maintaining the core principles of early childhood education.

Integrative Literature Review

The integrative review methodology is a comprehensive approach to literature synthesis that combines empirical and theoretical research to provide a well-rounded understanding of a topic. Unlike systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which have stricter inclusion criteria, integrative reviews allow for a diverse range of research methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, theoretical, and empirical sources (Torraco, 2005). This flexibility makes them particularly valuable for generating practical recommendations and addressing complex, multidisciplinary topics. By critically analyzing existing studies, integrative reviews help develop new frameworks, resolve contradictions, and highlight knowledge gaps (Callahan, 2010). This methodology is especially vital in addressing complex, multifaceted issues within rapidly evolving fields, such as technology integration in early childhood education (ECE).

Scholars emphasize different aspects of the integrative review process. Callahan (2010) describes it as a rigorous research method involving systematic data collection, analysis, and synthesis (p. 303). Torraco (2005, p. 356; 2016, p. 404) defines it as a structured approach that synthesizes, critiques, and integrates literature to develop new perspectives. Whittemore and Knafelz (2005) highlight its role in evidence-based practice, summarizing empirical and theoretical literature to provide deeper insights into a phenomenon (p. 546). Toronto and Remington (2020) emphasize the importance of systematic search

strategies, quality appraisal, data analysis, and synthesis to ensure rigor and transparency in the review process.

A structured and systematic approach is essential for conducting a rigorous integrative review. Several scholars have proposed methodological frameworks that outline key stages in the review process, ensuring clarity, consistency, and reliability. Torraco (2005) outlines five key stages of an integrative review: (1) identifying an appropriate topic, (2) justifying the chosen methodology, (3) conducting a literature search, (4) analyzing and critiquing the literature, and (5) synthesizing the results (p. 360). Whitemore and Knafl (2005) propose a similar five-stage framework, while Toronto (2020) expands the process into six steps: (1) formulating the research question, (2) conducting a systematic literature search, (3) appraising the quality of selected literature, (4) analyzing and synthesizing data, (5) discussing findings, and (6) disseminating results. To ensure rigor and reliability, this study integrates the frameworks of Whitemore and Knafl (2005) and Toronto and Remington (2020) in its methodological approach. The following sections outline the proposed study stages, actions, and tasks in detail.

For this study, the frameworks of Whitemore and Knafl (2005) and Toronto and Remington (2020) were integrated to maintain rigor throughout the analytical process. The following sections outline the proposed study stages, along with their corresponding actions and tasks.

1. Formulated purpose and research questions
 - a. Define the research problem and objectives
 - b. Develop research questions related to theoretical foundations, pedagogical strategies, and technology integration.
2. Systematic literature search and selection
 - a. Identify relevant databases
 - b. Use Boolean search strategies with keywords.
 - c. Apply inclusion and exclusion criteria.
3. Quality appraisal
 - a. Define and apply inclusion and exclusion criteria for empirical researches

- b. Evaluate quality of theoretical and gray literatures
 - c. Ensure reliability and validity of data sources.
4. Data extraction analysis and synthesis
 - a. Extract key information (study objectives, methods, findings, theoretical perspectives).
 - b. Use thematic analysis to identify patterns and gaps.
 - c. Categorize data into themes.
 5. Discussion and conclusion
 - a. Interpret findings by comparing theoretical insights with empirical evidence.
 - b. Identify best practices and challenges in implementing technology in ECE.
 - c. Discuss implications for future research, policy, and educator training.

Conducting the Integrative Review

Ensuring a rigorous integrative review requires a systematic and transparent approach that allows for replication (Toronto & Remington, 2020; Whitemore & Knaf, 2005). To achieve this, the study follows a structured five-stage process, designed to implement robust and replicable procedures throughout the analysis.

Stages 1: Formulate Purpose and Research Questions

The identified problem and defined questions were described previously in chapter 1 introduction, and together drove the selection of the integrative review as the appropriate research methodology. Next, the purpose of the review was developed:

The purpose of this integrative literature review is to systematically explore and synthesize research and evaluation literature surrounding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of play-based learning technologies in early childhood in-person and hybrid classroom environments. Specifically, this study investigates evidence-based approaches for designing and developing instruction that promotes children's holistic learning and development within play-based environments through appropriate and intentional technology integration. The study synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed empirical and

theoretical sources to generate practical, theoretically grounded strategies for educators, instructional designers, curriculum developers, and educational leaders working in early childhood contexts.

The study answers the following research questions:

1. What technology integration strategies for play-based early childhood classrooms are supported in the research literature?
2. What learning theories align with those strategies?
3. What evidence-based recommendations can be synthesized into practical strategies for educators and instructional designers?

Stage 2: Systematic Literature Search and Selection

A rigorous and systematic literature search and selection process was undertaken to identify high-quality empirical studies relevant to the integration of technology into play-based learning environments in early childhood education (ECE). This process aligns with the principles outlined by Whitemore and Knaff (2005), emphasizing transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness in integrative reviews.

Database Selection and Search Strategy Initial database searches were conducted using peer-reviewed academic databases known for their relevance to education and technology, including ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, PsycINFO, Web of Science, ProQuest Education, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect. Additionally, IEEE Xplore was considered to capture emerging studies focused on technological applications. A university-affiliated research librarian was consulted to refine keyword combinations and Boolean operators, ensuring the optimal balance between sensitivity and specificity in the results.

However, due to the scope and time constraints of the dissertation project, the final search was limited to the ERIC database, which yielded over 300,000 records using the initial keyword combinations. The decision to focus exclusively on ERIC was justified by its comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed educational research and its alignment with the research focus.

Keyword Strategy Search terms were selected to capture the interdisciplinary nature of the study and organized into thematic categories aligned with the three research questions. Terms for early

childhood education included: “early childhood education,” “preschool*,” “pre-K,” “early years,” and “child care.” Play-based learning was explored using: “play-based learning,” “learning through play,” “play pedagogy,” “guided play,” and “digital play.” Technology integration was captured through terms such as: “educational technology,” “digital tools,” “digital games,” “immersive technologies,” “augmented reality,” “robotics,” and “mobile apps.” Learning theories were investigated using terms such as: “constructivis*,” “constructionism,” “social constructivism,” “cognitive development,” “psychosocial development,” “Vygotsky,” “Piaget,” and “Erikson.” Strategy-focused terms included: “strateg*,” “recommendation*,” “guideline*,” “implication*,” “outcome*,” and “evidence-based.” Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” were used to combine and refine results effectively.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to ensure the final dataset aligned with the study’s conceptual framework and research questions. The following criteria were applied:

Table 1

Inclusion Criteria for Data Set

Criteria
Study focused on early childhood learning environment
Study investigated the play-based classes
Study explored strategies for technology integration
Study is empirical study
Study published between 2016 and 2025 in a peer-reviewed journal
Study published in English

Table 2*Exclusion Criteria for Data Set*

Criteria
Study context outside the classroom (e.g., home, museum)
Study investigated the attitudes, perceptions, or beliefs without strategy implementation
Study focused solely on evaluating the effectiveness of the integrated technology
Study sample in K3 and above or with disabilities
Study context involves family participation
Study is comparative study without descriptive strategy content

Search Outcome and Screening Process The search and selection process is summarized in the table 3:

Table 3*Summary, Selection Actions, Articles for Data Set*

Quantities	Action	Reason for inclusion / Exclusion
378,804	articles identified through databases searches as potentially relevant	
21,787	articles identified through study education level on Early Childhood Education	
20,385	articles excluded	
1,402	articles identified via limited the descriptor on Play, references imported into citation manager (Mendeley)	
1,129	studies excluded	
273	studies screened via title, abstract, and keywords inclusion criteria	

207 studies excluded
66 studies assessed via full-text analysis against inclusion criteria
27 studies excluded
9 Studies context outside the classroom
7 Studies investigated the attitudes and view only
3 Studies investigated in non-play-based learning environment
3 Study investigated the effectiveness of the integrated technology sample has disability
2 Studies conducted comparative study
1 Studies involved family participation
1 Studies sample contained disability young children
1 Study sample above K3
39 studies identified for final data set

During the screening process, studies were excluded primarily for not addressing classroom-based instruction (n = 9), focusing solely on attitudes or perceptions (n = 7), not involving play-based pedagogies (n = 3), or evaluating the effectiveness of technology without describing integration strategies (n = 3). Additional exclusions involved comparative study designs (n = 2), family participation contexts (n = 1), or inclusion of non-ECE age groups or children with disabilities (n = 2).

This multi-stage, criterion-based screening process ensured that the final 39 studies formed a coherent and methodologically appropriate dataset for analysis.

This systematic search and selection process ensured the incorporation of high-quality, relevant literature, forming a strong foundation for the integrative review.

Stage 3 Quality Appraisal

To systematically address the study's three research questions, a rigorous data extraction and coding process was employed. This process was rooted in the integrative literature review methodology, which necessitates the synthesis of diverse findings and theoretical perspectives into a comprehensive understanding (Torraco, 2005).

Codebook Development and Refinement A codebook was developed to guide the data extraction process. The initial coding labels were generated deductively, based on the study's conceptual frameworks—Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK; Mishra & Koehler, 2006), the Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015), and the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013)—and inductively refined through a preliminary reading of a representative sample of the literature.

The codes were structured around the three research questions: 1. Technology integration strategies in play-based early childhood education. 2. Learning theories aligned with those strategies. 3. Evidence-based recommendations for effective technology integration in early learning contexts.

The development process was iterative and involved pilot testing with three studies (Edwards, 2016; Ethridge et al., 2024; McPake & Stephen, 2016), followed by refinements based on observed ambiguities and overlaps. Key adjustments included:

- Refining “Integration level” from a general notion of technology impact to the specific depth at which technology shapes pedagogy, learning goals, and children’s experiences.
- Dividing the broad label “immersive technologies” into three distinct subcodes: interactive technology applications, adaptive learning technologies, and augmented reality and emerging technologies.
- Replacing “assessment tools” with “technology-supported documentation and assessment” to focus on digital tools used for evaluative purposes.
- Revising “experiential learning theory” to “play-based learning theory” to more accurately reflect the developmental and socio-cultural dimensions emphasized in the literature.

- Splitting “instructional design strategies” into “instructional design recommendations” and “practical implementation strategies” to differentiate theoretical planning from practical application.

These refinements were validated with two additional studies (Johnston et al., 2020; Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020) to ensure clarity and minimal overlap, yielding a well-structured and logically differentiated codebook (see Appendix A).

Data Extraction Procedures Data extraction was performed using Microsoft Excel to allow for structured organization of codes and excerpts. Each row of the spreadsheet represented a study, with columns corresponding to the finalized coding labels. This approach ensured consistency and facilitated cross-case comparisons. A manual review extraction was employed to extract excerpts from the literature.

To maintain analytical rigor, each excerpt was reviewed for alignment with the code definitions, which included a label, definition, and examples. While only one researcher conducted the coding process, several measures ensured reliability and consistency. These included systematic self-checks for coding consistency, comprehensive documentation of all analytical decisions, and ongoing reflective notes during the analysis phase. The study's credibility was strengthened through regular consultations with my dissertation advisor regarding the developing coding framework, and periodic reviews of coding choices to confirm they remained consistent with the study's research objectives and theoretical foundation. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

Justification for Coding Schema The use of a structured coding schema enabled systematic interpretation of complex qualitative data across diverse studies. Labels under Research Question 1 captured the pedagogical design, tools, educator roles, and child engagement with digital technologies. These codes were guided by the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), the Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015), and principles of developmentally appropriate practice (NAEYC, 2012).

Labels under Research Question 2 mapped observed practices and discussions in the literature to foundational learning theories, including cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1952), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), constructivism (Jonassen, 1999), psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963), and play-

based learning theory (Wood, 2014). This approach supported the theoretical alignment of practical strategies identified in the literature.

Finally, the codes for Research Question 3 focused on distilling evidence-based and actionable guidance for practitioners. These included pedagogical strategies, design considerations, implementation recommendations, and technology integration guidelines grounded in literature from early childhood education and instructional design (Falloon, 2013; ISTE, 2017).

Stage 4: Data Extraction Analysis and Synthesis

The data analysis and synthesis process in this integrative literature review followed a systematic and inductive approach, enabling the identification of key technology integration strategies in play-based early childhood education. The process involved three interconnected stages: (a) data sourcing and coding, (b) identification of cross-study patterns, and (c) synthesis of findings supported by evidence and literature.

Address research question 1:

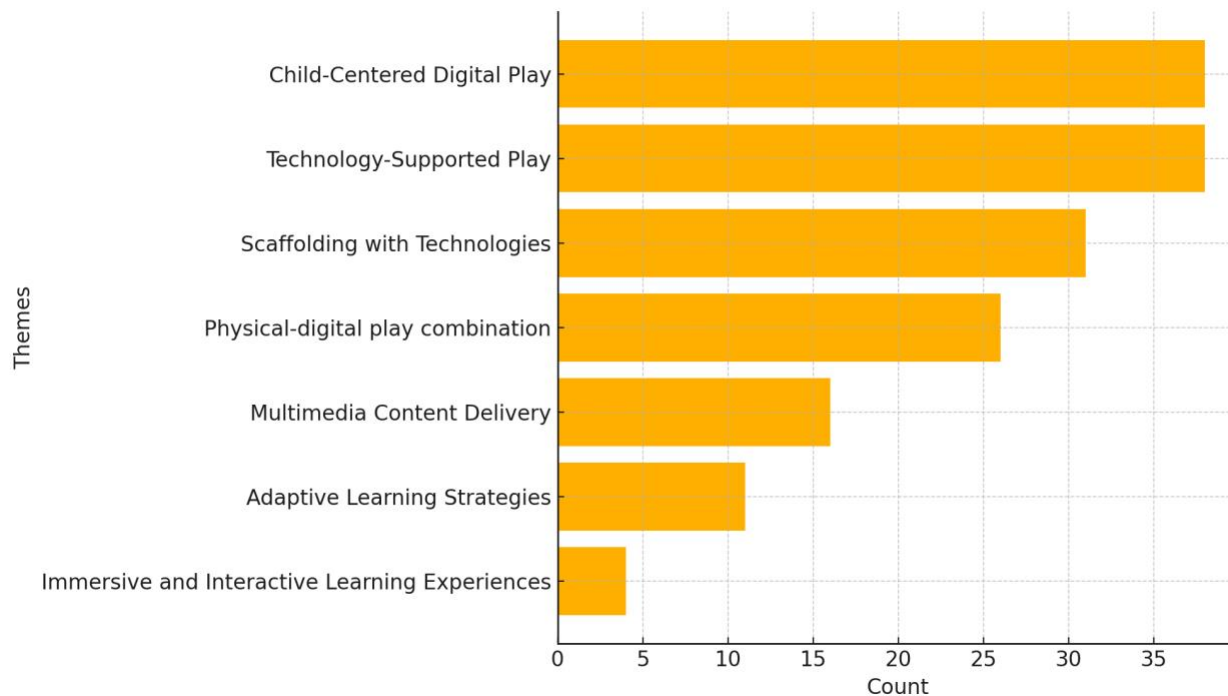
Data sourcing and coding Data were extracted from 39 peer-reviewed studies that explored the use of digital technologies in early childhood play-based learning environments. Each study was read closely, and excerpt phrases were identified that described technology use, pedagogical approaches, and observed learning outcomes. These excerpts were coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data (Miles et al., 2014). Using color-coding for each code labels to highlight the selected excerpts for each of them. The records were saved into excel files.

Codes were then clustered based on conceptual similarities, resulting in overarching themes, Technology-Supported Play, Child-Centered Digital Play, Adaptive Learning Strategies, Scaffolding with Technologies, Multimedia Content Delivery, Physical-Digital Play Combination, and Immersive and Interactive Learning with Emerging Technologies (see Figure 1). Each theme table (see Sample Appendix B) details the excerpts, codes, and supporting studies used in the synthesis. The inductive coding process

ensured that findings were grounded in empirical evidence and reflected diverse perspectives across the literature (Ethridge et al., 2022; Edwards, 2016; Sakr & Oscar, 2020).

Figure 1

Frequency of Identified Technology Integration Strategies



Identification of cross-study patterns Following patterns (see Sample Appendix C) were identified through coding and constant comparison across studies. Each theme revealed recurring pedagogical and design principles guiding technology integration in play-based settings:

- **Technology-Supported Play:** Digital tools consistently enhanced, rather than replaced, traditional play, fostering creativity, collaboration, and motivation.
- **Child-Centered Digital Play:** Excerpts highlighted children’s agency, self-directed exploration, and active engagement with interactive tools supported by educators.

- **Adaptive Learning Strategies:** AI-driven and multimodal sensing technologies provided personalized, real-time feedback, tailoring learning to individual needs.
- **Scaffolding with Technologies:** Evidence showed explicit and embedded scaffolds delivered through teacher guidance, peer collaboration, or digital tool prompts to support cognitive and language development.
- **Multimedia Content Delivery:** Interactive storytelling and multimodal tools enriched meaning-making and improved inclusivity for diverse learners.
- **Physical-Digital Play Combination:** Hybrid environments linked tangible, embodied play with digital creativity, fostering multimodal expression and collaboration.
- **Immersive and Interactive Learning with Emerging Technologies:** AR, conversational AI, and blended digital-physical environments created responsive, multisensory experiences while raising pedagogical considerations regarding social interaction and intentional use.

These patterns were identified through iterative reading, memo writing, and cross-checking excerpts across studies, ensuring analytic rigor and traceability.

Synthesis of Findings

Supporting Evidence from the Data Representative excerpts from the dataset illustrate the thematic findings. For example, technology-supported play was described as “*intentional integration of digital tools with play-based pedagogies*” (Ethridge et al., 2022), while child-centered digital play emphasized “*integrating children’s needs and agency in selecting tools*” (Barman & Kjallander, 2022). Adaptive learning strategies were supported by data such as “*multimodal AI senses activity, speech, and emotions to guide responses*” (Aslan et al., 2022) and scaffolding with technologies was evidenced by “*digital tools scaffold children’s learning through structured prompts and feedback*” (Kumpulainen, et al., 2020).

Similarly, hybrid physical-digital environments were depicted as “*combining physical and digital elements to foster collaboration and imaginative engagement*” (Edwards, 2016), while immersive technologies were described as “*AR overlays that create multisensory and context-rich play experiences*” (Aslan, et al., 2022). These excerpts, consistently coded across multiple studies, provided a strong empirical foundation for each theme.

Literature Integration The synthesized findings were validated and expanded through cross-referencing with established research. For instance:

- Technology acts as a supportive layer to play, not a substitute (Edwards, 2016; Ethridge et al., 2022).
- Child-centered approaches foster autonomy and meaningful learning when guided by skilled educators (Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Antrilli & Wang, 2022).
- Adaptive tools personalize learning and sustain engagement (Aslan et al., 2022; Barman & Kjallander, 2022).
- Scaffolding strategies embedded in tools or teacher guidance support problem-solving, literacy, and inclusion (Axelsson et al., 2016; Grieshaber et al., 2021).
- Multimedia and hybrid play experiences enhance symbolic representation and multimodal expression (Speldewinde & Campbell, 2024).
- Immersive AR and AI technologies offer novel affordances but require critical, evidence-informed adoption to ensure social and developmental appropriateness (Pelizzari et al., 2023; Leung et al., 2019).

This integration of coded data and prior literature strengthened the credibility of the synthesized findings and ensured alignment with current theoretical and pedagogical discourse.

Through an inductive and iterative coding and synthesis process, this review identified core strategies for technology integration in play-based early childhood education. Findings emerged from systematically coded excerpts across multiple studies, demonstrating that intentional, culturally responsive,

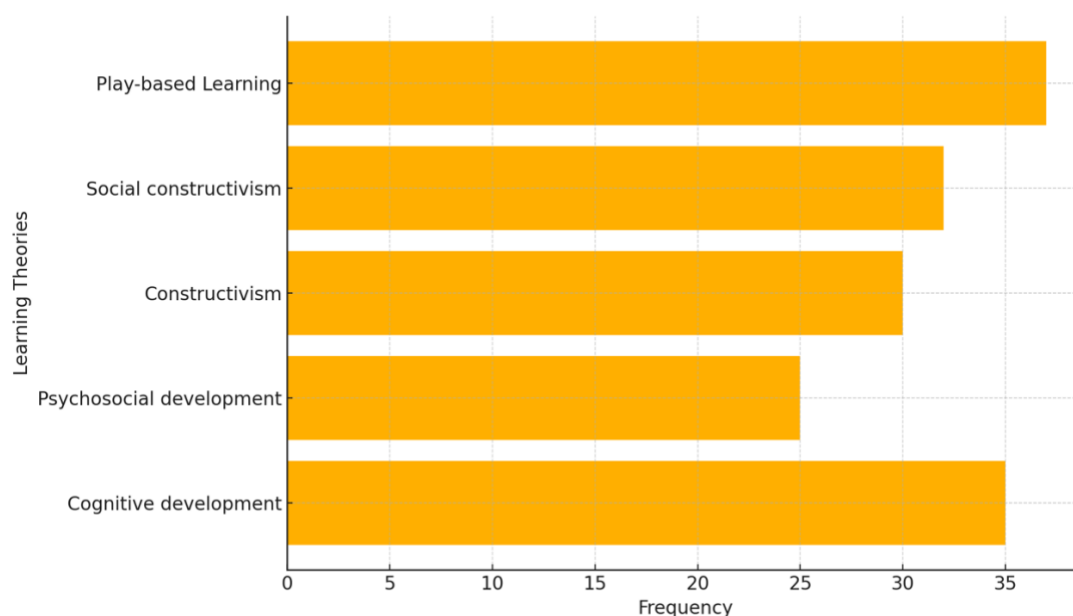
scaffolded, and adaptive digital tools can enhance children’s creativity, collaboration, and holistic development in play environments. (Edwards, 2016; Ethridge et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2019; Aslan et al., 2022; Speldewinde & Campbell, 2024).

Research question 2:

Data sourcing and coding Data were extracted from 39 peer-reviewed studies that explored the learning theories aligned with the identified seven technology integration strategies, *Technology-Supported Play, Child-Centered Digital Play, Adaptive Learning Strategies, Scaffolding with Technologies, Multimedia Content Delivery, Physical-Digital Play Combination, and Immersive and Interactive Learning with Emerging Technologie*, in research question 1. Each study was read closely, and excerpt phrases were identified that described learning theories and their alignments with technology integration strategies. The extracted data were saved into an Excel file. Then identified five most highly mentioned learning theories, *Play-Based Learning, Cognitive Development, Social Constructivism, Constructivism, and Psychosocial Development* (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Frequency of Learning Theories



Then according to the each of the technology integration strategies, the initial data were separated into seven files with the initial data of the above five identified learning theories and the aligned learning theories with each technology integration strategy and then each technology integration strategy initial data was separated into five individual files collecting the excerpts of each learning theory and alignment with each technology integration strategy (see Sample Appendix D).

Identification of cross-study patterns Following the coding process, cross-study comparisons were conducted to identify patterns of theoretical alignment (see Table 4). Patterns emerged within and across the seven technology integration strategies analyzed: *technology-supported play, child-centered digital play, adaptive learning technologies, scaffolding with technology, multimedia content delivery, physical-digital play combinations, and immersive and interactive learning experiences*. Consistent evidence indicated that these strategies collectively fostered cognitive, psychosocial, social, and experiential learning, aligning with foundational theories of child development.

- Technology-Supported Play: Studies (e.g., Edwards, 2016; Ethridge et al., 2022; Sakr & Oscar, 2020) showed that when technology was integrated purposefully into play environments, it enhanced symbolic reasoning, attention, executive functioning, collaboration, and agency, aligning with cognitive, social constructivist, and play-based frameworks.
- Child-Centered Digital Play: Research (Pelizzari et al., 2022; Veresov & Veraksa, 2022) indicated that placing children in control of digital interactions supported autonomy, problem-solving, imaginative expression, and social negotiation, aligning strongly with psychosocial development, constructivist learning, and play-based theories.
- Adaptive Learning Technologies: AI-driven and responsive tools (Aslan et al., 2022; Cheng & Lam, 2025) provided individualized scaffolds for memory, reasoning, and emotional expression, adapting to each child's developmental level and fostering confidence, social engagement, and reflective thinking. These findings aligned with cognitive, psychosocial, constructivist, and social constructivist theories.

