IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION CENTERS IN NYAMIRA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Early childhood development education (ECDE) aims at providing an education geared towards the development of a child's mental capabilities, physical growth, self-awareness, esteem and confidence. Studies have shown that play is rarely utilized in teaching and learning in many ECDE Centre in Kenya. Learning through play is not only child friendly but also brain arousing. The Early Childhood Education program in Kenya is relatively young discipline as compared to other countries in the region. So far some studies have revealed problems in teacher's use of play of relevant teaching and learning strategies to enhance pre-primary children learning at their own base. This study assessed the importance of play and its relationship to learning in ECDE curriculum in Nyamira County. The objectives of the study were: To examine the teachers' attitudes in the utilization of play, Asses play activities used by teachers in teaching, investigate challenges faced by teachers in utilization of playand establish the availability of play materials in ECDE centers. A descriptive survey design was employed with independent variables being teachers' attitude, activities used in teaching and availability of play materials. The study adopted questionnaire method in collecting data. A target population of 317 pre-school teachers and100 head teachers in Nyamira County total of 417respondents was used in study. A sample size of 120 respondents was chosen from the target population. A pilot study was conducted in one school to help in improving validity and reliability of Questionnaires. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the data. The data collected was coded and analyzed using the statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Then it was presented in tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

Keywords: Early Childood Development Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information.

(Ngasike 2002) defines as an activity in which the child constructs reality without situational influences or constrains. Play is an opportunity for all the significant activities that enhance good development to take place. Although children develop according to the same pattern; they differ greatly in their rate of development.

The child development domains include physical, language, social and emotional. Many studies have portrayed that children