- Scaffolding with Technology: Structured prompts and multimodal guidance (Ethridge et al., 2022; McPake & Stephen, 2016) supported children's problem-solving, joint inquiry, confidence, and conceptual understanding, mapping closely to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (social constructivism) (Vygotsky, 1978), Piagetian cognitive stages (Piaget, 1952), and play-based pedagogy.
- Multimedia Content Delivery: Tools integrating sound, gesture, visual prompts, and interactive storytelling (Barman & Kjallander, 2022; Kewalramani et al., 2020) enhanced memory, symbolic thinking, emotional communication, and cultural meaning-making. This multimodal engagement aligned with cognitive, psychosocial, constructivist, and play-based frameworks.
- Physical-Digital Play Combinations: Hybrid environments using robotics, tangible coding blocks, and AR-linked physical tools (Pelizzari et al., 2023; Aslan et al., 2022) encouraged embodied learning, social bonding, collaborative problem-solving, and imaginative storytelling, supporting cognitive, psychosocial, social constructivist, and play-based learning theories.
- Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences: AR, AI, and multimodal technologies (Durham et al., 2024; Kumpulainen et al., 2020) stimulated inquiry, symbolic thinking, social negotiation, empathy, and active exploration, aligning strongly with all five theoretical frameworks.

These recurring patterns across strategy types indicate that technology integration, when designed to support agency, collaboration, and meaningful play, consistently reinforces established learning theories in early childhood contexts.

Table 4*Alignment of Technology Integration Strategies with Learning Theories*

Technology Integration Strategy	Learning Theory	Study (Year)	Excerpt Evidence	Code	Theme
Technology-Supported Play	Cognitive Development Theory	Edwards (2016); Ethridge et al. (2022)	“Opportunities to make sense of symbols and cause-effect relationships through digital storytelling.”	Symbolic Processing	Cognitive Growth
Technology-Supported Play	Psychosocial Development Theory	Pelizzari et al. (2023)	“Coding tasks supported autonomy and peer collaboration.”	Initiative & Belonging	Psychosocial Growth
Technology-Supported Play	Social Constructivism Theory	Ethridge et al. (2022)	“Virtual environments foster shared problem-solving and dialogue.”	Peer Collaboration	Co-Construction
Technology-Supported Play	Constructivist Learning Theory	Aslan et al. (2024)	“Children reflected and co-constructed understanding through digital play.”	Active Inquiry	Knowledge Construction

Technology-Supported Play	Play-Based Learning Theory	Madanipour & Cahrssen (2020)	“AR enhances imaginative, discovery-based play scenarios.”	Creative Exploration	Play Enrichment
Child-Centered Digital Play	Cognitive Development Theory	Veresov & Veraksa (2022)	“Digital games promote strategic thinking and cognitive flexibility.”	Executive Functioning	Cognitive Development
Child-Centered Digital Play	Psychosocial Development Theory	Pelizzari et al. (2022); Bird (2019)	“Digital play fosters autonomy, peer negotiation, and emotional expression.”	Initiative & Identity Formation	Psychosocial Growth
Child-Centered Digital Play	Social Constructivism Theory	Ethridge et al. (2022); McPake & Stephen (2021)	“Virtual play environments encourage peer dialogue and co-regulated thinking.”	Joint Inquiry	Social Construction
Child-Centered Digital Play	Constructivist Learning Theory	Madanipour & Cahrssen (2020)	“AR supports collaborative construction of shared understandings.”	Meaning-Making	Constructivist Learning
Child-Centered Digital Play	Play-Based Learning Theory	Edwards (2016); Sakr & Oscar (2020)	“Digital play complements traditional child-led exploration.”	Child Agency	Play-Based Learning

Adaptive Learning Technologies	Cognitive Development Theory	Aslan et al. (2022); Veresov & Veraksa (2022)	“Kid Space responds to gestures and speech, scaffolding reflective thinking and reasoning.”	Real-Time Scaffolding	Cognitive Growth
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Psychosocial Development Theory	Cheng & Lam (2025); McGlynn-Stewart et al. (2017)	“Music apps adapt to preferences, fostering autonomy and confidence.”	Adaptive Support	Identity & Emotional Growth
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Social Constructivism Theory	Axelsson et al. (2016); Aslan et al. (2024)	“Teachable agents promote explanation and shared reasoning in group tasks.”	Dialogic Learning	Social Knowledge Building
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Constructivist Learning Theory	McPake & Stephen (2016)	“Children construct narratives using adaptive digital tools.”	Responsive Feedback	Active Knowledge Construction
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Play-Based Learning Theory	Aslan et al. (2022)	“AI-powered adaptive play supports storytelling and child-led exploration.”	Personalized Play	Play-Based Enrichment

Scaffolding with Technology	Cognitive Development Theory	Ethridge et al. (2022); Aslan et al. (2022)	“Real-time digital prompts guide attention and problem-solving.”	Guided Prompting	Cognitive Skill Development
Scaffolding with Technology	Psychosocial Development Theory	Pelizzari et al. (2023); Cheng & Lam (2025)	“Scaffolded coding tasks build social awareness and confidence.”	Emotional Support	Psychosocial Development
Scaffolding with Technology	Social Constructivism Theory	Edwards (2016); Ethridge et al. (2022)	“Scaffolding fosters joint attention and collaborative problem-solving.”	Guided Participation	Co-Constructed Knowledge
Scaffolding with Technology	Constructivist Learning Theory	McPake & Stephen (2016)	“Storytelling scaffolds promote reflective, meaning-making activities.”	Guided Inquiry	Constructivist Learning
Scaffolding with Technology	Play-Based Learning Theory	Madanipour & Cahrssen (2020); Aslan et al. (2022)	“AR scaffolds support collaborative exploration in play settings.”	Supported Play	Play-Based Enrichment
Multimedia Content Delivery	Cognitive Development Theory	Aslan et al. (2022); Axelsson et al. (2016)	“Kid Space integrates video, sound, and gesture to	Multisensory Stimuli	Cognitive Growth

			enhance attention and memory.”		
Multimedia Content Delivery	Psychosocial Development Theory	Cheng & Lam (2025); McGlynn-Stewart et al. (2017)	“Music apps enhance emotional expression and peer bonding.”	Expressive Communication	Psychosocial Development
Multimedia Content Delivery	Social Constructivism Theory	McPake & Stephen (2016); Kewalramani et al. (2020)	“Children co-construct stories using images, text, and audio.”	Collaborative Narratives	Shared Knowledge
Multimedia Content Delivery	Constructivist Learning Theory	Barman & Kjallander (2022)	“Children manipulate multimedia math symbols to build understanding.”	Interactive Representation	Constructivist Learning
Multimedia Content Delivery	Play-Based Learning Theory	Kewalramani et al. (2020); Aslan et al. (2024)	“Multimedia storytelling supports imaginative, child-led play.”	Multimedia Exploration	Play-Based Learning
Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Cognitive Development Theory	Aslan et al. (2022); Sakr & Oscar (2020)	“Kid Space merges physical movement with digital feedback for problem-solving.”	Embodied Interaction	Cognitive Growth

Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Psychosocial Development Theory	Pelizzari et al. (2023); Bird (2019)	“Robotics environments foster perseverance, empathy, and identity formation.”	Social Engagement	Psychosocial Development
Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Social Constructivism Theory	McPake & Stephen (2016); Kewalramani et al. (2020)	“Hybrid storytelling mediates cultural participation and shared learning.”	Joint Inquiry	Social Co-Construction
Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Constructivist Learning Theory	Barman & Kjallander (2022); Wohlwend (2017)	“Hybrid manipulatives and digital representations support exploratory math learning.”	Inquiry-Based Play	Constructivist Learning
Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Play-Based Learning Theory	Madanipour & Cohrssen (2020); Edwards (2016)	“AR and physical tools enhance curiosity and collaborative storytelling.”	Hybrid Play	Play-Based Enrichment
Immersive and Interactive	Cognitive Development Theory	Aslan et al. (2022); Durham et al. (2024)	“AI-driven multimodal interactions strengthen executive	Multisensory Tasks	Cognitive Development

Learning Experiences			function and problem-solving.”		
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Psychosocial Development Theory	Kumpulainen et al. (2020); Mowafi & Abumuhfouz (2021)	“AR storying builds empathy, self-confidence, and social bonding through collaborative play.”	Role-Play & Social Identity	Psychosocial Growth
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Social Constructivism Theory	Aslan et al. (2024); Mowafi & Abumuhfouz (2021)	“Mobile collaborative tools foster shared inquiry and reflection.”	Dialogic Learning	Social Knowledge Building
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Constructivist Learning Theory	Kumpulainen et al. (2020); Aslan et al. (2024)	“Gesture-based, child-led tasks support knowledge building and reflection.”	Active Exploration	Constructivist Learning
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Play-Based Learning Theory	Kumpulainen et al. (2020); Mowafi & Abumuhfouz (2021)	“AR narratives preserve symbolic, social, imaginative play in interactive settings.”	Immersive Storytelling	Play-Based Engagement

Synthesis of Findings The synthesis of findings demonstrates that all seven technology integration strategies share common theoretical alignments, while each contributes uniquely to cognitive, social, and emotional development:

- Cognitive Development Theory: Technology-supported play, adaptive technologies, scaffolding, multimedia content, physical-digital combinations, and immersive experiences consistently supported attention, memory, problem-solving, symbolic reasoning, and schema construction.
- Psychosocial Development Theory: Child-centered digital play, adaptive tools, scaffolding, and immersive environments promoted autonomy, confidence, emotional regulation, identity formation, and social competence through collaborative and expressive play experiences.
- Social Constructivism Theory: Across all strategies, particularly scaffolding, physical-digital play, and immersive environments, technology mediated peer collaboration, shared inquiry, cultural meaning-making, and co-construction of knowledge, aligning with Vygotskian principles.
- Constructivist Learning Theory: Interactive and adaptive technologies, multimedia delivery, hybrid play, and immersive experiences fostered active exploration, hypothesis testing, reflective thinking, and contextualized meaning-making, aligning with Piagetian (Piaget, 1952, 1962) and Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978) views of experiential learning.
- Play-Based Learning Theory: All strategies preserved and enriched core attributes of play pedagogy—child agency, creativity, joy, and open-ended discovery—while extending traditional forms of play into digital and hybrid domains.

The integrated analysis shows that technology-supported play is theoretically grounded when it promotes child agency, inquiry, collaboration, and scaffolded learning opportunities across multiple modalities. Each strategy complements traditional developmental and pedagogical theories, demonstrating that well-designed digital interventions can support holistic learning experiences. This multi-strategy, theory-informed alignment strengthens the evidence base for leveraging technology in play-based early childhood classrooms.

Research question 3:

Data sourcing and coding The initial stage focused on aggregating pertinent scholarly articles from peer-reviewed sources dated between 2016 and 2025, with the goal of capturing contemporary technological advancements—particularly those shaped by the impact of global health crises—on emerging strategies for integrating technology in educational settings. Each article included in the review provided practical recommendations for integrating digital tools into play-based early childhood education environments. A data extraction table was developed to document key information, including (a) the recommendation text, (b) the source title, (c) author(s), (d) year of publication, and (e) the preliminary theme assigned. This process ensured that all recommendations were traceable to their original source, supporting methodological transparency and auditability (Snyder, 2019).

The coding process followed an inductive and deductive approach. Initially, open coding was conducted to label each recommendation with descriptive codes reflecting its core message (e.g., child-led digital storytelling, augmented reality play, formative digital assessment). Subsequently, these codes were categorized into broader thematic areas (see Sample Appendix E) based on conceptual similarity and alignment with the study's guiding frameworks. For instance, recommendations focusing on intentional and balanced technology use were grouped under Technology Integration Strategies, whereas those emphasizing learner autonomy and culturally relevant digital play were coded as Child-Centered Pedagogy. Multiple iterations of coding were conducted to refine category boundaries and resolve overlapping codes (e.g., recommendations belonging to both instructional design and child-centered approaches). Coding consistency was verified through repeated checks and cross-referencing with original excerpts, ensuring analytical rigor (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Identification of cross-study patterns In the second phase, recommendations were analyzed to detect recurring themes and relationships across studies. A frequency analysis was performed to identify which strategies appeared most frequently, both as standalone recommendations and as co-occurring categories (e.g., *Technology Integration Strategies*, *Child-Centered Pedagogy*). This step revealed patterns in the literature, indicating areas of strong scholarly agreement and commonly endorsed best

practices. For example, multiple studies (Ethridge et al., 2022; Sakr & Oscar, 2020) consistently highlighted the importance of designing technology experiences that enhance—rather than replace—traditional forms of play.

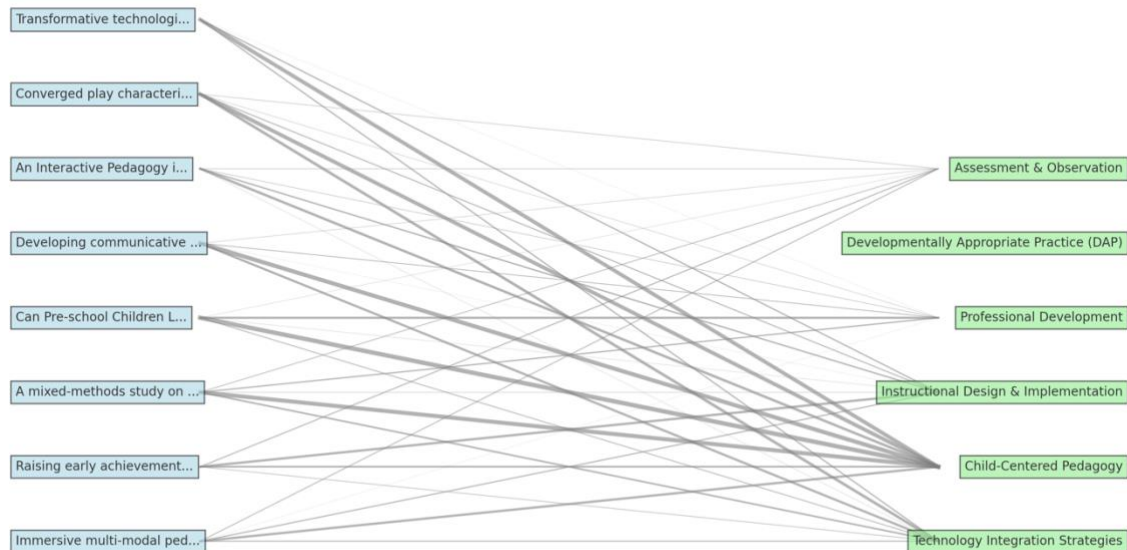
- **Technology Integration Strategies** (122 standalone entries; 295 co-occurring)
Focused on purposeful use of tools like AR, tablets, and hybrid play, emphasizing balance between digital and traditional play.
- **Child-Centered Pedagogy** (395 standalone entries; frequent co-occurrence)
Highlighted children’s autonomy, cultural relevance, and co-created digital storytelling.
- **Instructional Design & Implementation** (41 standalone entries + combined themes)
Recommended inquiry-based, multimodal, and flexible integration of technology into lesson plans.
- **Professional Development** (23 standalone entries + combined themes)
Suggested collaborative training and reflective communities to support tech integration.
- **Developmentally Appropriate Practice** (rare standalone but frequent overlap)
Ensured tools align with cognitive, emotional, and social needs of young learners.
- **Assessment & Observation** (32 standalone entries)
Emphasized digital documentation, formative assessment, and tracking children’s digital play patterns.

Visual analytical tools, including bar charts (see Figure 3) and a Sankey flow diagram (see Figure 4), were used to map the connections between sources and thematic areas. These visualizations demonstrated how recommendations flowed from different studies into the six overarching themes, providing a clear depiction of cross-study convergence.

Figure 3*Flow of Recommendations to Thematic Areas*

Figure 4

Detailed Flow diagram: Top 8 Sources to Thematic Areas



Synthesis of findings The final phase involved synthesizing coded data and identified patterns into six thematic categories: (1) Technology Integration Strategies, (2) Child-Centered Pedagogy, (3) Instructional Design and Implementation, (4) Professional Development, (5) Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), and (6) Assessment and Observation. Each theme was defined based on collective evidence from multiple articles, ensuring that final recommendations were grounded in diverse research perspectives.

For example, the *Technology Integration Strategies* theme drew on consistent findings across studies recommending balanced, intentional use of digital tools (Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020; Sakr & Oscar, 2020). Similarly, *Child-Centered Pedagogy* synthesized evidence emphasizing learner agency, culturally relevant digital narratives, and co-constructed play opportunities (Edwards, 2016; Ethridge et al., 2022). The synthesis process was iterative, involving re-examination of original data excerpts to confirm

thematic alignment and ensure each category was distinct yet interconnected with broader play-based pedagogical principles.

This multi-phase analysis process enabled the development of a structured, evidence-based framework of recommendations for early childhood educators integrating technology into play-based environments. By combining inductive coding, cross-study pattern recognition, and thematic synthesis, the findings provide both theoretical insights and practical strategies that are well-supported in the current literature.

Stage 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The phase of this integrative review will synthesize findings to provide meaningful contributions to theory, research, practice, and policy regarding technology integration in play-based early childhood education (ECE). First, the review will summarize its key findings, addressing literature-supported technology integration strategies for play-based early childhood classes, their aligned learning theories, and evidence-based recommendations for practical strategies for educators. Instead of repeating raw data, findings will be presented thematically to logically answer the research questions. Next, a comparative analysis will assess how these findings align with or diverge from prior research, highlighting agreements, contradictions, and gaps in the literature. This step will determine whether the review contributes new theoretical perspectives on the role of technology in early childhood play-based instruction.

A critical part of the discussion will be analyzing unexpected findings, identifying methodological inconsistencies, and providing alternative explanations for variations in study outcomes. The implications of the findings will be explored in two key areas. For research, the review will highlight gaps and propose new avenues for future studies. For practice, it will offer research-based practices for integrating digital tools into ECE curricula while addressing implementation challenges.

The conclusion will acknowledge methodological limitations, potential biases, and gaps in the reviewed literature while offering recommendations for future research to strengthen the evidence base. By consolidating the major contributions of the review, this section will emphasize how technology can

enhance play-based learning while maintaining core principles of early childhood education. The final synthesis will provide practical takeaways for educators, and researchers, reinforcing the importance of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based approaches to digital learning in early childhood settings.

Limitations

Despite the rigorous methodology employed in this integrative literature review, several limitations must be acknowledged. One key limitation is the selected studies are from one database, ERIC, not multiple databases. The second limitation is the reliance on existing literature, which inherently restricts the study to available data rather than generating new empirical evidence. The study depends on the quality, scope, and relevance of prior research, meaning that gaps, inconsistencies, or biases in the reviewed studies could impact the findings. Additionally, the inclusion criteria—such as focusing on peer-reviewed articles from the last ten years—may exclude older yet still relevant studies or emerging research not yet published in academic journals. While efforts were made to include gray literature to broaden the scope, limitations in access to certain unpublished or proprietary studies may have resulted in a partial representation of the field.

Another limitation is the selection and interpretive bias in the literature search, appraisal, and synthesis processes. Although systematic search strategies and predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied to minimize bias, the interpretation of findings may still be influenced by subjective perspectives. The study employs thematic analysis and qualitative synthesis, which, while valuable for identifying patterns and gaps, may lead to variability in how themes are categorized and interpreted. Moreover, the rapidly evolving nature of technology integration in early childhood education means that new developments may emerge that were not captured within the review period. Future research could address these limitations by conducting empirical studies to validate the synthesized findings, incorporating longitudinal analyses to track technological advancements over time, and expanding the review to include non-English publications for a more global perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Early Childhood Classes

The systematic analysis of the literature revealed seven distinct technology integration strategies that demonstrate empirical support for enhancing play-based early childhood education. These strategies emerged from a comprehensive examination of peer-reviewed research spanning the past decade, representing a paradigm shift from questioning whether technology belongs in early childhood settings to understanding how it can be meaningfully integrated while preserving the fundamental principles of play-based pedagogy.

The findings indicate that contemporary research has moved beyond the traditional dichotomy of technology versus play, instead embracing a more nuanced understanding of how digital tools can serve as mediators, enhancers, and extensions of children's natural learning processes. This evolution reflects broader theoretical shifts in early childhood education, where constructivist and sociocultural frameworks increasingly inform technology integration practices.

Technology-Supported Play: Foundational Integration Approaches

The first major strategy identified in the literature positions technology as a supportive element within traditional play frameworks rather than a replacement mechanism. This approach, which emerged prominently in the work of Ethridge et al. (2022), represents a fundamental reconceptualization of the technology-play relationship. The researchers demonstrated that technology-supported play involves the purposeful integration of developmentally appropriate digital tools that resonate with children's intrinsic interests and cultural backgrounds, thereby maintaining the child-centered nature of play while expanding its possibilities.

Kumpulainen et al. (2020) provided substantial evidence supporting this foundational approach, demonstrating through longitudinal observations that technology-supported play environments fostered creativity, collaboration, and multidomain learning when implemented with intentional pedagogical

frameworks. Their findings align with constructivist theories of learning, suggesting that digital tools function most effectively when they serve as mediating artifacts within children's zone of proximal development.

The literature reveals a critical dimension of technology-supported play in its emphasis on cultural relevance and contextual embedding. Critten et al. (2021) found that successful integration occurred when digital features were embedded within familiar objects and culturally meaningful contexts. This finding suggests that the abstraction often associated with digital technologies can be mitigated through careful attention to children lived experiences and cultural funds of knowledge. The researchers documented how storytelling applications reflecting children's home languages and community experiences created bridges between digital and analog worlds, facilitating more meaningful engagement.

Particularly noteworthy in this body of research is the identification of hybrid tools that exemplify technology-supported play principles. Stavholm et al. (2023) examined digital musical instruments and interactive storybooks as paradigmatic examples of technologies that preserve child agency while extending exploratory possibilities. These tools demonstrated effectiveness in supporting emergent literacy, mathematical thinking, and creative expression without compromising the open-ended nature of play that characterizes high-quality early childhood programs.

The success of technology-supported play, however, emerged as fundamentally dependent on informed adult facilitation. Leung et al. (2019) identified this as a critical factor, noting that educators require both technological competence and deep pedagogical knowledge to design experiences that are simultaneously engaging, developmentally appropriate, and educationally meaningful. This finding underscores the complexity of effective technology integration and challenges simplistic assumptions about digital natives or intuitive technology use.

Child-Centered Digital Play: Preserving Agency and Autonomy

The second major strategy identified in the literature emphasizes the paramount importance of maintaining child agency within digital environments. This approach, strongly supported by empirical research, positions children as active knowledge constructors rather than passive consumers of digital

content. Ethridge et al. (2022) provided foundational evidence for this strategy, demonstrating that child-centered approaches to technology integration resulted in higher levels of engagement, creativity, and self-directed learning.

The theoretical underpinnings of child-centered digital play draw heavily from constructivist and democratic education philosophies, emphasizing children's inherent capacity for meaningful choice-making and self-direction. Kumpulainen et al. (2020) documented how this approach manifested in practice, showing that effective child-centered technology use typically involved interactive, open-ended tools that adapted to diverse learning pathways while maintaining intuitive interfaces appropriate for young learners.

Empirical evidence from multiple studies supports the effectiveness of child-directed digital experiences. Sakr and Oscar (2020) found that when children guided their own interactions with digital media, they demonstrated more positive attitudes toward learning, increased intrinsic motivation, and deeper cognitive engagement. These findings align with self-determination theory, suggesting that digital environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to foster sustained engagement and meaningful learning.

The literature reveals important nuances in implementing child-centered digital play. Madanipour and Cahrssen (2019) found that effective child-centered approaches required sophisticated understanding of the balance between freedom and structure. While children needed autonomy to explore and create, they also benefited from carefully designed affordances that guided their exploration toward educationally meaningful outcomes. This finding challenges both laissez-faire approaches to technology use and overly structured, adult-directed implementations.

Antrilli and Wang (2022) contributed significant insights into the role of adult scaffolding within child-centered digital play. Their research demonstrated that applications designed to be child-directed fostered autonomy and creativity, particularly when paired with adult guidance that respected children's choices while providing necessary support. This finding suggests that child-centered approaches do not eliminate the need for skilled facilitation but rather require more sophisticated pedagogical skills to support children's self-directed learning.

The holistic framework identified by Pelizzari et al. (2023) positions technology as one resource among many within balanced learning environments. This perspective recognizes that child-centered digital play must be embedded within broader pedagogical approaches that prioritize play as central to cognitive and socio-emotional development. Kewalramani et al. (2020) found that in this model, educators assume critical facilitative roles, designing meaningful engagement opportunities while ensuring that play remained joyful, exploratory, and grounded in children lived experiences.

Adaptive Learning Technologies: Personalization Through Artificial Intelligence

The third strategy identified in the literature represents a significant technological advancement in personalizing play-based learning experiences. Adaptive learning technologies, supported by artificial intelligence and multimodal sensing capabilities, emerged as powerful tools for creating individualized learning pathways while maintaining the playful context that characterizes effective early childhood education.

Aslan et al. (2022) and Barman and Kjallander (2022) provided foundational research demonstrating how these sophisticated systems leverage real-time data tracking and behavioral analysis to dynamically adjust learning content and interaction strategies. Their work reveals that adaptive technologies can interpret complex behavioral patterns—including speech patterns, movement sequences, gestural communication, and emotional expressions—to provide responsive feedback that mirrors the attentiveness of skilled educators.

The multimodal sensing capabilities identified in the literature represent a significant advancement in educational technology. Madanipour and Cohrssen (2019) documented how these systems detect subtle indicators of engagement, frustration, or confusion, enabling automatic adjustments to task difficulty, alternative strategy suggestions, or motivational prompts. This responsiveness addresses a critical challenge in early childhood education: providing individualized support within group learning contexts.

Profile-based tracking systems, as examined by Mowafi and Abumuhfouz (2020), enable continuous refinement of individualized learner profiles based on ongoing interactions. This capability

facilitates differentiated instruction while fostering learner autonomy and promoting competence development by allowing children to progress at individually appropriate paces. The findings suggest that these systems can support the individualization that experts have long advocated for in early childhood education while maintaining the social and collaborative aspects of play-based learning.

The real-time mobile adaptivity documented by Stavholm et al. (2023) extends these capabilities across varied learning contexts, whether in formal classroom settings, home environments, or outdoor play spaces. This flexibility preserves the open-ended nature of play while subtly guiding children toward specific learning objectives. The seamless integration of guidance and play represents a significant advancement in educational technology design.

Yelland and Gilbert (2017) contributed important insights into how adaptive learning technologies can combine digital and tangible play experiences, enriching children's cognitive and social development through hybrid interactions. Their research demonstrated that these technologies could support the integration of multiple learning modalities while maintaining the hands-on, experiential learning that characterizes effective early childhood programs.

The evidence presented by Antrilli and Wang (2022) indicates that adaptive learning technologies can successfully nurture play-based atmospheres while supporting enhanced learning outcomes. Their longitudinal study revealed improvements in foundational skills necessary for future academic success, suggesting that personalized technology integration can support both immediate developmental needs and long-term educational preparation.

Scaffolding with Technology: Dynamic Support Systems

The fourth strategy identified in the literature conceptualizes technology as a dynamic scaffolding system that supports learning through both explicit instruction and implicit guidance. This approach, grounded in Vygotskian theories of learning and development, positions digital tools as mediating artifacts that can bridge the gap between children's current abilities and their potential development.

Axelsson et al. (2016) provided foundational evidence for technology-mediated scaffolding, demonstrating how digital tools facilitate developmentally appropriate support through timely feedback, structured exploratory activities, and gradual release of responsibility. Their work reveals that effective technological scaffolding can be embedded within technology design itself or mediated through adult, peer, and environmental supports.

Teacher-guided scaffolding emerged as a particularly significant dimension of this strategy. Critten et al. (2021) documented how educators intentionally integrate digital resources—including programmable toys, educational applications, and game-based platforms—to co-construct knowledge with children. This approach requires sophisticated pedagogical knowledge, as educators must understand both the technological affordances and the developmental needs of individual children.

The research on coding robots provides compelling examples of technology-mediated scaffolding in practice. Pelizzari et al. (2023) examined tools like Bee-Bot and Cubetto, demonstrating how these devices provide immediate, non-judgmental feedback that enables children to iteratively refine problem-solving strategies within playful, hands-on contexts. The visual and kinesthetic feedback provided by these tools supports children's developing understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, logical sequencing, and spatial reasoning.

Peer-mediated scaffolding through technology represents another significant finding in the literature. Outhwaite et al. (2019) examined applications such as Our Story, which promote collaborative digital storytelling where children co-create narratives, share perspectives, and build upon each other's ideas. These interactions foster not only cognitive and language development but also social-emotional skills and learner agency, demonstrating the multifaceted benefits of well-designed collaborative technologies.

The literature reveals particular promise for multimodal digital tools in supporting emergent literacy development. Mowafi and Abumuhfouz (2020) found these tools especially effective for bilingual and multilingual learners, enabling children to bridge home languages with new vocabulary and narrative structures through voice recording, visual prompts, and multimedia creation tools. This finding suggests

that technology-mediated scaffolding can be particularly valuable for supporting linguistic diversity within early childhood settings.

Grieshaber et al. (2021) contributed important insights into how technological scaffolding can create more inclusive learning environments. Their research demonstrated that multimodal tools could recognize and value diverse linguistic backgrounds, ultimately enriching all children's educational experiences through exposure to multiple languages and cultural perspectives.

Yelland and Gilbert (2017) emphasized the importance of integrated approaches to technological scaffolding, arguing that these tools are most effective when they support holistic learning environments that recognize children's varied cultural experiences, cognitive preferences, and developmental pathways while providing appropriate challenges and supports.

Multimedia Content Delivery: Multimodal Learning Experiences

The fifth strategy identified in the literature focuses on the strategic use of multimedia content to enhance engagement, support diverse learning needs, and foster multimodal expression within play-based environments. This approach recognizes the diverse ways children process information and expresses their understanding, providing multiple pathways for learning and communication.

Kumpulainen et al. (2020) provided foundational research demonstrating how multimedia tools—including videos, images, audio recordings, animations, and interactive storytelling applications—enable educators to present information in developmentally appropriate and accessible formats. Their work reveals that multimedia integration can accommodate a range of learning preferences and cognitive strengths while maintaining the engaging, interactive qualities that characterize effective play-based learning.

The Our Story application emerged as an exemplar of effective multimedia integration in multiple studies. Madanipour and Cohrssen (2019) documented how this tool allows children to create and share digital narratives by combining photographs, voice recordings, and text, thereby supporting expressive language development, narrative construction, and creative expression. The multimodal nature of the tool

provides opportunities for children to communicate ideas in ways that align with their developmental levels and personal experiences.

Sakr and Oscar (2020) contributed significant insights into the cognitive benefits of multimodal storytelling, finding that young learners who engaged with multimedia creation tools demonstrated enhanced ability to connect lived experiences with symbolic representation. This connection deepened comprehension and promoted meaning-making processes that are fundamental to early literacy development.

The literature reveals that multimedia content delivery enables sophisticated scaffolding approaches tailored to individual children's interests, language abilities, and cognitive profiles. Leung et al. (2019) found that visual and auditory supports enhanced understanding of complex concepts, particularly for emergent readers, multilingual learners, and children with diverse learning needs. This finding suggests that multimedia integration can serve as a powerful tool for inclusive education.

Speldewinde and Campbell (2024) documented the flexible nature of multimedia scaffolding, showing how content could be adapted in real-time to respond to children's changing needs and interests. This adaptability supports the responsive teaching that experts advocate for in early childhood education while leveraging technological capabilities that extend beyond what individual educators might accomplish independently.

The interactive dimensions of multimedia content emerged as particularly significant in the literature. Ethridge et al. (2022) found that interactive media invited active participation, promoting learner agency and sustained engagement while supporting reflective learning through iterative processes. These findings suggest that multimedia tools are most effective when they position children as creators and manipulators of content rather than passive consumers.

Thorshag and Holmqvist (2018) contributed important insights into the metacognitive benefits of multimedia creation, documenting how children who engaged in multimodal composition demonstrated enhanced understanding of their own learning processes. This reflective capacity supports deeper understanding and the development of self-regulation skills that are crucial for lifelong learning.

Aslan et al. (2022) provided comprehensive evidence that multimedia technology integration enriches children's play while supporting cognitive, social, and emotional development. Their longitudinal study demonstrated that multimedia tools could effectively bridge formal educational contexts with the world of play, creating seamless learning experiences that honor both educational objectives and children's natural learning processes.

Physical-Digital Play Combinations: Hybrid Learning Environments

The sixth strategy identified in the literature represents an evolving pedagogical approach that combines tangible, sensory-rich experiences with interactive technological affordances. This hybrid approach emerged as a response to concerns about screen time and digital displacement of physical activity, offering a solution that preserves the embodied, social, and exploratory nature of traditional play while enriching it with digital adaptability and engagement.

Madanipour and Cohrssen (2019) provided foundational research demonstrating how blended approaches support holistic development by maintaining the multisensory experiences that are crucial for young children's learning. Their work reveals that effective physical-digital combinations honor children's need for movement, tactile exploration, and social interaction while leveraging the unique affordances of digital technologies.

Critten et al. (2021) contributed significant evidence supporting the effectiveness of combined physical-digital experiences, documenting improved outcomes across multiple developmental domains when children engaged with hybrid learning environments. Their research suggests that these combinations may offer advantages over purely digital or purely analog approaches by providing multiple pathways for learning and expression.

Web-mapping emerged as a particularly promising pedagogical framework within hybrid environments. Kumpulainen et al. (2020) documented how web-mapping enables educators to design, observe, and reflect on play experiences by tracing connections between children's physical actions and

digital representations. This approach supports intentional planning while honoring the spontaneous, child-led exploration that characterizes high-quality play.

Digital storytelling within hybrid environments represents another significant application identified in the literature. Sakr and Oscar (2020) found that children could fluidly transition between physical enactment and digital narration or multimedia composition, with this movement across modalities supporting creativity, narrative development, and multimodal literacy development. The continuity between analog and digital expression emerged as a key factor in successful implementation.

Speldewinde and Campbell (2024) provided important insights into the flexible learning pathways supported by blended play environments. Their observational research documented how children shifted seamlessly between hands-on manipulation and digital exploration, with these transitions enhancing collaboration, problem-solving, and imaginative thinking rather than creating disruption or confusion.

The reflective dimensions of physical-digital play combinations received significant attention in the literature. Thorshag and Holmqvist (2018) found that hybrid environments encouraged children to reflect on their learning processes, integrating physical play experiences with digital insights to foster deeper understanding and engagement. This metacognitive awareness represents a sophisticated outcome that bridges concrete and abstract thinking.

Ethridge et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of active participation within hybrid environments, documenting how these settings promoted agency and self-direction while maintaining the collaborative and social dimensions of play. Their research suggests that successful physical-digital combinations require careful attention to preserving the interpersonal interactions that support social-emotional development.

Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences: Emerging Technologies

The seventh and final strategy identified in the literature encompasses emerging immersive technologies that create responsive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning environments. This category includes augmented reality (AR), advanced artificial intelligence applications, multimodal

sensing systems, and personalized digital platforms that offer new possibilities for supporting children's curiosity, creativity, and agency through sophisticated physical-digital integration.

Kumpulainen et al. (2020) provided foundational research on immersive technology integration, demonstrating how these tools can transform play-based learning by creating hybrid physical-digital experiences that extend rather than replace traditional play. Their work reveals that immersive technologies are most effective when they maintain the exploratory, embodied, and social characteristics that define high-quality early childhood education.

Augmented reality emerged as particularly promising within the immersive technology category. Madanipour and Cohrsen (2019) documented AR's unique capacity to overlay virtual content onto physical environments, making it especially well-suited for educational approaches that emphasize exploration, embodied learning, and active engagement. The seamless integration of real and virtual elements provides rich sensory experiences that support both cognitive and imaginative development.

Outhwaite et al. (2019) contributed significant evidence supporting AR's educational effectiveness, finding that children who engaged with AR applications demonstrated enhanced spatial reasoning, creative thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. Their research suggests that AR's ability to make abstract concepts visible and manipulable provides unique learning opportunities that are particularly valuable for young children's concrete thinking patterns.

AI-powered multimodal sensing systems represent another significant advancement documented in the literature. Leung et al. (2019) examined tools like Kid Space, which employ sophisticated sensing capabilities to detect children's gestures, speech, and movement patterns, delivering adaptive prompts and content in real time. These systems align with individual developmental paces while maintaining the spontaneity and child-direction that characterize effective play-based learning.

Aslan et al. (2022) provided comprehensive evidence for personalized learning through immersive technologies, documenting how responsive, context-aware systems enhance learner autonomy while supporting individualized development. Their longitudinal study revealed that children using AI-enhanced

play environments demonstrated improved self-regulation, problem-solving skills, and creative expression compared to control groups using traditional play materials alone.

AR storytelling tools received particular attention as exemplars of immersive technology integration. Stavholm et al. (2023) examined applications such as MyAR Julle, documenting how these tools bring narratives to life through multisensory interactions that promote expressive language, emotional engagement, and collaborative meaning-making. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements supports multiple learning modalities while maintaining narrative coherence.

The social dimensions of immersive technology integration emerged as crucial considerations in the literature. Yelland and Gilbert (2017) found that immersive technologies could facilitate social interaction and collaboration when designed and implemented thoughtfully. Cooperative AR tasks and collaborative digital games invited children to communicate, negotiate roles, and work together toward shared goals, supporting social-emotional development alongside cognitive growth.

However, the literature also reveals important cautions regarding immersive technology implementation. Ethridge et al. (2022) emphasized that benefits depend heavily on intentional design and skilled educator mediation. Without thoughtful facilitation, immersive technologies risk isolating learners or reducing opportunities for meaningful peer interaction, undermining the social foundations of early childhood education.

The challenge of evidence-based implementation emerged as a significant concern in the immersive technology literature. Critten et al. (2021) cautioned against uncritical adoption of emerging technologies, noting that educational technology often follows "hype cycles" in which initial enthusiasm outpaces rigorous evidence accumulation. They argued for critical reflection to determine whether and how tools like AR align with core objectives of play-based learning.

Pelizzari et al. (2023) contributed important insights into balanced implementation of immersive technologies, emphasizing that these tools should enrich rather than replace the physical movement, social engagement, and hands-on inquiry that form the foundation of early childhood education. Their research

documented concerns about screen time, overreliance on digital content, and potential loss of tactile play experiences, underscoring the need for thoughtful design and ethical implementation.

Despite these cautions, the literature provides substantial evidence for the potential of immersive technologies to enhance early childhood education. Axelsson et al. (2016) found that when thoughtfully integrated, these technologies increased children's motivation, sustained attention, and encouraged deeper exploration of content. The immediate feedback, dynamic interaction, and adaptable pathways offered by immersive technologies align well with constructivist and child-centered learning approaches.

Madanipour and Cohrssen (2019) concluded that immersive technology success depends fundamentally on maintaining balance between technological innovation and pedagogical wisdom. Their research suggests that the most effective implementations leverage technology's unique affordances while preserving the essential elements that make play such a powerful vehicle for early learning and development.

Aligned Learning Theories with the Strategies

Cognitive Development Theory

The analysis of technology integration strategies revealed profound alignment with cognitive development theory, demonstrating how digital tools can effectively support children's mental processes and intellectual growth. Drawing primarily from Piaget's developmental framework (Piaget, 1952) and contemporary extensions of cognitive theory, the findings illuminate the ways in which various technology integration approaches foster attention, memory, symbolic representation, and problem-solving capacities in early childhood learners.

Technology-Supported Play and Cognitive Development The examination of technology-supported play environments revealed compelling evidence for their cognitive developmental benefits. Edwards (2016) demonstrated that technology-supported play effectively mirrored children's real-world experiences while offering cognitively rich opportunities to explore abstract concepts in tangible ways. This finding suggests that digital tools, when thoughtfully integrated into play contexts, encourage children to

engage with symbols, systems, and cause-effect relationships that form the foundation of early cognitive development.

Further supporting this alignment, Ethridge et al. (2022) found that intentional technology use in early learning environments could scaffold critical cognitive processes, particularly executive functioning and self-regulation. Their research indicated that digital tools, when combined with child-directed learning and supportive adult interaction, promoted independent thinking and cognitive strategy development. This evidence aligns with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), where appropriate technological scaffolding enables children to achieve cognitive tasks beyond their independent capability.

The work of Sakr and Oscar (2020) provided additional insights into how early years practitioners leveraged digital play to facilitate children's meaning-making processes. Their findings revealed that technology allowed children to visualize abstract ideas and engage in symbolic thinking—hallmarks of Piaget's preoperational and concrete operational stages (Piaget, 1952). This visualization capacity appeared particularly significant for supporting children's transition from concrete to more abstract thinking patterns.

Child-Centered Digital Play and Cognitive Growth The analysis of child-centered digital play revealed substantial conceptual connections to cognitive development theory, particularly regarding how technology integration facilitates cognitive growth through interactive and developmentally appropriate experiences. Edwards (2016) argued that contemporary conceptualizations of play must reflect the cognitive realities of children developing within digital environments, suggesting that digital play provides opportunities for mental representation, symbolic thinking, and narrative construction.

Ethridge et al. (2022) contributed compelling evidence through their examination of virtual play-based learning environments that foster essential cognitive skills including memory, attention, and executive functioning. Their results demonstrated that digital platforms, when thoughtfully designed, can scaffold children's thinking and support metacognition during play experiences, particularly when children exercise agency in exploration and decision-making.

The research by Veresov and Veraksa (2022) provided additional evidence of theoretical alignment by exploring how digital games enhance attention, strategic thinking, and problem-solving capabilities. Their findings indicated that well-designed digital play environments prompt children to utilize working memory and adapt to rule-based systems, thereby exercising key components of cognitive flexibility—a critical aspect of executive function development.

Adaptive Learning Technologies and Cognitive Development The investigation of adaptive learning technologies revealed particularly strong alignment with cognitive development principles. Aslan et al. (2022) demonstrated that adaptive systems, such as the Kid Space platform, utilized real-time multimodal data including gestures and speech to respond to children's behaviors and cognitive cues. These systems provided just-in-time prompts, suggestions, and modifications that supported children's engagement in problem-solving and reflective thinking—central features of cognitive development theory.

The adaptive nature of these technologies proved especially significant for accommodating diverse developmental levels, allowing children to advance through tasks at their own pace and readiness. This individualization aligned closely with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), where learners achieve cognitive growth with appropriate and timely guidance.

Technology Scaffolding and Cognitive Processes The analysis of scaffolding with technology consistently demonstrated alignment with core cognitive development principles. Edwards (2016) found that scaffolding with technology in early childhood settings helped children navigate and make sense of digital tools in ways that supported symbolic reasoning and conceptual understanding. Digital scaffolds—including prompts, visuals, and interactive feedback—enriched children's ability to represent and reflect on information, fostering cognitive growth.

Ethridge et al. (2022) provided evidence that digital scaffolding strategies embedded in virtual learning environments supported working memory, self-regulation, and metacognitive strategies. Their findings underscored the importance of intentionally designed digital tools that provided developmentally appropriate support, enabling children to engage in increasingly complex tasks as their competence developed.

Multimedia and Physical-Digital Integration The examination of multimedia content delivery and physical-digital play combinations revealed additional support for cognitive development theory. Aslan et al. (2022) found that children's cognitive development was significantly enriched through multimodal learning experiences that combined video, sound, gesture, and interactive storytelling to support sustained attention, memory development, and sensory integration.

The integration of physical and digital elements proved particularly powerful for cognitive development. Edwards (2016) introduced the concept of "web-mapping" to illustrate how physical-digital play helped children make connections between digital tools and their real-world experiences, enhancing cognitive development through inquiry and meaning-making across both physical and virtual contexts.

Psychosocial Development Theory

The analysis revealed extensive evidence that various technology integration strategies align closely with psychosocial development theory, particularly Erikson's framework of psychosocial stages. The findings demonstrate how digital play environments support children's emerging sense of identity, agency, social roles, and emotional well-being across multiple technology integration approaches.

Identity Formation and Social Competence Technology-supported play environments consistently demonstrated their capacity to foster psychosocial development through identity formation and social skill development. Pelizzari et al. (2023) found that coding tasks embedded in playful settings not only fostered cognitive growth but also enhanced children's social identity formation. When children engaged with technology in collaborative and imaginative ways, they developed confidence and a sense of purpose—key aspects of Erikson's "initiative versus guilt" and "industry versus inferiority" stages.

The Kid Space multi-modal interactive digital environment studied by Aslan et al. (2024) provided compelling evidence of how technology can support psychosocial development. Children's engagement in technology-supported dialogue and joint problem-solving helped build trust, autonomy, and social competence—fundamental components of early psychosocial growth. The platform's integration of AI-

based personalized scaffolding through responsive dialogue and encouragement provided emotional support while fostering collaboration, empathy, and emotional security.

Emotional Expression and Self-Concept Development The research on child-centered digital play revealed significant contributions to psychosocial development through emotional expression and self-concept formation. Bird (2019) focused on digital camera use in children's imaginative play, revealing how technology enabled children to express personal experiences and engage in storytelling. These experiences proved central to developing coherent self-concept and personal identity while fostering initiative and emotional expression.

Cheng and Lam (2025) demonstrated how mobile music applications facilitated not only communication but also collaborative expression and emotional regulation among children. The multimedia features—including visual cues, auditory prompts, and interactive elements—created emotionally safe and responsive environments that supported both self-expression and social interaction, aligning with psychosocial needs for autonomy and identity formation.

Adaptive Technologies and Emotional Support The investigation of adaptive learning technologies revealed their particular strength in supporting psychosocial development through individualized, emotionally responsive interactions. The Kid Space environment's AI-driven feedback system enhanced opportunities for emotional expression and relationship-building, supporting Erikson's concepts of initiative and social participation through tailored prompts and support for each child's behavior.

McGlynn-Stewart et al. (2017) found that adaptive, open-ended iPad apps enhanced communication and cooperation among young learners, allowing children to engage in socially meaningful tasks that contributed to a sense of agency and community. These digital experiences fostered psychosocial well-being by creating contexts where children could develop trust, resilience, and identity within social frameworks.

Physical-Digital Integration and Social Identity The analysis of physical-digital play combinations revealed particular strength in supporting psychosocial development through embodied social interaction. Pelizzari et al. (2023) found that physical-digital play environments involving coding and

robotics nurtured children's emotional engagement and communicative confidence, empowering children to initiate and sustain social interactions while contributing to a sense of competence and purpose.

The immersive and interactive learning experiences demonstrated additional psychosocial benefits. Kumpulainen et al. (2020) found that children's "augmented storying" using augmented reality allowed learners to co-construct narratives, express emotions, and engage in imaginative role-play. Through collaborative storytelling and meaning-making, children built emotional resilience and self-confidence, supporting psychosocial growth in initiative and industry domains.

Social Constructivism Theory

The findings provided compelling evidence that technology integration strategies align strongly with social constructivist learning theory, rooted in Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction, cultural tools, and collaborative knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Across all examined technology integration approaches, digital tools consistently served as mediators of social learning rather than isolated cognitive activities.

Collaborative Knowledge Construction Technology-supported play demonstrated particular alignment with social constructivist principles through its facilitation of collaborative knowledge construction. Edwards (2016) found that technology-supported play reflected children's contemporary life-worlds and enabled engagement with cultural tools in socially mediated environments. Digital platforms served not merely as content delivery tools but as spaces for children to co-construct knowledge through dialogue, peer exchange, and imaginative collaboration.

The virtual play-based learning environments examined by Ethridge et al. (2022) provided conducive contexts for social constructivist learning. Children actively engaged in shared problem-solving and peer teaching when supported by thoughtfully integrated digital tools, enhancing their social learning networks and co-regulated thinking processes. This evidence demonstrated how technology could amplify rather than replace the social dimensions of learning.

Cultural Mediation and Meaning-Making The analysis of child-centered digital play revealed extensive support for social constructivist principles through culturally mediated learning experiences. Ethridge et al. (2022) found that virtual teaching environments designed around child-centered digital play encouraged collaboration, dialogue, and shared problem-solving among children and adults within constructivist pedagogical frameworks that valued learners' active roles in meaning-making.

Veresov and Veraksa (2022) reinforced social constructivism's role in digital play by emphasizing how play-based technologies promoted peer interaction, cooperation, and shared narrative development. Children constructed understanding through both interaction with digital tools and social use of those tools with others, highlighting the inherently social nature of digital play when properly implemented.

Adaptive Technologies as Social Mediators The investigation of adaptive learning technologies revealed their particular strength as social mediators in constructivist learning environments. Aslan et al. (2024) found that Kid Space, a responsive AI-driven system, fostered collaborative storytelling and peer dialogue while adapting to children's behavior and prompting cooperative problem-solving. This approach highlighted core tenets of mediated learning and joint activity within the zone of proximal development.

McPake and Stephen (2016) demonstrated that adaptive technologies enabled children to engage in socially meaningful interactions even in early implementations. Their findings underscored the importance of shared technology experiences in constructing knowledge, particularly when digital tools were embedded in the social and cultural contexts of learners.

Scaffolding and Social Interaction The examination of technology scaffolding revealed strong alignment with social constructivist principles through its emphasis on socially mediated learning. Edwards (2016) found that technology-supported scaffolding co-constructed knowledge through culturally and developmentally appropriate tools, fostering learning environments where children's everyday experiences, including digital play, were integrated into shared meaning-making processes.

The analysis of multimedia content delivery confirmed its role as a facilitator of social constructivist learning. McPake and Stephen (2016) found that multimedia tools such as the "Our Story" app enabled children to engage in collaborative storytelling using images, voice recordings, and text. These tools served

as mediators of joint attention and cultural expression, supporting co-construction of narratives within social learning contexts.

Constructivist Learning Theory

The analysis consistently demonstrated that technology integration strategies align effectively with constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active, experiential process where individuals construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and others. The findings revealed that digital technologies, when integrated thoughtfully into early learning environments, serve as powerful tools supporting exploration, meaning-making, and self-directed inquiry.

Active Knowledge Construction Technology-supported play demonstrated strong constructivist alignment by providing environments where children could explore, experiment, collaborate, and create. Edwards (2016) found that technology-supported play reflected children's contemporary experiences and encouraged engagement in open-ended, symbolic, and imaginative activities. These activities allowed children to manipulate representations and test hypotheses in ways that aligned with constructivist views on developmental progression of thinking.

The examination of child-centered digital play revealed compelling evidence for constructivist principles. Edwards (2016) emphasized the necessity for contemporary play concepts reflecting children's digital experiences, conceptualizing digital play as socially mediated and embedded in children's life-worlds. This approach aligned with constructivist emphasis on learning as contextual and participatory rather than passive reception of information.

Self-Directed Learning and Agency Adaptive learning technologies proved particularly aligned with constructivist principles through their support of learner agency and self-direction. McPake and Stephen (2016) found that adaptive technologies provided children with meaningful tools to construct narratives and communicate ideas, promoting active engagement and self-expression that allowed learners to build knowledge through digital storytelling and multimedia composition.

The Kid Space platform studied by Aslan et al. (2024) integrated adaptive, AI-driven supports that adjusted based on children's gestures, speech, and actions. This approach embodied a socio-constructivist model of learning by fostering exploratory dialogue and child-led inquiry within responsive, technology-mediated environments.

Scaffolded Exploration and Reflection Technology scaffolding demonstrated strong constructivist alignment by supporting guided discovery and personally meaningful learning experiences. Edwards (2016) found that digital scaffolding in early childhood classrooms enhanced conceptual development by providing support during open-ended play, allowing learners to build understanding through active engagement, symbolic representation, and iterative exploration.

The analysis of multimedia content delivery revealed additional constructivist benefits. McPake and Stephen (2016) explored multimedia tools that allowed children to create digital narratives by combining images, text, and audio. These platforms supported self-directed, symbolic, and contextual learning experiences—all central to constructivist pedagogy.

Physical-Digital Integration and Experiential Learning The examination of physical-digital play combinations revealed particular strength in supporting constructivist learning through hands-on, multimodal experiences. Edwards (2016) presented the concept of "web-mapping" to explain how physical-digital play environments allowed children to make meaningful connections between digital and real-world experiences, supporting constructivist views of learning as an active process shaped by interaction with both tools and context.

Wohlwend (2017) explored how children used physical and digital materials together to engage in symbolic play and narrative construction. The convergence of popular culture and tangible props in digital environments encouraged children to construct knowledge that reflected their own experiences and interests, embodying constructivist ideals of personally meaningful learning.

Play-Based Learning Theory

The findings consistently supported the integration of various technology approaches within play-based learning theory frameworks. Rooted in developmental and constructivist traditions, play-based learning emphasizes exploration, child agency, imagination, and joy in learning. The analysis revealed that technology, when used purposefully, enhances these principles rather than detracting from them.

Preserving Play Qualities in Digital Environments Technology-supported play demonstrated strong alignment with play-based learning theory by maintaining the centrality of child agency and open-ended exploration. Edwards (2016) argued for an expanded view of play that included digital engagement as part of children's life-worlds, demonstrating that technology-supported play aligned with play-based pedagogy by facilitating child-led exploration, symbolic representation, and social interaction in both physical and virtual environments.

The research by Sakr and Oscar (2020) confirmed that early years practitioners increasingly conceptualized technology-supported play as an extension of traditional play-based learning. Children's interaction with digital tools supported curiosity, narrative construction, and shared problem-solving—essential dimensions of play-based learning that remained intact in digital contexts.

Child Agency and Developmental Appropriateness Child-centered digital play revealed particularly strong alignment with play-based learning principles through its emphasis on child agency and developmental appropriateness. Ethridge et al. (2022) emphasized that play-based learning remained central even in virtual and digitally mediated environments, with virtual teaching platforms sustaining playful learning experiences by enabling child-led exploration, problem-solving, and narrative construction.

The analysis revealed that child-centered approaches ensured technology complemented rather than competed with early education's developmental and pedagogical goals. Madanipour and Cohrssen (2020) explored augmented reality integration as digital play supporting embodied, interactive learning, demonstrating how such tools enabled children to immerse themselves in exploratory and imaginative play scenarios that mirrored traditional play-based learning's experiential nature.

Adaptive Support for Playful Learning Adaptive learning technologies demonstrated their compatibility with play-based learning theory through responsive, developmentally appropriate support systems. Aslan et al. (2022) found that the adaptive learning environment "Kid Space" used real-time multimodal sensing to engage children in embodied play, storytelling, and interactive dialogue. The platform aligned with play-based pedagogy by allowing children to guide their learning through playful inquiry and exploration while promoting both autonomy and cognitive growth.

The examination of technology scaffolding revealed how digital supports could enhance rather than constrain playful learning. Edwards (2016) found that digital scaffolding could support symbolic thinking and narrative development during play, helping children navigate complex tasks within meaningful contexts while extending their ability to construct knowledge through self-directed and imaginative play.

Enriching Traditional Play Forms The analysis of multimedia content delivery and physical-digital play combinations revealed how technology could enrich traditional play forms while maintaining their essential characteristics. McPake and Stephen (2016) found that multimedia tools such as the "Our Story" app fostered expressive play, enabling learners to make meaning through symbolic representation—an essential feature of play-based learning that was enhanced rather than replaced by digital tools.

The integration of physical and digital elements proved particularly powerful for maintaining play-based learning principles. Edwards (2016) introduced "web-mapping" to illustrate how technologies embedded in play-based frameworks supported children's agency and exploration, with physical-digital tools becoming part of children's broader play environments while enabling experimentation and meaning construction through inquiry and discovery.

Immersive and interactive learning experiences demonstrated the potential for technology to create new forms of play while preserving essential play qualities. Kumpulainen et al. (2020) found that children's "augmented storying" practices using AR tools enabled construction of narratives, peer interaction, and environmental engagement in playful and imaginative ways, supporting core play-based learning elements including symbolic play, social collaboration, and agency.

Evidence-Based Recommendations for Practical Educator Strategies

The comprehensive analysis of peer-reviewed literature revealed a robust foundation of evidence-based recommendations that can be synthesized into practical strategies for early childhood educators. Through systematic examination of current research, six distinct thematic categories emerged, each offering concrete guidance for practitioners seeking to integrate technology effectively within play-based learning environments. These findings represent a convergence of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, providing educators with actionable strategies grounded in rigorous scholarship.

The synthesis process revealed that effective technology integration in early childhood education is not merely a matter of introducing digital tools, but rather requires a fundamental reimagining of pedagogical approaches that honor both technological affordances and developmentally appropriate practices. The following findings illuminate the multifaceted nature of this integration and offer a roadmap for practitioners navigating the complex intersection of technology and early learning.

Thematic Category 1: Strategic Technology Integration Approaches

The literature consistently advocates for a paradigm shift from technology as an add-on component to technology as an integrated element of holistic learning experiences. Madanipour and Cohrssen (2020) and Sakr and Oscar (2020) provide compelling evidence for adopting balanced, intentional approaches that leverage digital tools—including tablets, augmented reality systems, and multimedia devices—to enhance rather than replace traditional play-based learning modalities.

The research demonstrates that successful integration requires careful alignment between technological affordances and pedagogical objectives. Ethridge et al. (2022) emphasize that screen-based activities must complement embodied and social learning experiences, creating what Edwards (2016) conceptualizes as "hybrid play models." These models represent a sophisticated understanding of how digital and physical learning environments can be woven together to create enriched educational experiences.

Particularly noteworthy is the emerging evidence supporting augmented reality as a transformative tool for spatial awareness development and interactive narrative construction (Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020). The literature suggests that AR technologies, when thoughtfully implemented, can bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete understanding, offering children opportunities to manipulate and explore digital content in physically meaningful ways.

Thematic Category 2: Child-Centered Digital Pedagogies

A significant body of evidence supports the centrality of child agency and cultural responsiveness in technology-enhanced learning environments. Edwards (2016) presents compelling arguments for integrating children's popular culture and personal digital narratives as foundational elements of meaningful learning experiences. This approach recognizes children not as passive consumers of digital content but as active creators and curators of their own learning journeys.

The research reveals that effective child-centered pedagogies embrace what Edwards (2016) terms "co-constituted play," wherein children and adults collaboratively negotiate digital play scenarios. This collaborative approach honors children's autonomy while providing appropriate scaffolding for learning. Ethridge et al. (2022) and Palaiologou (2016) extend this concept by advocating for practices that position children as co-creators of multimedia content, digital storytellers, and decision-makers in their learning processes.

The literature suggests that these child-centered approaches are not merely pedagogical preferences but essential components of effective technology integration. By centering children's voices, interests, and cultural backgrounds, educators create conditions for authentic engagement and meaningful learning that extends beyond superficial interaction with digital tools.

Thematic Category 3: Intentional Instructional Design and Implementation

The research provides substantial evidence for the critical role of intentional instructional design in successful technology integration. Rather than viewing technology as a standalone intervention, the literature advocates for embedding digital tools within comprehensive inquiry-based learning frameworks.

Ethridge et al. (2022) and Johnston et al. (2020) demonstrate that effective implementation requires systematic integration through thematic units, digital portfolios, and project-based learning approaches.

The findings reveal that digital content should function as a scaffold for children's thinking processes rather than merely a delivery mechanism for predetermined content. This represents a fundamental shift from transmission-based models of education to constructivist approaches that honor children's capacity for problem-solving and creative expression.

Madanipour and Cohrsen (2020) contribute important insights regarding multimodal engagement, demonstrating that effective instructional design must accommodate diverse learning preferences through visual, auditory, and tactile modalities. The research suggests that this multimodal approach not only supports individual differences but creates richer, more accessible learning environments for all children.

Edwards (2016) emphasizes the importance of implementation flexibility, arguing that rigid adherence to predetermined technology protocols can undermine the responsive, adaptive nature of effective early childhood pedagogy. The literature supports approaches that allow educators to modify and adapt technological tools based on emerging classroom needs and individual child characteristics.

Thematic Category 4: Professional Development and Educator Capacity Building

The literature presents compelling evidence for the essential role of comprehensive professional development in supporting effective technology integration. Johnston et al. (2020) and Plumb and Kautz (2022) argue that technical skill development alone is insufficient; rather, educators require sophisticated understanding of how to integrate digital tools within developmentally appropriate, play-based pedagogical frameworks.

The research reveals that effective professional development models extend beyond traditional workshop formats to embrace collaborative inquiry and professional learning communities. Johnston et al. (2020) demonstrate that educators who engage in ongoing, reflective professional learning are more likely to develop critical evaluation skills and adapt technology use to meet specific student needs.

The findings suggest that professional development must address both the technical and pedagogical dimensions of technology integration. This dual focus enables educators to move beyond superficial tool use toward sophisticated integration that enhances rather than disrupts established effective practices.

Thematic Category 5: Developmentally Appropriate Technology Practices

A consistent theme throughout the literature is the paramount importance of maintaining developmentally appropriate practices within technology-enhanced learning environments. Palaiologou (2016) and Madanipour and Cohrssen (2020) provide substantial evidence that technology integration must be carefully calibrated to align with young children's cognitive, social, and emotional developmental stages.

The research demonstrates that developmentally appropriate technology use prioritizes interactive, social, and physically engaging applications over passive consumption models. Sakr and Oscar (2020) present evidence supporting active learning principles within digital environments, advocating for approaches that encourage movement, expression, and collaborative engagement.

The literature reveals that certain technologies, particularly augmented reality and digital storytelling platforms, demonstrate strong alignment with developmentally appropriate practices when implemented thoughtfully. These tools support narrative construction, spatial reasoning, and creative expression—all foundational elements of early childhood development.

Thematic Category 6: Assessment and Documentation in Digital Learning Environments

The research provides important guidance for assessment practices within technology-integrated learning environments. Aslan et al. (2022) advocate for formative assessment approaches that leverage digital documentation, learning stories, and observational protocols to capture the complex learning processes occurring in technology-enhanced play.

The findings suggest that traditional assessment models may be inadequate for capturing the multifaceted nature of learning in digital environments. Critten et al. (2022) propose innovative modifications

to existing assessment tools that can accommodate digital skill development while maintaining focus on holistic child development.

The literature emphasizes that assessment data should inform personalized instruction and guide technology selection decisions. This represents a shift from summative evaluation toward ongoing documentation that supports responsive teaching and individualized learning experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This chapter interprets the findings from the integrative literature review examining technology integration strategies for play-based early childhood education. The discussion synthesizes empirical evidence through two complementary theoretical frameworks—Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the Digital Play Framework (DPF) (Bird & Edwards, 2015)—while addressing critical questions about implementation, inclusive access, and pedagogical coherence in early childhood settings.

As digital technologies become increasingly prevalent in educational environments, understanding how to integrate these tools meaningfully within developmentally appropriate, play-based pedagogies has become essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers. This discussion moves beyond describing what was found to examining what these findings mean for the future of early childhood education.

Interpretation of Major Findings by Research Question

Research Question 1: What Technology Integration Strategies for Play-Based Early Childhood Classes Are Supported in the Research Literature?

The integrative literature review revealed a sophisticated and diverse landscape of technology integration strategies specifically designed to support play-based learning in early childhood education contexts. These strategies demonstrate a clear evolution from simple technology adoption toward more nuanced, pedagogically-informed approaches that honor both the developmental needs of young children and the fundamental principles of play-based learning. The analysis identified eight interconnected thematic categories that represent the current state of evidence-based practice in this field.

Technology-Supported Play emerged as a foundational category, encompassing research that demonstrates how digital tools such as tablets, educational applications, and digital toys can effectively support both guided and free play experiences when implemented with clear pedagogical intent (Kewalramani et al., 2020; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017; Outhwaite

et al., 2019; Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024). The literature consistently emphasized that the mere presence of technology does not guarantee educational benefit (McPake & Stephen, 2016); rather, the purposeful integration of digital tools within carefully designed play contexts enables enhanced exploration, problem-solving, and collaborative learning (Aslan et al., 2022; Edwards, 2016; Kewalramani et al., 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery; 2017). Particularly significant was the finding that adult mediation plays a crucial role in maximizing the educational potential of technology-supported play, suggesting that the educator's role becomes more, not less, important in technology-rich environments (Kewalramani et al., 2020; McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2017; MCPake & Stephen, 2016; Stavholm, Lagerlof, & Wallerstedt, 2023).

Child-Centered Digital Play represents a paradigm shift toward recognizing children's agency and intrinsic interests as driving forces in digital engagement. Research in this category highlighted the importance of scaffolding children's digital play experiences to align with developmental goals while preserving child autonomy and choice (Axelsson, Andersson, & Guz, 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery; 2017). This approach challenges traditional teacher-centered models of technology use and suggests that effective integration requires a delicate balance between adult guidance and child-directed exploration (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery; 2017; Stavholm, Lagerlof, & Wallerstedt, 2023). The findings indicate that when children are given meaningful choices in their digital interactions, engagement levels increase significantly, and learning outcomes become more authentic and sustainable (Bird, 2019; Bird & Edwards, 2017).

Scaffolding with Technology emerged as a critical pedagogical strategy, emphasizing the educator's role in guiding, extending, and enriching digital play experiences through strategic interventions (Flee, 2016; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Plowman & Stephen, 2005, 2013). The literature documented various forms of scaffolding, including verbal prompts, modeling, co-participation, and structured feedback mechanisms (Axelsson, Andersson, & Gulz, 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2017; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Kewalramani et al., 2020; McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2017; MCPake & Stephen, 2016; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017; Outhwaite et al., 2019). This finding is particularly significant because it addresses concerns about technology replacing human interaction by

demonstrating how digital tools can actually enhance the quality and depth of educator-child relationships when used thoughtfully (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Marsh, 2010).

Adaptive Learning Technologies represented a more sophisticated approach to differentiation, with research demonstrating how intelligent systems that adjust content and pacing based on individual children's responses can support inclusive play experiences (Axelsson, Andersson, & Gulz, 2016; McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2017; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Outhwaite et al., 2019). These technologies offer particular promise for supporting children with diverse learning needs (Axelsson, Andersson, & Gulz, 2016; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Outhwaite et al., 2019), though the literature also reveals significant challenges related to implementation complexity and the need for educator training in adaptive system management (Barman & Kjallander, 2022; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; McPake & Stephen, 2016).

Multimedia Content Delivery strategies encompassed the use of educational videos, music applications, and other multimodal resources that enrich storytelling and literacy development within play-based contexts (Cheng & Lam, 2025; Edwards et al., 2020; Grieshaber, Nuttall, & Edwards, 2021; Leung, Choi, & Yuen, 2020; McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2017; Wang & Delfin, 2024). The research demonstrated that when multimedia content is carefully selected and integrated with hands-on activities, it can significantly enhance children's understanding of complex concepts while maintaining the playful, exploratory nature of early childhood learning (Antrilli & Wang, 2023; Aslan et al., 2022; Kumpulainen et al., 2020; McGlynn-Stewart et al., 2017; Speldewinde & Campbell, 2024).

Physical-Digital Play Combinations represented an innovative category where technologies such as programmable toys, coding robots, and augmented reality applications merge physical and digital domains to support embodied learning through play (Antrilli & Wang, 2023; Aslan et al., 2022; Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Kewalramani et al., 2020; Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017). These hybrid approaches address longstanding concerns about screen-based learning by maintaining the physical manipulation and movement that are crucial for young children's development

while introducing digital concepts in concrete, tangible ways (Bers, 2010; Crescenzi, Jewitt, & Price, 2014; Resnick & Silverman, 2005).

Immersive and interactive play-based experiences, facilitated by emerging technologies, were identified as powerful tools for fostering children's imagination, collaborative knowledge construction, and socio-emotional development through shared play, reflective engagement, and storytelling (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Fleeer, 2016; Marsh, 2010, 2011). Findings from the reviewed literature highlight the potential of these technologies to enrich, rather than diminish, the inherently social nature of play, challenging prevalent assumptions that digital tools are primarily isolating or antisocial (Aslan et al., 2022; Kewalramani et al., 2020; Leung, Choi, & Yuen, 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017; Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024; Sun et al., 2022; Wang & Delfin, 2024). In particular, augmented reality (AR) and other emerging technological innovations demonstrated strong potential to create immersive, interactive environments that actively engage children in discovery, exploration, and problem-solving activities (Aslan et al., 2022; Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017). While these findings highlight promising outcomes, several studies emphasized that successful implementation of such technologies is highly dependent on adequate technical infrastructure and teacher preparedness (Barman & Kjallander, 2022; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Kewalramani et al., 2020; McPake & Stephen, 2016). Limited institutional resources, combined with the need for specialized training and ongoing support (Barman & Kjallander, 2022; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Madanpour & Cohnsen, 2020), may pose significant barriers to the widespread adoption of immersive and interactive learning experiences in early childhood education settings (Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; McPake & Stephen, 2016).

Despite the richness and diversity of these strategies, the literature review also revealed persistent challenges that limit their effectiveness and widespread implementation. These challenges include significant variations in teacher preparedness and confidence with technology integration (Barman & Kjallander, 2022; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Stavholm, Bagerlof, & Wallerstedt, 2023), substantial resource constraints that affect access to high-quality devices and software (Ethridge, Malek-

Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; McPake & Stephen, 2016), and a notable lack of comprehensive pedagogical models specifically tailored to early childhood education technology use (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Stavholm, Bagerlof, & Wallerstedt, 2023). Additionally, the research highlighted the need for more context-sensitive approaches that can be adapted to varied sociocultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic environments (Brown, 2020; Edwards et al., 2020; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Leung, Choi, & Yuen, 2020; Veresov & Veraksa, 2023; Wang & Delfin, 2024; Wohlwend, 2017).

Research Question 2: What Learning Theories Align with Those Strategies?

The synthesis of literature revealed strong theoretical foundations underlying the identified technology integration strategies, with several key learning theories providing robust frameworks for understanding how and why certain approaches prove effective in early childhood education contexts. This theoretical alignment is crucial for establishing the legitimacy and sustainability of technology integration practices within the broader educational community.

Constructivist Theory emerged as the most pervasive theoretical foundation, with nearly all identified strategies reflecting core constructivist principles that position learners as active builders of knowledge through interaction with digital environments, peers, and adults (). Digital storytelling applications, augmented reality experiences, and creative software exemplified tools that support the construction of meaning through playful engagement. The constructivist alignment is particularly significant because it validates technology integration as consistent with well-established early childhood pedagogical principles rather than representing a departure from traditional best practices (Edwards, 2016; Grieshaber, Nuttall, & Edwards, 2021; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018).

Social Constructivism, drawing heavily from Vygotskian perspectives, provided another crucial theoretical lens through which to understand effective technology integration strategies. The literature consistently emphasized the importance of co-construction of knowledge and adult mediation in digital learning experiences (Fleer, 2014; Plowman & Stephen, 2005). Strategies involving collaborative problem-solving (Aslan et al., 2022; Kamola et al., 2024), peer interaction around digital tasks (Stavholm et al., 2023;

Sun et al., 2022), and guided participation in technology-mediated activities (Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Veresove & Veraksa, 2023) all reflected social constructivist principles. This alignment suggests that effective technology integration must account for the inherently social nature of learning and the critical role of more knowledgeable others in scaffolding children's development (Arnott, 2016; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Flear, 2014).

Play-Based Learning Theory provided the foundational framework for understanding how technology can be integrated without compromising the essential role of play in early childhood development (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Flear, 2014; Plowman & Stephen, 2005). The reviewed studies consistently emphasized that technology should extend rather than replace traditional play experiences, positioning digital tools as additional materials within the broader play environment (Bird, 2019; Edwards et al., 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017; Veresov & Veraksa, 2023; Yelland & Gilbert, 2018). This theoretical alignment is particularly important given ongoing debates about the appropriateness of technology use with young children (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Edwards, 2013) and provides a framework for ensuring that digital integration remains developmentally appropriate (Arnott, 2016; Bird & Edwards, 2015; Flear, 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2005).

Cognitive Development Theory, primarily influenced by Piagetian perspectives, informed strategies that utilized technology to provide differentiated feedback, promote reflection, and support children's manipulation of digital objects within play-based frameworks (Flear, 2014; Jonassen, Carr, & Yueh, 1998; Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Piaget, 1952). The literature demonstrated how carefully designed digital experiences can support cognitive development goals by providing opportunities for experimentation, hypothesis testing, and concept refinement in ways that complement traditional hands-on learning activities (Axelsson, Andersson, & Gulz, 2016; Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Kamola et al., 2024; Macdonald et al., 2022; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Pelizzari et al., 2023).

Psychosocial Development Theory is foundational in early childhood education as it highlights the critical role of identity, emotional expression, and social interaction in children's growth (Arnott, 2016; Erikson, 1950; Flear, 2018). The findings from this review reveal that technology integration in play-based

settings can meaningfully support these developmental domains. Collaborative coding tasks and AI-supported digital environments enhanced children's autonomy, confidence, and empathy—key aspects of Erikson's stages of initiative and industry (Aslan et al., 2024; Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Kamola et al., 2024; Macdonald et al., 2022; Pelizzari et al., 2023). Digital tools such as cameras and music apps facilitated emotional expression, narrative construction, and self-concept development in socially engaging ways (Bird, 2019; Cheng & Lam, 2025; Edwards & Bird, 2017; Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024; Wang & Delfin, 2024). Adaptive technologies personalized emotional and social support, fostering trust, resilience, and peer cooperation (Aslan et al., 2024; Kamola et al., 2024; Mowafi & Abumuhfouz, 2021; Pelizzari et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2022), while physical-digital experiences like augmented storytelling encouraged role negotiation and emotional engagement (Aslan et al., 2022; Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020; Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024). Together, these findings suggest that well-designed digital experiences can extend traditional play by offering emotionally responsive, socially rich contexts that promote psychosocial well-being (Arnott, 2016; Fleer, 2018; Wohlwend, 2015).

The theoretical foundations identified in this analysis provide robust justification for integrating technology in ways that are developmentally appropriate, socially grounded, and play-enhancing. This theoretical coherence is essential for building educator confidence in technology integration and for developing sustainable implementation models that can withstand changes in specific technologies or educational trends (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Fleer, 2016; Plowman & Stephen, 2005).

Research Question 3: What Evidence-Based Recommendations Can Be Synthesized into Practical Strategies for Educators?

The comprehensive analysis of the reviewed literature revealed that effective technology integration in early childhood education is not achieved by simply adding digital tools to traditional practices. Rather, it requires a reimagining of instructional approaches to align digital affordances with developmentally appropriate, play-based pedagogies. Six thematic categories emerged from the

synthesis, each offering evidence-based, practical guidance for educators seeking to integrate technology meaningfully into early learning environments.

Strategic Technology Integration Approaches The literature strongly supports a shift from technology as a peripheral add-on to its thoughtful integration within holistic learning experiences. Scholars such as Madanipour and Cohrssen (2020) and Sakr and Oscar (2020) argue that digital tools—such as tablets, multimedia applications, and augmented reality (AR) systems—should enhance rather than replace traditional modalities. Ethridge et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of designing screen-based activities that support embodied learning, which complements physical interaction and peer collaboration. Edwards (2016) introduced the concept of "hybrid play models," which integrate physical and digital modalities to support enriched, multimodal engagement. Augmented reality, in particular, shows promise for promoting spatial reasoning and abstract-concrete connections (Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020), indicating its potential to transform learning experiences when implemented with pedagogical intention.

Child-Centered Digital Pedagogies A central recommendation across the literature is the prioritization of child agency and cultural relevance within digital play environments. Edwards (2016) highlights the significance of incorporating children's personal narratives and popular culture into digital learning, positioning children as active creators rather than passive recipients. The concept of "co-constituted play," wherein educators and children collaboratively negotiate digital experiences, is key to ensuring authentic engagement. Ethridge et al. (2022) and Palaiologou (2016) further advocate for approaches that empower children to act as digital storytellers and multimedia creators. These child-centered strategies are not merely pedagogical preferences but essential practices for ensuring that technology integration aligns with children's interests, identities, and developmental needs.

Intentional Instructional Design and Implementation Effective technology integration requires deliberate instructional design embedded within inquiry-based and constructivist frameworks. The literature advises educators to move beyond isolated technology use and instead embed digital tools within thematic units, project-based learning, and portfolio assessments (Ethridge et al., 2022; Johnston et al., 2020). Madanipour and Cohrssen (2020) underscore the importance of multimodal learning experiences that

leverage visual, auditory, and kinesthetic inputs to support varied modes of engagement and cognitive processing among young learners. Moreover, Edwards (2016) cautions against rigid adherence to prescriptive technology use, advocating instead for adaptive implementation that responds to children's evolving needs. These findings collectively highlight the need for flexible, child-responsive instructional design that integrates digital tools as cognitive and creative scaffolds.

Professional Development and Educator Capacity Building The literature demonstrates that educator preparedness plays a pivotal role in effective technology integration. Johnston et al. (2020) and Plumb and Kautz (2022) emphasize that professional development must address both technical proficiency and pedagogical understanding. The most effective models move beyond one-time workshops to embrace ongoing, collaborative professional learning communities. These approaches promote reflective practice and help educators critically evaluate and adapt digital tools to their unique classroom contexts. Findings suggest that when educators are equipped with both pedagogical insight and technical fluency, they are more likely to implement developmentally appropriate and context-sensitive digital learning strategies.

Developmentally Appropriate Technology Practices Maintaining developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) remains a non-negotiable aspect of early childhood education, even in digital contexts. Palaiologou (2016) and Madanipour and Cohrsen (2020) provide substantial evidence that technology must be aligned with young children's cognitive, social, and emotional needs. Effective digital tools emphasize interactivity, movement, collaboration, and self-expression over passive screen time. Sakr and Oscar (2020) highlight the benefits of active learning principles in digital environments, where children engage in creative problem-solving and expressive play. Tools such as AR and digital storytelling platforms, when used intentionally, support narrative development, spatial reasoning, and imaginative expression—critical dimensions of early childhood development.

Assessment and Documentation in Digital Learning Environments A final thematic area addresses how educators can assess learning in technology-enhanced settings. The literature critiques traditional assessment models for their inadequacy in capturing the dynamic, multimodal nature of digital

learning (Aslan et al., 2022). Instead, formative approaches such as digital portfolios, learning stories, and observational documentation are recommended. Critten et al. (2022) propose adapting assessment frameworks to better capture digital skill development while retaining a focus on holistic growth. These practices enable educators to make data-informed decisions, personalize instruction, and continuously refine their integration strategies to support children's learning trajectories.

Together, these thematic findings offer a practical roadmap for early childhood educators seeking to integrate technology effectively. The evidence underscores that successful integration is grounded in pedagogical intentionality, cultural responsiveness, professional preparation, and a commitment to developmentally appropriate practice. By adopting these evidence-based strategies, educators can move beyond superficial uses of digital tools and foster meaningful, play-based learning experiences that honor the whole child.

Theoretical Integration: TPACK and the Digital Play Framework

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings, this discussion employs two complementary theoretical frameworks that offer different but interconnected perspectives on effective technology integration in early childhood education. The integration of these frameworks provides both practical guidance for educators and theoretical coherence for researchers and policymakers.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provides a sophisticated lens for understanding how technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge intersect in educational contexts, offering particular value for analyzing technology integration in early childhood education. Originally developed by Koehler, Mishra, and Cain (2017), TPACK has gained widespread acceptance as a framework for understanding the complex knowledge requirements for effective technology integration (Dexter, 2017; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014).

In the context of early childhood education, the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) illuminates several critical dimensions of effective practice. Technological Knowledge (TK) encompasses educators'

understanding of various digital tools, their capabilities and limitations, and their operational requirements. The research findings suggest that while basic technological literacy is necessary, it is insufficient for effective integration. Early childhood educators require deep understanding of how different technologies can support or hinder developmental goals, how young children interact with various interfaces, and how to troubleshoot common technical challenges that arise in classroom settings (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; Plowman, 2010).

Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) in early childhood contexts includes deep understanding of child development, play theory, family engagement strategies, and culturally responsive teaching practices (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Donohue, 2022; Flear, 2019). The literature review demonstrated that effective technology integration requires educators to maintain their commitment to developmentally appropriate practices while thoughtfully incorporating digital tools (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022). This dimension of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is particularly crucial in early childhood education because inappropriate pedagogical approaches can have lasting negative effects on young children's attitudes toward learning and their developmental progress (Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Bird & Edwards, 2017; Flewitt et al., 2015).

Content Knowledge (CK) encompasses the subject matter that educators intend to teach, including early literacy, numeracy, scientific thinking, social-emotional skills, and creative expression (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Donohue, 2022; Lim et al., 2023; Weisberg et al., 2013). In early childhood education, content knowledge is often integrated and emergent rather than compartmentalized, requiring educators to understand how learning occurs across domains and how technology can support holistic development (Edwards et al., 2020; Grieshaber, Nuttall, & Edwards, 2021; Kewalramani et al., 2020; Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020; Pelizzari et al., 2023).

The power of the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) lies in the intersections between these knowledge domains. Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK) represents understanding of how technology can enhance or constrain pedagogical approaches. For early childhood educators, this

includes knowing how to use technology to support collaborative learning, individual exploration, and documentation of learning. (Bird & Edwards, 2017; Anthony, 2012; Hew & Brush, 2007).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) reflects the long-established understanding of how to teach specific content effectively. In early childhood education, this includes knowledge of how children develop literacy skills, mathematical concepts, scientific thinking, and social-emotional competencies (Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015; Plowman & Stephen, 2013). Technological Content Knowledge (TCK) involves understanding how technology can represent, transform, or enhance specific content areas (Flewitt et al., 2015; Marsh, 2010).

The ultimate goal of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is the intersection of all three knowledge domains—the "sweet spot" where technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge work together synergistically. The research findings provide numerous examples of this integration, such as educators using augmented reality applications to support children's exploration of plant life during outdoor play, combining content knowledge (biology), pedagogical knowledge (experiential learning), and technological knowledge (AR applications) in ways that enhance rather than complicate the learning experience (Aslan et al., 2022; Kewalramani et al, 2020; Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020; Newhouse, Cooper, & Cordery, 2017; Speldewinde & Campbell, 2024).

Digital Play Framework (DPF)

The Digital Play Framework (DPF), developed by Bird and Edwards (2015), provides a complementary theoretical lens that focuses specifically on the play dimensions of digital experiences. This framework is particularly valuable for early childhood educators because it maintains focus on play as the primary vehicle for learning while acknowledging the potential contributions of digital technologies (Bird & Edwards, 2015, 2017; Edwards, 2013).

The DPF (Bird & Edwards, 2015) identifies three essential dimensions of meaningful digital play experiences. *Inquiry-Based Digital Play* encompasses children's use of technology to explore questions, investigate phenomena, and solve problems through systematic exploration (Fleer, 2018). Research

findings demonstrated numerous examples of this dimension, including children using coding robots to understand sequencing and cause-and-effect relationships (Kamola et al., 2024; Pelizzari et al., 2023), utilizing digital microscopes to examine natural objects (Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020), and employing simulation software to experiment with scientific concepts (Aslan et al., 2022; Macdonald et al., 2022).

Collaborative Digital Play focuses on how digital technologies can facilitate joint engagement, social negotiation, and collaborative construction of digital artifacts (Wohlwend, 2015). The literature review revealed that some of the most educationally valuable digital experiences occur when children work together to create digital stories, solve coding challenges, or document their learning experiences (Aslan et al., 2022; Critten, Hagon, & Messer, 2022; Edwards & Bird, 2017; Pelizzari et al., 2023; Samuelsson Price, & Jewitt, 2024). This dimension challenges common assumptions about technology as an isolating force and demonstrates how thoughtful integration can enhance social interaction and collaborative learning (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Plowman & Stephen, 2005).

Imaginative Digital Play encompasses the use of digital tools to support fantasy, role-playing, narrative construction, and creative expression (Fleer, 2018). Research findings included examples of children using drawing applications to create imaginary worlds (Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024), employing dress-up apps to explore different identities (Bird, 2019; Wang & Delfin, 2024), and utilizing storytelling software to construct and share original narratives (Edwards & Bird, 2017).

The Digital Play Framework also emphasizes two critical elements: *adult mediation* and *children's agency*. Adult mediation refers to the various ways that educators and caregivers support, extend, and enrich children's digital play experiences through scaffolding, co-participation, and intentional questioning (Bird & Edwards, 2015; 2017; Donohue & Schomburg, 2017). Children's agency highlights the importance of maintaining child choice, initiative, and control within digital play experiences, ensuring that technology use aligns with the foundational principles of play-based learning (Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Marsh, 2010).

Integration of TPACK and DPF

The integration of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the Digital Play Framework (Bird & Edwards, 2015) provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding effective technology integration in early childhood education. While TPACK emphasizes the knowledge requirements for educators—specifically the dynamic interplay of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge needed for meaningful technology use (Koehler, Mishra, & Cain, 2017)—the Digital Play Framework (DPF) focuses on the experiential dimensions that make digital activities educationally valuable for children (Bird & Edwards, 2017). Together, these frameworks suggest that effective technology integration requires both sophisticated educator knowledge and careful attention to the quality of children's digital play experiences (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Plowman & Stephen, 2005). This dual lens ensures that digital tools not only align with instructional goals but also preserve the child-centered, imaginative, and socially interactive qualities essential to play-based learning environments (Flewitt et al., 2015; Marsh, 2010).

Practical Implications for Educators and Instructional Designers

The findings of this integrative review carry significant implications for multiple stakeholders involved in early childhood education, including classroom educators, instructional designers, curriculum specialists, and educational technology developers. The practical applications of this research extend beyond simple recommendations to encompass fundamental shifts in how educators conceptualize and implement technology integration.

Professional Development and Educator Preparation

The research findings highlight the critical need for comprehensive professional development that extends far beyond basic technology training to encompass the complex integration of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022). Traditional approaches to educational technology professional development, which often focus primarily on tool usage and technical skills, prove insufficient

for the sophisticated integration required in early childhood education contexts (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Plowman & Stephen, 2005; Yelland, 2011).

Effective professional development programs must be grounded in the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), ensuring that educators develop competence across all three knowledge domains and their intersections (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020). This requires sustained, job-embedded learning experiences that allow educators to experiment with technology integration in their own classrooms while receiving ongoing support and feedback from knowledgeable colleagues and mentors (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Lim et al., 2023; Yelland, 2011).

Furthermore, professional development initiatives must address the unique challenges and opportunities present in early childhood education, including the developmental needs of young children, the importance of play-based pedagogy, and the critical role of family engagement (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022). This specialized focus is essential because technology integration strategies that prove effective in elementary or secondary education may be inappropriate or ineffective with younger children (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Donohue & Schomburg, 2017; Yelland, 2011).

Curriculum Design and Implementation

The research findings have significant implications for curriculum design at both institutional and classroom levels. Instructional designers working in early childhood education must move beyond traditional models that view technology as an add-on or enhancement to existing curricula toward integrated approaches that embed digital tools naturally within play-based learning experiences (Aslan et al., 2022; Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Edwards et al., 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022).

This integration requires careful attention to the developmental appropriateness of digital activities, ensuring that technology use supports rather than accelerates academic expectations beyond children's

readiness levels (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Edwards, 2013; Yelland, 2011). Curriculum designers must also consider the balance between structured and open-ended digital experiences, providing sufficient scaffolding to support learning while preserving the child agency and exploration that characterize high-quality play experiences (Flewitt et al., 2015; Marsh, 2010).

Assessment and Documentation

The integration of technology in play-based early childhood education also has significant implications for assessment and documentation practices. Digital tools offer new possibilities for capturing and analyzing children's learning processes, including video documentation of problem-solving strategies, digital portfolios that showcase learning over time, and interactive assessment tools that provide immediate feedback to both children and educators (Aslan et al., 2024; Edwards & Bird, 2017; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Outhwaite et al., 2019; Samuelsson, Price, & Jewitt, 2024).

However, the use of technology for assessment purposes must be carefully considered to ensure that it enhances rather than interferes with the natural flow of play and learning (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017). Assessment strategies must maintain focus on holistic development and authentic demonstration of learning rather than narrow skill measurement that may be facilitated by digital tools but inconsistent with early childhood pedagogical principles (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Yelland, 2011).

Considerations for Access, Inclusion, and Ethical Technology Use

The integration of technology in early childhood education raises significant concerns about access, inclusion, and ethical use that must be addressed to ensure that digital tools contribute to rather than exacerbate existing educational disparities. These considerations are particularly critical in early childhood education because of the potential long-term impacts of early educational experiences on children's subsequent academic and social development.

Access Gaps and Inclusive Digital Learning

Access to educational technology remains significantly uneven across different communities, with disparities often correlating with socioeconomic status, geographic location, and institutional resources (Blackwell et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2023). These disparities are especially troubling in early childhood education, where limited access to digital tools and resources during the foundational years can accumulated over time and contribute to widening educational outcomes (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017). The literature emphasizes that supporting meaningful digital inclusion involves more than simple providing devices; it requires access to high-quality tools, reliable internet connectivity, and well-prepared educators who can integrate technology effectively (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Outhwaite et al., 2019; Teichert & Salman, 2022).

Beyond providing access to devices, digital tools must also reflect and support the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children who use them (Brown, 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022). Technologies that reflect and affirm the diverse backgrounds of children and their families promote inclusion and engagement, supporting both identity development and learning (Kewalramani et al., 2020; Wang & Delfin, 2024; Wohlwend, 2017). Well-resourced digital settings may still fall short if they do not reflect and support the cultural backgrounds of the children they serve (Edwards, 2013).

Privacy and Safety Considerations

Young children are particularly vulnerable to privacy breaches due to their limited understanding of digital data collection and online safety. Research has highlighted the developmental limitations that prevent young learners from grasping the implications of their digital actions, thus placing a heightened responsibility on adults to protect them (Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Teichert & Salman, 2022; Wohlwend, 2017). Institutions must therefore implement robust safety protocols, including careful vetting of applications, encrypted storage of children's data, and clear communication with families about how

children's information is collected, stored, and shared (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024).

These safety measures are not only ethical but essential for building trust among families, especially in communities characterized by varied cultural backgrounds where skepticism toward technology use in education may already exist (Plowman & Stephen, 2005). The literature also emphasizes the importance of adult mediation and supervision, ensuring that technology use is guided and that children are not exposed to inappropriate content or excessive advertising (Ethridge, Malek-Lasater, & Kwon, 2024; Teichert & Salman, 2022; Wohlwend, 2017).

Screen Time and Developmental Appropriateness

The use of digital tools in early childhood education must be carefully balanced against the risks of excessive screen time. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) recommends limited screen use for young children, emphasizing co-engagement and meaningful content over passive or solitary screen exposure. The literature reinforces these guidelines, suggesting that quality digital experiences—those embedded in active, social, and creative play—are more developmentally appropriate than rote instructional software (Aslan et al., 2022; Bird, 2019; Edwards & Bird, 2017; Edwards et al., 2020; Wohlwend, 2017).

Educators are thus tasked with applying these guidelines in developmentally informed ways, integrating digital tools into rich learning contexts that also include outdoor play, hands-on learning, and peer collaboration. For example, Bird and Edwards (2017) highlight how digital tools can complement rather than replace traditional forms of play when thoughtfully implemented. Ultimately, the literature advocates for a thoughtful, developmentally informed approach to digital learning—emphasizing that effective integration depends not on the quantity of technology used, but on its alignment with pedagogical intentions and principles of child development (Blackwell, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Johnston, Hadley, & Waniganayake, 2020; Teichert & Salman, 2022).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this integrative literature review provides valuable insights into technology integration in play-based early childhood education, several limitations must be acknowledged that affect the generalizability and comprehensiveness of the findings. Recognition of these limitations provides important context for interpreting the results and identifies priorities for future research.

Methodological Limitations

Despite the rigorous methodology employed in this integrative literature review, several limitations must be acknowledged. One notable limitation is the exclusive use of a single database—ERIC—for sourcing relevant studies. Although ERIC is a respected and education-focused repository, reliance on a single source may have limited the comprehensiveness of the review by excluding pertinent research indexed in other databases. In addition, the inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies published in the last ten years, which may have inadvertently excluded older foundational literature or cutting-edge studies not yet published in scholarly journals.

Further limitations relate to the language and publication format restrictions. The review included only English-language publications, thereby omitting potentially valuable studies published in other languages. As Whitemore and Knaf (2005) caution, integrative reviews must balance breadth with depth, and decisions around source inclusion—such as prioritizing peer-reviewed journal articles—may result in underrepresentation of regionally or culturally specific innovations. Access limitations to gray literature, including unpublished or proprietary studies, may also have contributed to a partial representation of the field.

Another important consideration is the nature and quality of the available evidence. Much of the literature in this domain comprises small-scale case studies, practitioner reports, and descriptive studies, rather than large-scale experimental or quasi-experimental research (Snyder, 2019; Whitemore & Knaf, 2005). While such studies provide rich contextual insights into practice, they offer limited generalizability and constrained ability to assess the impact of specific technology integration strategies on child learning

outcomes. This variability in methodological rigor complicates efforts to draw firm, evidence-based conclusions.

Subjectivity in interpretation also presents a methodological limitation. Although systematic search procedures and clearly defined inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied to minimize bias, the thematic synthesis and qualitative coding processes inherently involve researcher interpretation. As such, theme development and categorization may have been shaped by subjective judgments despite efforts to enhance transparency and consistency.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of educational technology introduces a temporal limitation. Because digital tools, platforms, and pedagogical models continue to advance, some findings from the reviewed literature may already be outdated or less relevant to current early childhood education contexts (Snyder, 2019). Future research should address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal studies, expanding database and language inclusion criteria, and conducting empirical investigations to validate and extend the findings of this review.

Contextual and Cultural Limitations

The literature reviewed in this study reflects primarily Western, English-speaking educational contexts, which limits the generalizability of findings to multilingual and cross-cultural learning environments. As highlighted by Bird and Edwards (2017), most research on digital play and technology integration in early childhood settings stems from high-income countries, leaving a gap in understanding how digital strategies function in low-resource or non-Western contexts. Future research must address this gap by investigating technology integration strategies across varied sociocultural settings and examining how cultural values and practices influence the effectiveness of different approaches (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knaf, 2005).

Additionally, the literature provides limited insight into how family attitudes, home technology environments, and community resources influence the effectiveness of school-based technology integration efforts. These contextual factors are especially important in early childhood education, where

strong school-family partnerships and continuity between home and classroom environments play a critical role in shaping learning outcomes (Bird & Edwards, 2017).

Theoretical and Conceptual Gaps

While this review identified strong alignment between technology integration strategies and established learning theories, significant gaps remain in the theoretical understanding of how digital tools interact with fundamental aspects of early childhood development. More research is needed to understand how technology use affects social-emotional development, creativity, attention regulation, and other crucial developmental domains.

Furthermore, the literature provides limited guidance on how to adapt technology integration strategies for children with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities, language differences, or other individual characteristics that may influence their interactions with digital tools.

Future Research Directions

Based on the limitations identified and the gaps revealed in the current literature, several priorities emerge for future research in technology integration in early childhood education.

Longitudinal Studies

Long-term investigations are essential to understand the enduring impacts of early technology integration on children's academic, social, and emotional development. While short-term gains have been observed, few studies explore how early digital experiences shape developmental trajectories into later childhood and adolescence. Future research should examine both the positive and potential negative outcomes of technology use and investigate mediating factors such as instructional quality, digital content, and family support (Donohue & Schomburg, 2020; Herodotou, 2018).

Comparative Research

There is a need for comparative studies that evaluate the relative effectiveness of different technology integration strategies (e.g., augmented reality, coding, digital storytelling) in play-based early

learning contexts. This research should not only compare instructional outcomes but also explore implementation feasibility, educator confidence, and child engagement across tools and approaches (Bird & Edwards, 2015; Marsh et al., 2016).

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Research

Current literature is largely grounded in Western, English-speaking educational settings, which constrains its broader relevance. Future research should investigate how digital play and technology integration strategies can be adapted to reflect varying sociocultural norms, language backgrounds, and community-based educational traditions. Such research is crucial to support multilingual learners and promote inclusive practices (Flewitt et al., 2015; Yelland, 2018).

Family and Community Engagement Research

Technology offers new opportunities for building stronger home–school partnerships, yet the research base is underdeveloped in this area. Investigations are needed to identify effective digital tools and strategies that facilitate family engagement, enhance communication between educators and caregivers, and support children's learning across settings (Donohue, 2015; Edwards, 2016). This includes examining how home technology environments and family attitudes influence school-based digital experiences.

Professional Development Research

Although numerous studies point to the importance of professional development, few offer empirical evidence on the most effective models for preparing early childhood educators to integrate technology in developmentally appropriate ways. Future research should examine coaching models, communities of practice, and embedded learning experiences that align with the TPACK framework and support sustained implementation of best practices (Koehler, Mishra, & Cain, 2017; Bird & Edwards, 2017).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this integrative review have significant implications for policy development and practical implementation at multiple levels of the educational system. Policymakers, administrators, and educators must work collaboratively to create conditions that support effective technology integration while addressing concerns about inclusion, developmental appropriateness, and educational quality (Bird & Edwards; 2017; Edwards et al., 2020).

At the policy level, findings suggest the need for comprehensive frameworks that guide technology integration in early childhood education while preserving the essential characteristics of developmentally appropriate practice. These frameworks must address funding priorities, professional development requirements, and quality assurance mechanisms that ensure technology integration serves the best interests of young children and their families (Neumann, 2018; Marsh et al., 2016).

At the institutional level, findings highlight the importance of creating supportive environments for technology integration, including adequate technical infrastructure, ongoing professional development opportunities, and collaborative planning processes that involve educators, families, and community members in decision-making about technology use (Blackwell et al., 2014; Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Stavholm et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how technology can be effectively integrated into play-based early childhood education through an integrative literature review guided by the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and the Digital Play Framework (DPF) (Bird & Edwards, 2015). The findings illustrate a rich tapestry of strategies that reflect developmentally appropriate, evidence-based practices, grounded in key learning theories such as constructivism (Piaget, 1962), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), play-based learning theory (Wood, 2014), cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1952), and psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950).

The integrative analysis underscores that effective technology integration is not about the tools themselves, but about how educators use those tools to support child-centered, imaginative, collaborative, and inquiry-driven learning (Edwards, 2015; Neumann & Neumann, 2014). While technologies like augmented reality, adaptive learning systems, and multimedia resources present compelling opportunities for enhancing children's engagement and learning (Herodotou, 2017; Kucirkova & Flewitt, 2018), their educational value depends significantly on pedagogical intent, adult mediation, and contextual alignment (Bird & Edwards, 2015).

A central conclusion of this study is that early childhood educators require ongoing, high-quality professional development that equips them not only with technical skills, but also with the pedagogical vision to align digital tools with developmental needs (Blackwell et al., 2014; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2014). Similarly, institutions must ensure consistent and inclusive access to high-quality technologies (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010), and policies must support inclusive, culturally responsive, and ethically sound technology use (NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center, 2012). Without systemic coordination and shared responsibility among educators, administrators, families, and policymakers, even promising digital strategies may fail to achieve their intended outcomes (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017).

This dissertation also identifies key gaps in the literature—particularly the need for longitudinal studies, cross-cultural research, scalable professional development models, and strategies for family engagement (Hatzigianni et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2024; Marsh et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2023). These gaps signal important directions for future investigation and provide a research agenda for scholars seeking to advance the field of early childhood technology integration.

Ultimately, the promise of technology in early childhood education lies not in replacing traditional pedagogies, but in enhancing them—enriching the environments in which children learn through play, and amplifying the role of educators in guiding meaningful, joyful, and developmentally appropriate experiences (Marsh et al., 2016). As digital tools become more embedded in young children's lives, it is incumbent upon the field to ensure that their use is informed, intentional, and anchored in the enduring principles of early childhood education (Arnott, 2016). Through collaborative effort and sustained inquiry, educators and

researchers can continue to reimagine how technology supports the holistic development of all young learners.

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Appendix A

Codebook for Data Extraction and Coding

The following table presents the finalized codebook developed for this integrative literature review. It includes the category grouping (aligned with each research question), the assigned code labels, their definitions, and example criteria used to guide consistent coding across the reviewed studies.

Category	Code Label	Definition	Example
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Technology integration strategy	The overall instructional or pedagogical model through which digital tools are embedded into play-based learning activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The integration of technology in early childhood education can be effectively approached through the concept of web-mapping, which aligns children's digital experiences with play-based learning (Edwards, 2016). - Teachers' positive attitudes towards technology are crucial as they influence the effectiveness of technology use in teaching and impact children's motivation and learning (Ethridge et al., 2022).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Integration level	The depth to which technology is embedded in play-based learning, shaping pedagogy, goals, and children's experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The integration level of technology, digital media, and popular culture into play-based learning in early childhood education is notably challenging for teachers (Edwards, 2016). -The intervention aimed to enhance language-learning opportunities by providing children with access to Gaelic through the app, thereby reducing reliance on practitioners as the sole source of spoken Gaelic (McPake & Stephen, 2016).

RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Instructional use for technology	The purposeful application of digital tools to support specific teaching goals, enhance learning processes, and promote engagement in early childhood play-based education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The instructional use of technology in early childhood education (ECE) has been met with skepticism from many teachers and parents, who often favor traditional, hands-on methods for their tactile learning benefits (Ethridge, 2022) - Teachers often face issues related to their confidence in using technologies and their beliefs about technology's role in learning and teaching (Edwards, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Digital play tools & platforms	Software, apps, or systems used by children to engage in digital play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AR technology is increasingly prevalent in home environments, with many preschoolers accessing digital devices that feature AR applications (Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020). - These tools facilitate a co-constituted form of play, where traditional and digital activities converge, allowing children to engage with digital media while exploring their interests (Edwards, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Types of digital tools used	Categorization by tool function: open-ended, guided, collaborative, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers utilized the iPad™ for researching videos related to children's interests, such as spiders, enhancing play-based learning experiences (Edwards, 2016). - The integration of these digital tools supports the co-constitution of children's traditional, technological, digital, and popular-culture activities, fostering a more inclusive curriculum (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Interactive technology applications	Tools requiring real-time user input, promoting engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive technology applications, such as Augmented Reality (AR), allow users to engage with both real and virtual objects,

			<p>enhancing the learning experience in educational settings (Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020).</p> <p>- This app allows children to hear and practice Gaelic independently, providing exposure to the language without the constant presence of a practitioner (McPake & Stephen, 2016).</p>
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Adaptive learning technologies	Tech that adjusts content or pacing based on user input.	- The research paper discusses the use of adaptive learning technologies, specifically through the implementation of the tablet app "Our Story", aimed at enhancing language-learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Augmented reality & emerging technologies	Tools that extend reality or involve immersive features.	<p>- Emerging technologies, including AR, often experience hype cycles, where initial excitement may lead to inflated expectations regarding their effectiveness in educational contexts (Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020).</p> <p>- It is essential to evaluate whether AR enhances or hinders the quality of play-based learning in early childhood curricula (Madanipour & Cohrsen, 2020).</p>
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Multimedia content delivery	Technology used to provide visual, auditory, or multimodal input.	- The Our Story app serves as a multimedia content delivery tool, enabling children in Gaelic-medium preschool settings to engage with language learning through interactive storytelling (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Teacher role in tech integration	The ways educators facilitate, guide, or intervene in technology-supported learning.	<p>- Teachers play a crucial role in integrating technology, digital media, and popular culture into play-based learning experiences in early childhood education (Edwards, 2016)</p> <p>- Teachers are expected to collaborate closely with researchers to</p>

			identify challenges and refine the use of technology in the classroom, ensuring it aligns with curricular themes and existing practices (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Child-centered tech use	Tech use initiated or directed by the child, emphasizing agency.	- Child-centered technology use emphasizes the importance of selecting digital technologies that promote active learning and engagement in early childhood education (Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Scaffolding with technology	Adult mediation in supporting children's tech use.	- Scaffolding with technology in early childhood education involves using digital tools to support children's learning and development. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's ideas of explicit and implicit mediation, where technology serves as a conceptual tool to enhance curriculum practices. Web-mapping, as a new concept of play, exemplifies this by allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play-based learning experiences that integrate children's interests in technology and digital media. This method fosters social learning networks among children and helps educators align play experiences with contemporary play interests, addressing the challenges of technology integration in early childhood education (Edwards, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Tech-supported documentation & assessment	Use of technology for recording or evaluating learning.	- The research paper discusses the use of a tablet app, Our Story, to enhance language-learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms, highlighting the role of technology in documentation and assessment (McPake & Stephen, 2016).

RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Technology-supported play	General category capturing play enhanced or mediated by digital tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies (Edwards, 2016). - Early childhood educators face significant challenges in translating play-based learning experiences to virtual settings, particularly due to a lack of experience with technology and virtual instruction (Ethridge et al., 2022).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Physical-digital play combinations	Interactions that blend physical manipulation with digital elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For instance, children may engage in physical activities, such as drawing or creating collages, which are then transformed into digital narratives using applications like Puppet Pals (Edwards, 2016). - AR allows children to interact with both real and virtual objects, creating a mixed reality that enriches their play experiences (Madanipour & Cohrssen, 2020).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Play-based learning strategy	Pedagogical approaches grounded in play that include technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructive play was reported less frequently, often involving open-ended activities with materials like blocks and Play-Doh (Ethridge et al., 2022). - The play context in Gaelic-medium preschool settings involves children engaging in role-play scenarios, such as pretending to be ill, which reflects their understanding of themes like 'people who help us' in their curriculum (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ1: Technology Integration Strategies	Play context	The social and physical setting of the play experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The play context in Gaelic-medium preschool settings involves children engaging in role-play scenarios, such as pretending to be ill,

			<p>which reflects their understanding of themes like 'people who help us' in their curriculum (McPake & Stephen, 2016).</p> <p>- The study identifies various types of play that can be effectively facilitated in virtual teaching, including games with rules, functional play, dramatic play, and constructive play (Ethridge et al., 2022).</p>
RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Cognitive development theory	Focus on mental structures, schemas, or stages of cognitive growth.	<p>- Cognitive development in early childhood is significantly influenced by play, which is recognized as a primary force in learning and development. Play-based activities foster cognitive skills by allowing children to engage in problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. The study emphasizes the importance of incorporating various types of play, such as functional and symbolic play, to support cognitive growth. Guided play, which connects play to learning standards, can enhance children's understanding and engagement in virtual settings. This approach is essential for educators to effectively promote cognitive development, even in a virtual teaching environment (Ethridge et al., 2022).</p>
RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Social constructivism theory	Learning as socially mediated and culturally situated.	<p>- Constructivism is an educational theory that posits learners construct knowledge through experiences and reflections, emphasizing the active role of the learner in the learning process. It suggests that understanding is built upon prior knowledge and experiences, leading to personalized learning outcomes (McPake & Stephen, 2016).</p>

RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Psychosocial development theory	Development of identity, trust, and autonomy through play.	- It emphasizes that educational robotics, when integrated into playful situations, fosters social relations among children, promoting the development of social skills through playfulness. The study indicates that the use of digital media and technology can facilitate children's participation and gratification in learning, which is crucial for their psychosocial growth (Pelizzari et al., 2023)
RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Constructivism theory	Emphasis on hands-on, experience-based knowledge construction.	- Constructivism is a learning theory that posits knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment and social contexts, rather than being passively absorbed. It emphasizes the role of learners in actively engaging with materials and experiences to build their understanding (Edwards, 2016).
RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Play-based learning theory	Emphasizes learning through play, choice, and imagination.	- Play-based learning is a central component in early childhood education (ECE), emphasizing child-directed, active engagement that involves a child's social world and community. It combines play with adult guidance and scaffolding, allowing children to construct new knowledge, which has been linked to higher academic achievement and improved executive functioning (Ethridge et al., 2022).
RQ2: Learning Theory Alignment	Aligned learning theories	Theories directly or implicitly referenced in relation to integration strategies.	- The research highlights that play is a central component in early learning, rooted in constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of play-based learning combined with adult guidance to engage children in constructing new knowledge. Technology, when used intentionally and appropriately, can support children's learning, as noted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Ethridge et al., 2022).

RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Strategies for child engagement & learning	Practices that enhance motivation, curiosity, and learning outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The integration of web-mapping as a conceptual tool enhances child engagement by allowing teachers to intentionally plan play-based learning experiences that align with children's interests (Edwards, 2016). - Utilizing guided play, where teachers actively engage and scaffold children's learning, can foster deeper understanding and participation (Ethridge et al., 2022).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Evidence-based practices	Practices shown to be effective through empirical studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research employs design-based research (DBR) methodology, which emphasizes collaboration between researchers and practitioners to address practical problems in educational settings. This approach allows for iterative refinements based on real-world challenges encountered in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Practical teaching strategies	Classroom methods implementable by educators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Web-mapping serves as a practical teaching strategy by promoting intentional teaching, allowing educators to plan play-based learning experiences that align with children's interests and capabilities. Teachers utilize 'empty' cells in a child's web-map to identify specific areas for development, enhancing their curriculum practices (Edwards, 2016).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Instructional design recommendations	Suggestions on how to design tech-supported lessons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights several instructional design recommendations for fostering play-based learning in virtual classrooms:

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators should incorporate guided play, which connects play to learning standards, making it more acceptable to parents and administrators. • Providing clear communication to parents about the importance of play in children's learning is essential to gain their support. • Teachers should utilize a variety of play-based activities that are adaptable to virtual formats, ensuring they are engaging and developmentally appropriate. • Addressing technical issues and ensuring access to materials at home can enhance student engagement and participation. • Continuous professional development and support for teachers in virtual teaching practices are crucial (Ethridge et al., 2022).
<p>RQ3: Recommendations for Practice</p>	<p>Tech integration guidelines</p>	<p>Policy or research-based guidance on how to integrate tech.</p>	<p>- The integration of technology, digital media, and popular culture into early childhood education should focus on new concepts of play, such as web-mapping, which aligns with children's contemporary play experiences. Educators should observe and plan play-based learning experiences that incorporate children's interests in technology and digital media, moving beyond traditional beliefs about play. Teachers are encouraged to recognize the importance of children's digital literacies and common knowledge, fostering social learning networks among children. The shift towards explicit mediation of children's play</p>

			can enhance teachers' curriculum practices and address the challenges of technology integration (Edwards, 2016)
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Best practices for tech integration	High-impact and widely supported practices.	- Effective technology integration in educational settings should involve close collaboration between researchers and practitioners to identify and address specific problems. This collaboration allows for the refinement of solutions through iterative design processes. It is essential to document the integration process thoroughly to track practical barriers and facilitators, which can lead to necessary design changes. Practitioners should focus on the practical and symbolic value of technology, ensuring that it conveys the message that the language being taught is contemporary and relevant. Diversifying learning opportunities through technology can reduce reliance on practitioners as the sole source of language exposure (McPake & Stephen, 2016).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Technology Use	Aligns tech use with developmentally appropriate practice (DAP).	- Developmentally appropriate technology use should align with children's learning needs and developmental stages, emphasizing active engagement and social interaction. Technology and interactive media can be effective tools for supporting children's learning when used intentionally and appropriately. Educators should focus on integrating technology that fosters play-based learning experiences, ensuring that activities are rooted in developmentally appropriate practices. Continuous training and support for early childhood educators are essential to enhance their confidence and competence in using technology effectively in virtual settings. Policies should

			ensure equitable access to necessary materials and resources for children engaging in virtual learning (Ethridge et al., 2022).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Practical Implementation Strategies	Specific, actionable methods educators use to introduce and manage technology in play-based early childhood settings.	- The practical implementation of web-mapping involved teachers using it with identified focus children to observe, plan, and implement play-based learning experiences. Teachers documented their practices through various means, including sample web-maps, photographs, and anecdotal records. A professional learning session was conducted to introduce web-mapping as a new conceptual tool, representing the intervention phase. Teachers participated in small group discussions to share their experiences and challenges with web-mapping, which were audio-recorded for analysis. The implementation concluded with a focus group interview, utilizing data mirroring to reflect on the influence of web-mapping on curriculum practices (Edwards, 2016).
RQ3: Recommendations for Practice	Assessment strategies	Methods used to observe, document, and evaluate children's learning, development, and engagement during technology-integrated play experiences.	- The research emphasizes the use of 'data mirroring' as an assessment strategy, which involves participants generating data related to their activity system during focus group interviews. This technique allows for reflection on the influence of changes introduced into the system, such as the implementation of web-mapping in curriculum practices. Teachers documented their observations, plans, and implementations of play-based learning experiences, which served as a form of assessment of their practices and the effectiveness of web-mapping. Evaluation sheets completed by

			teachers also provided insights into the challenges and benefits encountered during the use of web-mapping (Edwards, 2016).
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Appendix B

Technology Integration Strategies Initial Excerpts Table Sample

This appendix presents a sample excerpt from the initial table of technology integration strategies. The complete version of this table is available in the accompanying file titled *Analysis Notes -Developing Play-Based Learning with Integrated Technology*.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Technology-Supported Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies. - The concept of 'web-mapping' serves as a new framework for understanding and enhancing play-based learning, allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play experiences that incorporate technology. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, enabling them to share common knowledge and interests, which can enhance their social interactions and friendships. - Ultimately, technology-supported play addresses the challenges of integrating digital tools into early childhood education by focusing on children's play as a foundation for learning.
Technology-Supported Play	Practitioner inquiry as a professional learning strategy to support	Kelly Johnston, Fay Hadley,	2020	The provided contexts do not contain specific information regarding "Technology-Supported Play." Therefore, an answer cannot be generated based on the available information.

	technology integration in early learning centres: Building understanding through Rogoff,'s planes of analysis	Manjula Waniganayake		
Technology-Supported Play	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play can be effective when used intentionally and appropriately, as noted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in 2012. - Early childhood educators face significant challenges in translating play-based learning experiences to virtual settings, particularly due to a lack of experience with technology and virtual instruction. - Despite these challenges, many teachers actively sought resources and collaborated to provide developmentally appropriate and play-based virtual learning experiences. - The study emphasizes the need for a mindset shift towards integrating technology in early childhood education to enhance play-based instruction.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Child-Centered Digital Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child-centered technology use emphasizes integrating children's interests and experiences with technology into play-based learning. This approach recognizes the significance of children's access to digital media and popular culture in shaping their play experiences in contemporary society. Web-mapping serves as a tool for teachers to observe and plan learning experiences that align with children's technological engagement, promoting intentional teaching. By focusing on children's interests, educators can create a curriculum that reflects the complexities of modern play, thereby enhancing children's confidence and engagement in learning activities. This method addresses the challenges of integrating technology into early childhood education.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Digital technology in the early years: a reflection of the literature	Laura Theichert, Munizah Salman	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tablets promote independence in children, reducing their reliance on adults for assistance. - Children with varying abilities can master skills more easily using tablets. - Tablets offer alternative methods for practicing skills like letter recognition. - iPads enhance creativity and choice in children's writing activities. - The MyCreate app enriches children's play through digital role-playing and collaboration.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers noted that tablets help children focus on ideas without motor skill limitations. - Digital technology's integration in early learning is essential for developing literacy. - Some educators advocate for quality digital tools rather than limiting technology use. - Concerns exist about the negative impact of digital technology on children's social skills.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study reflects a sociocultural view of learning, emphasizing child-centered pedagogies and multiliteracies with technology use. - Teachers aimed for creative tablet uses, promoting open-ended explorations and communication of ideas. - Tablets supported children's multimodal learning, linking linguistic, visual, and spatial dimensions. - The project encouraged children to engage in playful explorations, fostering new understandings through technology. - Teachers redefined their pedagogical approaches, enhancing their repertoire to support children's learning with technology. - The research highlights the potential of iPads to facilitate investigations and knowledge building in early education.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Adaptive Learning Strategies	Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences	Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptive learning technologies are designed to personalize educational experiences by responding to individual student needs, behaviors, and contexts. - These technologies utilize multimodal sensing and sensemaking capabilities, often incorporating artificial intelligence to understand students' activities, speech, behaviors, and emotions. - The goal is to enhance engagement and learning outcomes by providing tailored interactions that blend physical and digital learning environments. - In the context of Kid Space, adaptive learning features are planned to be integrated for real-time personalization, improving the overall learning experience for young learners.
Adaptive Learning Strategies	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research paper discusses the use of adaptive learning technologies, specifically through the implementation of the tablet app "Our Story", aimed at enhancing language-learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms. - This intervention follows design-based research principles, focusing on how new technologies can diversify learning opportunities and reduce reliance on practitioners as the sole

				<p>source of language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The findings suggest that while the app has potential, the integration of such technologies into existing educational practices presents challenges, particularly in achieving effective language immersion in early years settings.
Adaptive Learning Strategies	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space utilizes advanced AI to provide personalized learning experiences in a blended physical and digital environment. - The system adapts to individual progress through dialogue-based interactions with the conversational AI agent, Oscar. - The study highlights the importance of algorithmic maturity and user experience design for effective adaptive learning technologies. - Positive educational outcomes were achieved, indicating the effectiveness of adaptive learning strategies in engaging young children. - Kid Space addresses concerns about screen time and promotes physical activity through adaptive learning experiences.

Theme	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Scaffolding with Technologies	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	2016	- Scaffolding with technology in early childhood education involves using digital tools to support children's learning and development. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's ideas of explicit and implicit mediation, where technology serves as a conceptual tool to enhance curriculum practices. Web-mapping, as a new concept of play, exemplifies this by allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play-based learning experiences that integrate children's interests in technology and digital media. This method fosters social learning networks among children and helps educators align play experiences with contemporary play interests, addressing the challenges of technology integration in early childhood education.
Scaffolding with Technologies	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	- Scaffolding with technology in early childhood education involves using digital tools to support children's learning and development. It allows teachers to provide guided play experiences that engage children in constructing new knowledge. This approach is essential, especially in virtual settings, where teachers face challenges in facilitating play-based learning. Effective scaffolding can enhance children's problem-solving skills and executive functioning, as it combines play with adult guidance. However, many teachers reported a lack of experience with technology,

				which hindered their ability to implement these strategies effectively in virtual classrooms. Thus, professional development in technology integration is crucial for successful scaffolding.
Scaffolding with Technologies	Augmented reality as a form of digital technology in early childhood education	Parian Madanipour, Caroline Cohrsen	2020	- Scaffolding with technology, particularly through Augmented Reality (AR), provides opportunities for real-time feedback and support in educational settings. This approach enhances student motivation and concentration by facilitating interactions between students and content, peers, and teachers. AR technology allows for the visualization of abstract concepts and events that are difficult to explore in the real world, thereby enriching the learning experience. It is essential for educators to integrate AR thoughtfully into play-based curricula to promote effective learning outcomes and to assess its impact on child engagement and social interaction.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Multimedia Content Delivery	Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences	Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research emphasizes the importance of multimedia content delivery in enhancing student engagement during learning experiences. Kid Space integrates immersive computing experiences that blend digital and physical elements, allowing children to interact with an animated peer learner, Oscar, through various modalities such as speech and gestures. This approach aims to create a seamless interaction between the physical and digital worlds, fostering active participation and collaboration among students. The study highlights the need for real-time personalization and diverse content to maintain sustained engagement and address varying ability levels among students during these multimedia learning experiences.
Multimedia Content Delivery	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Our Story app serves as a multimedia content delivery tool, enabling children in Gaelic-medium preschool settings to engage with language learning through interactive storytelling. - It allows children to hear and practice Gaelic without the constant presence of a practitioner, thus increasing their exposure to the language. - The app facilitates the integration of sound files with

				<p>pictures and texts, enabling children to listen to stories, respond to questions, and create their own narratives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This multimedia approach aims to enhance language learning and early literacy by providing a unique resource that is not merely a translation of English materials.
Multimedia Content Delivery	The Integration of the Internet of Toys in Early Childhood Education: A Platform for Multi-Layered Interactions.	Sarika Kewalramani, Ioanna Palaiologou, Lorna Arnott, Maria Dardanou	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the use of multimedia content in the context of IoT, where various forms of digital media, such as images, videos, and written reflections, are utilized to enhance interactions in early childhood education settings. - Parents contribute multimedia messages that provide insights into children's experiences with IoT, which are then analyzed alongside observations and interviews. - This multimodal approach allows for a richer understanding of how children engage with technology, facilitating playful learning and collaboration in both physical and online environments.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Physical-digital play combination	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The concept of web-mapping illustrates the integration of physical and digital play, showcasing how children's traditional play activities can be enhanced through technology. - For instance, children may engage in physical activities, such as drawing or creating collages, which are then transformed into digital narratives using applications like Puppet Pals. - This blending of physical and digital play allows for a co-constituted play experience, where children's interests in popular culture, such as Spiderman, are utilized to foster deeper learning experiences. - Such combinations reflect the blurring boundaries between analogue and digital play, emphasizing the importance of new concepts of play in early childhood education.
Physical-digital play combination	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	The research paper does not provide specific information regarding physical-digital play combinations. It primarily focuses on the challenges and barriers faced by early childhood teachers in fostering play-based learning through virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights various types of play-based activities that teachers implemented in virtual settings, but it does not

				explicitly address the concept of combining physical and digital play. Therefore, no detailed information on physical-digital play combinations can be provided based on the available contexts.
Physical-digital play combination	Stretchy time or screen time: how early years practitioners conceptualise time in relation to children's digital play	Mona Sakr, Amanda Oscar	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practitioners recognize the potential for fluidity between physical and digital play, suggesting that children's play experiences can weave in and out of both environments. - Digital play is not viewed as opposing other forms of play; rather, it is seen as a complementary activity that can enhance children's overall play experiences. - The emphasis is on normalizing digital engagement, allowing children to explore and develop their interests across both physical and digital realms. - This approach encourages children to manage and regulate their own time, fostering a balanced integration of digital and physical play.

Data Label	Supported Studies	Authors	year	Excerpts
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Augmented reality as a form of digital technology in early childhood education	Parian Madanipour, Caroline Cohrsen	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Augmented Reality (AR) is a form of digital technology that is increasingly prevalent in early childhood education, as highlighted in the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. - The integration of AR technology in educational settings raises questions about its impact on play-based learning and social interaction among children. - Emerging technologies, including AR, often experience hype cycles, where initial excitement may lead to inflated expectations regarding their effectiveness in educational contexts. - It is essential to evaluate whether AR enhances or hinders the quality of play-based learning in early childhood curricula.
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences	Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike,	2022	The research paper does not specifically address Augmented Reality (AR) or emerging technologies in detail. However, it discusses the use of immersive computing experiences and multimodal sensing technologies in the Kid Space learning environment, which may relate to AR principles. Kid Space incorporates technologies such as gesture recognition, speech recognition, and projection to create an engaging learning experience that blends physical and digital interactions. This approach aims to

		Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman		enhance student engagement and physical activity during play-based learning, suggesting a potential application of AR in educational contexts. Further exploration of AR's role in such environments is not covered in the provided contexts.
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research discusses emerging technologies like computer-based games that enhance play-based learning for young children. - Kid Space incorporates advanced AI technologies to blend digital and physical learning experiences. - The study highlights the use of conversational AI in educational settings, referred to as Pedagogical Conversational Agents (PCAs). - Kid Space utilizes multiple sensing technologies and immersive environments to facilitate personalized learning. - The findings indicate that these technologies can improve engagement while addressing concerns about screen time and physical activity.

Appendix C

Technology Integration Strategies Thematic Codes Sample

This appendix includes a sample excerpt from the thematic coding table of technology integration strategies. The complete table is provided in the accompanying file titled *Analysis Notes -Developing Play-Based Learning with Integrated Technology*.

Theme	Matching Code	Excerpt Phrase
Access & Inclusion	Technology Access for All Learners	The study highlights the importance of access to technology for providing all learners with meaningful learning opportunities.
Access & Inclusion	Familiar-Toy Affordances	The use of familiar toys and equipment facilitated engagement in technology-supported play.
Access & Inclusion	Inclusive Music Instrument	Technology-mediated music-making served as an intervention for expressive and communicative learning goals for children with functional diversity.
Implementation Strategies	Adult Competence in Tech-Play Integration	Technology-supported play enhances children's learning outcomes when integrated thoughtfully with adult involvement and teacher competence.
Implementation Strategies	Adult mediation in digital vs. tangible play for language development	Parents interact differently with children during digital versus tangible play, affecting language experiences.
Implementation Strategies	Balanced technology integration and blended-digital-physical play	This method addresses parental concerns about excessive screen time by blending digital and physical activities, allowing children to engage more actively while minimizing sedentary behavior.

Learning Environments & Play	Balancing Traditional and Digital Play	Teachers express concerns about balancing traditional play with technology-supported play.
Learning Environments & Play	Challenges in Digital Play Adoption	Educators face challenges in associating learning through play with digital technologies, impacting their adoption of technology-supported play.
Learning Environments & Play	Curriculum Alignment in Digital Play	The research aimed to see if digital play meets Digital Technologies curriculum requirements.
Other	Assessment in Bush Kinder Contexts	The research highlights children's play-based technology learning can be assessed using a five-step model in bush kinder contexts.
Other	Child Content Creation	Rithik's activities with digital devices illustrate technology-supported play through content creation and recording.
Other	Child agency and multidirectional interaction	These interactions are multidirectional, allowing children to instruct both educators and loToys on their preferred play methods.
Pedagogical Frameworks & Theories	Digital Play Framework	The Digital Play Framework helps educators observe children's technology-supported play in early childhood settings.
Pedagogical Frameworks & Theories	Digital Play Framework Analysis	The digital play framework was utilized to analyze children's interactions with technology during play.
Pedagogical Frameworks & Theories	Engagement with Digital Systems	Children showed motivation and engagement while using digital systems, enhancing their play experience.
Student Skills & Outcomes	21st Century Skills through Child-Centered Tech Play	Overall, technology-supported play promotes child-centered practices and the

		development of essential digital skills for the 21st century.
Student Skills & Outcomes	AR Engagement in Storytelling	The children engaged with the AR character Julle, experimenting with its size and position in their stories.
Student Skills & Outcomes	Cognitive and Social Self-Directed Play	The approach supports both free and self-directed play, enhancing cognitive and social engagement.
Teacher Role & Professional Support	Adult Scaffolding in Tech	Adult support was crucial in helping children navigate technology during play activities.
Teacher Role & Professional Support	Barriers to Teacher Integration	Educators have been slow to integrate digital technologies into everyday curricula practices, despite children's changing play contexts.
Teacher Role & Professional Support	Change in educator's mindset	The study emphasizes the need for a mindset shift towards integrating technology in early childhood education to enhance play-based instruction.
Technology Types & Tools	AI-supported tools for authentic learning	The prototype utilizes advanced AI technologies to facilitate natural dialogue between children and the learning companion.
Technology Types & Tools	AR App for Story Sharing	Children utilized the MyAR Julle app to explore and share their stories, demonstrating technology-supported play.
Technology Types & Tools	AR for Nature-Based Storying	The study highlights how augmented reality can support children's storying and interaction with nature.

Appendix D

Technology Integration Strategies Aligned Learning Theories Sample

This appendix includes a sample excerpt from the table linking technology integration strategies with learning theories. The full table is available in the accompanying file titled *Analysis Notes-Developing Play-Based Learning with Integrated Technology*.

Technology Integration Strategies	Study Title	Authors	Excerpt	Cognitive Development Theory Alignment
Technology-Supported Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies. - The concept of 'web-mapping' serves as a new framework for understanding and enhancing play-based learning, allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play experiences that incorporate technology. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, enabling them to share common knowledge and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research paper discusses cognitive development in the context of early childhood education, particularly how new concepts of play, like web-mapping, can influence teachers' curriculum practices. - It highlights that traditional theories of play, which focus on cognitive development, may not adequately address contemporary children's play experiences shaped by digital media and popular culture. - The introduction of web-mapping

			<p>interests, which can enhance their social interactions and friendships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ultimately, technology-supported play addresses the challenges of integrating digital tools into early childhood education by focusing on children's play as a foundation for learning. 	<p>as a conceptual tool aims to bridge this gap, allowing teachers to better integrate technology and children's interests into play-based learning, thereby supporting cognitive development in a modern context.</p>
<p>Child-Centered Digital Play</p>	<p>Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning</p>	<p>Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights children's ability to engage in playful explorations using new technologies like iPads, fostering creativity and communication. - Children articulate their feelings and actions during play, enhancing their sense of well-being and engagement. - The use of eBooks allows children to reflect on their activities, promoting meta-cognition and memory recall. - Digital play supports multimodal learning, integrating various forms of expression and communication. - The study emphasizes the importance of child-initiated play in developing learning outcomes and creative thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children engaged in multimodal learning, enhancing their cognitive development through linguistic, visual, and spatial dimensions. - They articulated their ideas and discoveries, fostering deeper understanding and cognitive connections. - The use of eBooks facilitated meta-cognitive reflections, allowing children to recall and build on their learning experiences. - Playful explorations supported by new technologies encouraged knowledge building and cognitive

				<p>engagement in dynamic ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The partnership between teachers and children created enriched learning experiences, promoting cognitive growth through investigations. - The study highlights the potential of iPads to transform learning and support cognitive development in early childhood.
Adaptive Learning Technologies	Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences	<p>Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the role of technology-supported play in enhancing the learning experiences of 4-year-old children through coding and robotics. - The educational robot Cubetto is utilized to facilitate this play, allowing children to engage with programming concepts in a narrative and playful manner. - This approach promotes problem-solving skills, spatial awareness, and collaborative abilities among children, as they interact with both unplugged and plugged coding activities. - The integration of technology in play not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the impact of coding and robotics on the psychosocial development of 4-year-old children, particularly in enhancing collaborative skills. - It emphasizes that educational robotics, when integrated into playful situations, fosters social relations among children, promoting the development of social skills through playfulness. - The study indicates that the use of digital media and technology can facilitate children's

		Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman	only makes learning enjoyable but also aids in the development of cognitive and socio-relational skills.	participation and gratification in learning, which is crucial for their psychosocial growth. - Overall, the findings suggest that coding activities can significantly contribute to the cognitive and socio-relational development of young children.
Scaffolding with Technology	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	- Scaffolding with technology in early childhood education involves using digital tools to support children's learning and development. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's ideas of explicit and implicit mediation, where technology serves as a conceptual tool to enhance curriculum practices. Web-mapping, as a new concept of play, exemplifies this by allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play-based learning experiences that integrate children's interests in technology and digital media. This method fosters social learning networks among children and helps educators align play experiences with	- The research paper discusses cognitive development in the context of early childhood education, particularly how new concepts of play, like web-mapping, can influence teachers' curriculum practices. - It highlights that traditional theories of play, which focus on cognitive development, may not adequately address contemporary children's play experiences shaped by digital media and popular culture. - The introduction of web-mapping as a conceptual tool aims to bridge

			contemporary play interests, addressing the challenges of technology integration in early childhood education.	this gap, allowing teachers to better integrate technology and children's interests into play-based learning, thereby supporting cognitive development in a modern context.
Multimedia Content Delivery	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study highlights the use of iPads for creating multimodal texts, enhancing children's learning experiences through technology. - Children engaged in playful explorations, utilizing various media to communicate ideas and reflect on their learning. - The integration of new technologies supports children's ability to articulate and express their discoveries in diverse formats. - The research emphasizes the importance of multimodal environments for fostering deeper understanding and engagement in learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children engaged in multimodal learning, enhancing their cognitive development through linguistic, visual, and spatial dimensions. - They articulated their ideas and discoveries, fostering deeper understanding and cognitive connections. - The use of eBooks facilitated meta-cognitive reflections, allowing children to recall and build on their learning experiences. - Playful explorations supported by new technologies encouraged knowledge building and cognitive engagement in dynamic ways.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The partnership between teachers and children created enriched learning experiences, promoting cognitive growth through investigations. - The study highlights the potential of iPads to transform learning and support cognitive development in early childhood.
Physical-digital Play Combinations	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The concept of web-mapping illustrates the integration of physical and digital play, showcasing how children's traditional play activities can be enhanced through technology. - For instance, children may engage in physical activities, such as drawing or creating collages, which are then transformed into digital narratives using applications like Puppet Pals. - This blending of physical and digital play allows for a co-constituted play experience, where children's interests in popular culture, such as Spiderman, are utilized to foster deeper learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research paper discusses cognitive development in the context of early childhood education, particularly how new concepts of play, like web-mapping, can influence teachers' curriculum practices. - It highlights that traditional theories of play, which focus on cognitive development, may not adequately address contemporary children's play experiences shaped by digital media and popular culture. - The introduction of web-mapping

			<p>experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Such combinations reflect the blurring boundaries between analogue and digital play, emphasizing the importance of new concepts of play in early childhood education. 	<p>as a conceptual tool aims to bridge this gap, allowing teachers to better integrate technology and children's interests into play-based learning, thereby supporting cognitive development in a modern context.</p>
<p>Immersive and interactive learning experiences: Emerging Technologies</p>	<p>Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences</p>	<p>Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research emphasizes the integration of immersive computing experiences to enhance children's engagement in physical movement and social collaboration during play-based learning. - It highlights the use of augmented reality and multimodal sensing technologies to create interactive learning environments that blend physical and digital experiences. - The study indicates that these technologies can facilitate collaborative game design, enriching social interactions among students and promoting teamwork. - The incorporation of AI in understanding students' behaviors and emotions further 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cognitive development in children is significantly influenced by play-based activities, which promote engagement and provide cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits. - The integration of technology in play-based learning can enhance cognitive experiences, particularly through interactive digital games and immersive environments. - Kid Space, a technology designed for collaborative play-based learning, aims to engage children actively, fostering cognitive development through multimodal interactions and

			supports the development of personalized learning experiences.	physical movement. - The study indicates that children demonstrated high levels of engagement, which is crucial for cognitive growth, as they interacted with both digital and physical elements during learning activities.
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Technology Integration Strategies	Study Title	Authors	Excerpt	Psychosocial Development Theory Alignment
Technology-supported play	Coding and childhood between play and learning: Research on the impact of coding in the learning of 4-year-olds	Federica Pelizzari, Michele Marangi, Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Giulia Peretti, Davide Massaro, Daniela Villani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the role of technology-supported play in enhancing the learning experiences of 4-year-old children through coding and robotics. - The educational robot Cubetto is utilized to facilitate this play, allowing children to engage with programming concepts in a narrative and playful manner. - This approach promotes problem-solving skills, spatial awareness, and collaborative abilities among children, as they interact with both unplugged and plugged coding activities. - The integration of technology in play not only makes learning enjoyable but also aids in the development of cognitive and socio-relational skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the impact of coding and robotics on the psychosocial development of 4-year-old children, particularly in enhancing collaborative skills. - It emphasizes that educational robotics, when integrated into playful situations, fosters social relations among children, promoting the development of social skills through playfulness. - The study indicates that the use of digital media and technology can facilitate children's participation and gratification in learning, which is crucial for their psychosocial growth. - Overall, the findings suggest that coding activities can significantly contribute to the cognitive and

				socio-relational development of young children.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Coding and childhood between play and learning: Research on the impact of coding in the learning of 4-year-olds	Federica Pelizzari, Michele Marangi, Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Giulia Peretti, Davide Massaro, Daniela Villani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research emphasizes the importance of child-centered digital play, particularly through the use of educational robots like Cubetto, which encourages children to engage in coding activities that are both playful and educational. - This approach allows children to explore coding concepts in an immersive and collaborative manner, fostering skills in problem-solving, spatial awareness, and motor activities. - The integration of digital media in a structured and supervised environment enhances children's learning experiences, promoting creativity and participation while balancing the need for physical and socio-relational development. - Overall, child-centered digital play is framed as a vital component in modern educational practices for early childhood development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the impact of coding and robotics on the psychosocial development of 4-year-old children, particularly in enhancing collaborative skills. - It emphasizes that educational robotics, when integrated into playful situations, fosters social relations among children, promoting the development of social skills through playfulness. - The study indicates that the use of digital media and technology can facilitate children's participation and gratification in learning, which is crucial for their psychosocial growth. - Overall, the findings suggest that coding activities can significantly contribute to the cognitive and socio-relational development of young children.

<p>Adaptive Learning Technology</p>	<p>Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild</p>	<p>Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space promotes child-centered digital play through personalized experiences, allowing children to select favorite colors and engage with Oscar, the digital peer learner. - The design incorporates mixed reality, bridging physical and digital experiences, enhancing engagement during play. - Educators noted that Kid Space fosters collaboration and teamwork among children, supporting social interaction during digital play. - The system encourages physical activity, reducing screen time while maintaining high engagement levels in learning activities. - Kid Space's immersive environment and conversational AI facilitate meaningful interactions, aligning with children's natural communication styles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study highlights the importance of collaborative problem solving, enhancing both cognitive and social benefits for young children. - Oscar's role as a learning companion supports students' social engagement and emotional needs. - Significant positive changes in students' emotions were observed during learning experiences, indicating psychosocial development. - The research emphasizes the need to address diverse social and emotional needs among students from various backgrounds. - Kid Space promotes social interactions, contributing to students' psychosocial development through collaborative play.
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<p>Scaffolding with Technology</p>	<p>“You need a phone and camera in your bag before you go out!”: Children’s play with imaginative technologies</p>	<p>Jo Bird</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study explores children's engagement with imaginative technologies in play-based settings, emphasizing child-centered digital play experiences. - Children symbolically represent technologies in their play, showcasing creativity and adaptability. - Educators support children's play with imaginative technologies, recognizing its value in fostering digital citizenship. - The findings highlight the importance of imaginative play spaces that reflect children's cultural contexts and social realities. - Children's play with digital technologies encourages the development of their imagination and play skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study explores children's imaginative play, which is crucial for their psychosocial development in early childhood settings. - Imagination guides preschool children's play behavior, reflecting their emotional and social experiences. - Children's play scenarios are influenced by their real and imagined emotions, contributing to their psychosocial growth. - The research highlights the importance of imaginative technologies in fostering children's social interactions and creativity. - Vygotsky's theories on play emphasize the role of social roles and experiences in shaping children's psychosocial development.
<p>Multimedia Content Delivery</p>	<p>Developing communicative competencies</p>	<p>Lee Cheng, Chi Ying Lam</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research discusses the design of a mobile music app for facilitating communication among children with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the importance of music in enhancing children's intellectual, social, and

	in children with functional diversity through music technology: a posthuman perspective		<p>functional diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The app's participatory nature enhances collaborative music-making activities, fostering engagement through multimedia content. - Technology's role in music education is emphasized, transforming interactions and perceptions of music. - The study highlights the importance of non-verbal communication in music, which transcends traditional language barriers. 	<p>personal development, particularly for those with functional diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Music therapy fosters communication and emotional expression, contributing positively to psychosocial development in children with special needs. - The study emphasizes accommodating diverse needs, which is crucial for supporting psychosocial growth in children with functional diversity. - Engaging in musical activities can help children develop social skills and build relationships, essential for their psychosocial development.
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences with Emerging Technologies	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space utilizes advanced AI and multiple sensing technologies for immersive learning experiences in a blended physical and digital environment. - The system enables natural dialogue between children and a digital learning companion, enhancing interactivity. - Emerging technologies like conversational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study highlights the importance of collaborative problem solving, enhancing both cognitive and social benefits for young children. - Oscar's role as a learning companion supports students' social engagement and emotional

	<p>exploratory case study in the wild</p>		<p>AI facilitate personalized learning experiences, addressing concerns about screen time and social interaction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space represents a novel multi-modal pedagogical conversational agent prototype designed for early math education. 	<p>needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant positive changes in students' emotions were observed during learning experiences, indicating psychosocial development. - The research emphasizes the need to address diverse social and emotional needs among students from various backgrounds. - Kid Space promotes social interactions, contributing to students' psychosocial development through collaborative play.
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Technology Integration Strategies	Study Title	Authors	Excerpt	Social Constructivism Theory Alignment
Technology-Supported Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies. - The concept of 'web-mapping' serves as a new framework for understanding and enhancing play-based learning, allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play experiences that incorporate technology. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, enabling them to share common knowledge and interests, which can enhance their social interactions and friendships. - Ultimately, technology-supported play addresses the challenges of integrating digital tools into early childhood education 	<p>- Social constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural context in the construction of knowledge. It posits that individuals develop understanding through collaborative experiences and shared knowledge within their communities. This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's ideas, which highlight the importance of social mediation in learning processes. In early childhood education, social constructivism can be observed through children's play, where they engage in shared activities that foster social learning networks and enhance their understanding of the world around them. This approach encourages educators to integrate children's interests and cultural</p>

			by focusing on children's play as a foundation for learning.	backgrounds into their curriculum practices.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights children's ability to engage in playful explorations using new technologies like iPads, fostering creativity and communication. - Children articulate their feelings and actions during play, enhancing their sense of well-being and engagement. - The use of eBooks allows children to reflect on their activities, promoting metacognition and memory recall. - Digital play supports multimodal learning, integrating various forms of expression and communication. - The study emphasizes the importance of child-initiated play in developing learning outcomes and creative thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study reflects a sociocultural view of learning, emphasizing social interactions before internalizing new information. - It aligns with child-centered pedagogies and multiliteracies, promoting collaborative learning. - New technologies facilitate open-ended explorations and communication of ideas among children. - The research highlights the importance of social contexts in supporting children's literacy development. - The abstract discusses the potential for new learning through investigations and explorations enabled by iPads.
Adaptive Learning Technologies	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas:	Joanna McPake,	- The research paper discusses the use of adaptive learning technologies, specifically through the implementation of the tablet	- Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of social

	Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Christine Stephen	<p>app "Our Story", aimed at enhancing language-learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This intervention follows design-based research principles, focusing on how new technologies can diversify learning opportunities and reduce reliance on practitioners as the sole source of language. - The findings suggest that while the app has potential, the integration of such technologies into existing educational practices presents challenges, particularly in achieving effective language immersion in early years settings. 	<p>interactions and cultural context in the learning process. It posits that knowledge is constructed through collaborative engagement between learners and their peers, as well as with educators. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's understanding of learning as a social and collaborative endeavor, where language serves as a key tool for mediating interactions that support learning. In the context of Gaelic-medium education, the challenges of language revitalization highlight the complexities of implementing social constructivist principles, particularly when children are learning a language that is new to them.</p>
Scaffolding with Technology	Transformative technologies and play in the early years:	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers scaffold children's learning by integrating tablets, promoting open-ended explorations and communication of ideas. - A guided learning approach was implemented, providing structured yet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study reflects a sociocultural view of learning, emphasizing social interactions before internalizing new information. - It aligns with child-centered

	<p>Using tablets for new learning</p>		<p>flexible support for using new technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scaffolding helps children connect real-world experiences with technology, enhancing their understanding. - The use of tablets encourages collaborative knowledge building, shifting focus from rote learning to idea generation. - New technologies facilitate multimodal learning, allowing children to articulate and communicate their discoveries. 	<p>pedagogies and multiliteracies, promoting collaborative learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New technologies facilitate open-ended explorations and communication of ideas among children. - The research highlights the importance of social contexts in supporting children's literacy development. - The abstract discusses the potential for new learning through investigations and explorations enabled by iPads.
<p>Multimedia Content Delivery</p>	<p>New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.</p>	<p>Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Our Story app serves as a multimedia content delivery tool, enabling children in Gaelic-medium preschool settings to engage with language learning through interactive storytelling. - It allows children to hear and practice Gaelic without the constant presence of a practitioner, thus increasing their exposure to the language. - The app facilitates the integration of sound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural context in the learning process. It posits that knowledge is constructed through collaborative engagement between learners and their peers, as well as with educators. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's

			<p>files with pictures and texts, enabling children to listen to stories, respond to questions, and create their own narratives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This multimedia approach aims to enhance language learning and early literacy by providing a unique resource that is not merely a translation of English materials. 	<p>understanding of learning as a social and collaborative endeavor, where language serves as a key tool for mediating interactions that support learning. In the context of Gaelic-medium education, the challenges of language revitalization highlight the complexities of implementing social constructivist principles, particularly when children are learning a language that is new to them.</p>
<p>Immersive and Interactive Learning Experience with Emerging Technologies</p>	<p>Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild</p>	<p>Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space utilizes advanced AI and multiple sensing technologies for immersive learning experiences in a blended physical and digital environment. - The system enables natural dialogue between children and a digital learning companion, enhancing interactivity. - Emerging technologies like conversational AI facilitate personalized learning experiences, addressing concerns about screen time and social interaction. - Kid Space represents a novel multi-modal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The study emphasizes collaborative problem solving, enhancing social engagement among students, aligning with social constructivism principles. - Oscar's role as a learning companion supports social interactions, fostering a constructivist learning environment. - High levels of non-verbal engagement with peers indicate social constructivist practices in Kid

			<p>pedagogical conversational agent prototype designed for early math education.</p>	<p>Space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The design encourages rich social interactions, a key aspect of social constructivism.- Positive educational outcomes were linked to social interactions, reinforcing social constructivist theories.- The findings highlight the importance of social skills in facilitating peer interactions, supporting social constructivism.
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Technology Integration Strategies	Study Title	Authors	Excerpt	Constructivist Learning Theory Alignment
Technology-Supported Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies. - The concept of 'web-mapping' serves as a new framework for understanding and enhancing play-based learning, allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play experiences that incorporate technology. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, enabling them to share common knowledge and interests, which can enhance their social interactions and friendships. - Ultimately, technology-supported play addresses the challenges of integrating digital tools into early childhood education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructivism is a learning theory that posits knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment and social contexts, rather than being passively absorbed. - It emphasizes the role of learners in actively engaging with materials and experiences to build their understanding. - Vygotsky's ideas on mediation highlight the importance of social interaction and cultural tools in the learning process, suggesting that explicit mediation can introduce new concepts that enhance learning experiences. - In early childhood education, integrating contemporary tools like web-mapping can facilitate this constructivist approach by aligning

			by focusing on children's play as a foundation for learning.	with children's play interests and technological engagement.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights children's ability to engage in playful explorations using new technologies like iPads, fostering creativity and communication. - Children articulate their feelings and actions during play, enhancing their sense of well-being and engagement. - The use of eBooks allows children to reflect on their activities, promoting meta-cognition and memory recall. - Digital play supports multimodal learning, integrating various forms of expression and communication. - The study emphasizes the importance of child-initiated play in developing learning outcomes and creative thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights the importance of scaffolding children's learning through digital play, linking it to their experiences and understanding. - Multimodal environments support playful explorations, fostering knowledge building and communication among young learners. - The use of new technologies in early education encourages investigations and reflections, enhancing children's learning experiences. - Child-centered digital play allows children to express feelings and actions, promoting well-being and communication skills.
Adaptive Learning Technologies	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas:	Joanna McPake,	- The research paper discusses the use of adaptive learning technologies, specifically through the implementation of	- Constructivism is an educational theory that posits learners construct knowledge through

	Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Christine Stephen	<p>the tablet app "Our Story", aimed at enhancing language-learning opportunities in Gaelic-medium preschool playrooms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This intervention follows design-based research principles, focusing on how new technologies can diversify learning opportunities and reduce reliance on practitioners as the sole source of language. - The findings suggest that while the app has potential, the integration of such technologies into existing educational practices presents challenges, particularly in achieving effective language immersion in early years settings. 	<p>experiences and reflections, emphasizing the active role of the learner in the learning process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It suggests that understanding is built upon prior knowledge and experiences, leading to personalized learning outcomes. - In the context of the research, design-based research (DBR) aligns with constructivist principles by focusing on real-world problems and the collaborative development of interventions that enhance learning environments. - This approach fosters engagement between researchers and practitioners, ensuring that educational innovations are contextually relevant and effective in practice.
Multimedia Content Delivery	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and	Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen	- The Our Story app serves as a multimedia content delivery tool, enabling children in Gaelic-medium preschool settings to engage with language learning	- Constructivism is an educational theory that posits learners construct knowledge through experiences and reflections,

	<p>Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.</p>		<p>through interactive storytelling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It allows children to hear and practice Gaelic without the constant presence of a practitioner, thus increasing their exposure to the language. - The app facilitates the integration of sound files with pictures and texts, enabling children to listen to stories, respond to questions, and create their own narratives. - This multimedia approach aims to enhance language learning and early literacy by providing a unique resource that is not merely a translation of English materials. 	<p>emphasizing the active role of the learner in the learning process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It suggests that understanding is built upon prior knowledge and experiences, leading to personalized learning outcomes. - In the context of the research, design-based research (DBR) aligns with constructivist principles by focusing on real-world problems and the collaborative development of interventions that enhance learning environments. - This approach fosters engagement between researchers and practitioners, ensuring that educational innovations are contextually relevant and effective in practice.
<p>Physical-Digital Play Combinations</p>	<p>Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using</p>	<p>Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New technologies facilitate multimodal learning, combining physical and digital play experiences for children. - Children engage in playful explorations that integrate both real-world and digital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New learning emphasizes collaborative knowledge building rather than rote memorization, aligning with constructivist principles.

	tablets for new learning		<p>interactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The use of iPads allows children to create multimodal texts, blending physical and digital elements. - Play-based programs incorporate various materials, enhancing physical-digital play combinations. - Teachers scaffold learning by linking physical play with digital technologies, enriching children's experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children engage in multimodal explorations, linking real-world experiences to their learning. - Playful explorations initiated by children or teachers foster dynamic investigations, a key aspect of constructivism. - New technologies facilitate constructivist learning by enabling children to generate ideas and share collaboratively. - The study highlights how iPads support investigations and knowledge building in early childhood education.
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences with Emerging Technologies	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space utilizes advanced AI and multiple sensing technologies for immersive learning experiences in a blended physical and digital environment. - The system enables natural dialogue between children and a digital learning companion, enhancing interactivity. - Emerging technologies like conversational AI facilitate personalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space incorporates a socio-constructivist learning approach, positioning Oscar as a conversational peer learner rather than a tutor. - This design encourages collaborative problem solving, enhancing social engagement and task focus among students.

	exploratory case study in the wild		learning experiences, addressing concerns about screen time and social interaction. - Kid Space represents a novel multi-modal pedagogical conversational agent prototype designed for early math education.	- The instructional design process involved collaboration with first-grade teachers to create pedagogically sound learning content. - Scaffolding was integrated into the design, allowing personalized support for students experiencing learning deficiencies. - The overall approach aims to foster rich social interactions and creativity during learning experiences.
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Technology Integration Strategies	Study Title	Authors	Excerpt	Play-Based Learning Theory Alignment
Technology-Supported Play	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology-supported play is characterized by the integration of digital media and popular culture into children's play experiences, reflecting their contemporary life-worlds in post-industrial societies. - The concept of 'web-mapping' serves as a new framework for understanding and enhancing play-based learning, allowing teachers to observe, plan, and implement play experiences that incorporate technology. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, enabling them to share common knowledge and interests, which can enhance their social interactions and friendships. - Ultimately, technology-supported play addresses the challenges of integrating digital tools into early childhood education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play-based learning is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the importance of children's play as a foundation for curriculum provision in early childhood education. - It involves teachers observing, planning, and implementing learning experiences that are rooted in children's interests and play activities. - The integration of new concepts, such as web-mapping, enhances intentional teaching by allowing educators to focus on children's capabilities and interests, thereby extending their learning experiences. - This approach fosters social learning networks among children, promoting collaboration and shared

			by focusing on children's play as a foundation for learning.	knowledge, which is essential in contemporary educational settings.
Child-Centered Digital Play	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The research highlights children's ability to engage in playful explorations using new technologies like iPads, fostering creativity and communication. - Children articulate their feelings and actions during play, enhancing their sense of well-being and engagement. - The use of eBooks allows children to reflect on their activities, promoting meta-cognition and memory recall. - Digital play supports multimodal learning, integrating various forms of expression and communication. - The study emphasizes the importance of child-initiated play in developing learning outcomes and creative thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play-based learning encourages children to engage in playful explorations, fostering creativity and diverse solutions. - New technologies facilitate multimodal learning, enhancing play-based pedagogies in early childhood education. - Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding children's learning through structured yet flexible play environments. - The use of iPads in kindergarten supports investigations and knowledge building through playful explorations. - Multimodal environments enable children to articulate and communicate their ideas effectively during play.

<p>Adaptive Learning Technologies</p>	<p>Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences</p>	<p>Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptive learning technologies are designed to personalize educational experiences by responding to individual student needs, behaviors, and contexts. - These technologies utilize multimodal sensing and sensemaking capabilities, often incorporating artificial intelligence to understand students' activities, speech, behaviors, and emotions. - The goal is to enhance engagement and learning outcomes by providing tailored interactions that blend physical and digital learning environments. - In the context of Kid Space, adaptive learning features are planned to be integrated for real-time personalization, improving the overall learning experience for young learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play-based learning is critical for children's development, promoting cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits. - It incorporates technology, creating new opportunities through digital games on various platforms, such as tablets and interactive surfaces. - Kid Space is an example of play-based learning that combines immersive computing experiences to enhance physical movement and social collaboration among children. - The technology features an animated peer learner, Oscar, designed to engage children actively during learning experiences. - Observational studies indicate that collaborative play enhances social interactions and overall engagement among children.
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<p>Multimedia Content Delivery</p>	<p>Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences</p>	<p>Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman</p>	<p>- The research emphasizes the importance of multimedia content delivery in enhancing student engagement during learning experiences. Kid Space integrates immersive computing experiences that blend digital and physical elements, allowing children to interact with an animated peer learner, Oscar, through various modalities such as speech and gestures. This approach aims to create a seamless interaction between the physical and digital worlds, fostering active participation and collaboration among students. The study highlights the need for real-time personalization and diverse content to maintain sustained engagement and address varying ability levels among students during these multimedia learning experiences.</p>	<p>- Play-based learning is critical for children's development, promoting cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits.</p> <p>- It incorporates technology, creating new opportunities through digital games on various platforms, such as tablets and interactive surfaces.</p> <p>- Kid Space is an example of play-based learning that combines immersive computing experiences to enhance physical movement and social collaboration among children.</p> <p>- The technology features an animated peer learner, Oscar, designed to engage children actively during learning experiences.</p> <p>- Observational studies indicate that collaborative play enhances social interactions and overall engagement among children.</p>
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Physical-Digital Play Combinations	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New technologies facilitate multimodal learning, combining physical and digital play experiences for children. - Children engage in playful explorations that integrate both real-world and digital interactions. - The use of iPads allows children to create multimodal texts, blending physical and digital elements. - Play-based programs incorporate various materials, enhancing physical-digital play combinations. - Teachers scaffold learning by linking physical play with digital technologies, enriching children's experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play-based learning encourages children to engage in playful explorations, fostering creativity and diverse solutions. - New technologies facilitate multimodal learning, enhancing play-based pedagogies in early childhood education. - Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding children's learning through structured yet flexible play environments. - The use of iPads in kindergarten supports investigations and knowledge building through playful explorations. - Multimodal environments enable children to articulate and communicate their ideas effectively during play.
Immersive and Interactive Learning Experiences	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space utilizes advanced AI and multiple sensing technologies for immersive learning experiences in a blended physical and digital environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play-based learning is crucial for early childhood education, enhancing children's academic success through engaging

with Emerging Technologies	artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild	Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The system enables natural dialogue between children and a digital learning companion, enhancing interactivity. - Emerging technologies like conversational AI facilitate personalized learning experiences, addressing concerns about screen time and social interaction. - Kid Space represents a novel multi-modal pedagogical conversational agent prototype designed for early math education. 	<p>experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kid Space promotes play-based learning by blending physical and digital environments, fostering collaboration among students. - The use of computer-based games in play-based learning raises concerns about screen time and social interaction. - Kid Space's design elements, like gamification and physical activity, effectively engage young children in play-based learning. - The study found significant learning gains after students participated in play-based learning activities within Kid Space.
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Appendix E

Evidenced-Based Recommendations Strategies Theme Sample

This appendix presents a sample excerpt from the thematic table outlining evidence-based recommendation strategies. The complete version of this table is provided in the accompanying file titled *Analysis Notes-Developing Play-Based Learning with Integrated Technology*.

Recommendation	Source Title	Authors	Year	Theme
Observational data indicate that collaborative game design significantly enriches social interactions, which are crucial for effective learning experiences.	Exploring Kid Space in the wild: a preliminary study of multimodal and immersive collaborative play-based learning experiences	Sinem Aslan, Ankur Agrawal, Nese Alyuz, Rebecca Chierichetti, Lenitra M. Durham, Ramesh R. Manuvinakurike, Eda Okur, Saurav Sahay, Sangita Sharma, John L. Sherry, Giuseppe Raffa, Lama Nachman	2022	Assessment & Observation
Family engagement activities and informational sessions can help educate families on the importance of play in early childhood learning, even in virtual environments.	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	Child-Centered Pedagogy

<p>It is recommended that educators observe and document children's play interests using web-mapping, allowing for tailored play-based learning experiences.</p>	<p>New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education</p>	<p>Susan Edwards</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>Child-Centered Pedagogy, Assessment & Observation</p>
<p>The study modified existing assessment scales to evaluate young children's support needs during activities.</p>	<p>Can Pre-school Children Learn Programming and Coding Through Guided Play Activities? A Case Study in Computational Thinking</p>	<p>Valerie Critten, Hannah Hagon, David Messer</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Child-Centered Pedagogy, Assessment & Observation, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)</p>
<p>Each laboratory session includes two educators, one managing the activities and the other documenting progress using the checklist, which allows for a more structured analysis of children's development.</p>	<p>Coding and childhood between play and learning: Research on the impact of coding in the learning of 4-year-olds</p>	<p>Federica Pelizzari, Michele Marangi, Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Giulia Peretti, Davide Massaro, Daniela Villani</p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation</p>
<p>The emphasis is on understanding the multiplicity of interactions and how they can effectively realize IoT integration in the playroom ecology, rather than on</p>	<p>The Integration of the Internet of Toys in Early Childhood Education: A Platform for Multi-Layered Interactions.</p>	<p>Sarika Kewalramani, Ioanna Palaiologou, Lorna Arnott, Maria Dardanou</p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation, Assessment & Observation</p>

assessment frameworks or evaluations.				
Observational data and structured conversations with children provide insights into effective practices for language learning in early years, emphasizing the need for resources that support Gaelic immersion.	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen	2016	Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation, Assessment & Observation, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
It highlights that many teachers faced significant challenges and barriers in implementing play-based learning virtually, indicating a gap in resources and training.	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation, Professional Development
This type of play allows children to practice new words and ways of speaking, thereby improving their communication skills.	Cell phones as 'super props': children's language development in sociodramatic play	Wenjie Wang, Annabelle Black Delfin	2023	Child-Centered Pedagogy, Professional Development
Professional organizations should provide more resources and training focused on play-based and developmentally	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	Child-Centered Pedagogy, Professional Development, Developmentally

appropriate instruction in virtual settings.				Appropriate Practice (DAP)
The design principles include educational focus, social interaction, and promoting physical activity, aligning with developmentally appropriate practices.	Immersive multi-modal pedagogical conversational artificial intelligence for early childhood education: An exploratory case study in the wild	Sinem Aslan, Lenitra M. Durham, Nese Alyuz, Eda Okur, Sangita Sharma, Celal Savur, Lama Nachman	2024	Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
This approach aligns with Rogoff's planes of analysis, which provide a framework for understanding learning processes.	Practitioner inquiry as a professional learning strategy to support technology integration in early learning centres: Building understanding through Rogoff's planes of analysis	Kelly Johnston, Fay Hadley, Manjula Waniganayake	2020	Instructional Design & Implementation
The research emphasizes the use of 'data mirroring' as an assessment strategy, which involves participants generating data related to their activity system during focus group interviews. This technique allows for reflection on the influence of changes introduced into the system, such as the implementation of web-	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in early childhood education	Susan Edwards	2016	Instructional Design & Implementation, Assessment & Observation

mapping in curriculum practices.				
Continuous professional development and support for teachers in virtual teaching practices are crucial.	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	Professional Development
Pre and post-test assessments measure learning progress related to mathematical skills in intervention and control groups.	An Interactive Pedagogy in Mobile Context for Augmenting Early Childhood Numeric Literacy and Quantifying Skills	Yaser Mowafi, Ismail Abumuhfouz	2021	Professional Development, Assessment & Observation
Initial teacher education should equip educators to identify technology integration opportunities.	Building a Better Wall: Assessing Children's Design Technology Learning in Nature-Based Early Childhood Education	Christopher Speldewinde, Coral Campbell	2024	Technology Integration Strategies
Data analysis included frequency counts for teaching practices and learning outcomes, establishing median scores.	Converged play characteristics for early childhood education: multi-modal, global-local, and traditional-digital	Susan Edwards, Elizabeth Wood, Ana Mantillab, Susan Grieshaber, Joce Nuttall	2020	Technology Integration Strategies, Assessment & Observation
By incorporating children's popular culture interests, such as characters from media, teachers can create relevant and relatable learning	New concepts of play and the problem of technology, digital media and popular-culture integration with play-based learning in	Susan Edwards	2016	Technology Integration Strategies, Child-Centered Pedagogy

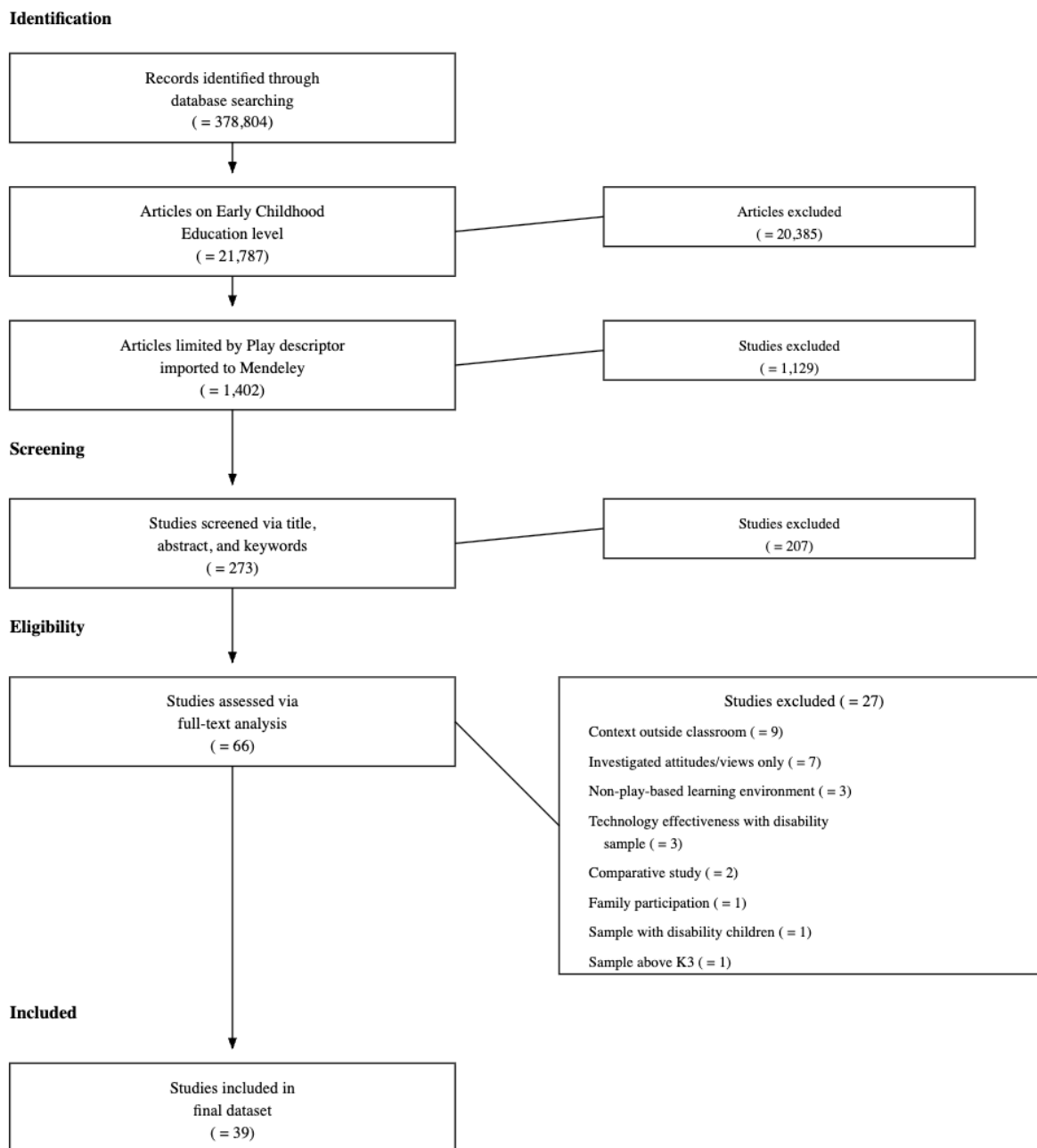
experiences that resonate with children.	early childhood education			
The integration of technology in preschool settings should begin with a thorough assessment of the local context, ensuring that the chosen technology aligns with the educational goals and needs of the children.	New Technologies, Old Dilemmas: Theoretical and Practical Challenges in Preschool Immersion Playrooms.	Joanna McPake, Christine Stephen	2016	Technology Integration Strategies, Child-Centered Pedagogy, Assessment & Observation
The National Association for the Education of Young Children emphasizes that when used intentionally and appropriately, technology can effectively support children's learning.	Fostering Play Through Virtual Teaching: Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies	Elizabeth A. Ethridge, Adrien Malek-Lasater, Kyong-Ah Kwon	2022	Technology Integration Strategies, Child-Centered Pedagogy, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
Instructional design in early childhood education should integrate augmented reality (AR) technology as a key component to enhance play-based learning experiences.	Augmented reality as a form of digital technology in early childhood education	Parian Madanipour, Caroline Cohrssen	2020	Technology Integration Strategies, Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation
Early learning frameworks recognize the need for children to	Digital technology in the early years: a	Laura Theichert, Munizah Salman	2022	Technology Integration Strategies,

develop digital literacy skills while balancing screen time recommendations.	reflection of the literature			Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Design & Implementation, Professional Development
The review suggests that educators should promote high-quality, developmentally appropriate media rather than merely limiting screen time.	Digital technology in the early years: a reflection of the literature	Laura Theichert, Munizah Salman	2022	Technology Integration Strategies, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
Technology should facilitate school readiness for preschoolers, focusing on early numeracy and literacy skills.	Scaffolding executive function capabilities via play-&-learn software for preschoolers	Anton Axelsson, Richard Andersson, Ageta Guiz	2016	Technology Integration Strategies, Professional Development
The research highlights the need for teachers to possess video art knowledge to effectively implement digital arts in classrooms.	Video art as digital play for young children	Suzannie K. Y. Leung, Kimburley W. Y. Choi, Mantak Yuen	2020	Technology Integration Strategies, Instructional Design & Implementation
The use of a skills-based assessment model is proposed to evaluate technology teaching in bush kinders.	Building a Better Wall: Assessing Children's Design Technology Learning in Nature-Based Early Childhood Education	Christopher Speldewinde, Coral Campbell	2024	Technology Integration Strategies, Professional Development, Assessment & Observation

New technologies facilitate collaborative work, shifting focus from rote learning to idea generation.	Transformative technologies and play in the early years: Using tablets for new learning	Nicola Yalland, Caja Gilbert	2018	Other
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Appendix F

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process



Note. This diagram shows the systematic review process for Early Childhood Education play-based learning studies, from initial database search to final dataset inclusion.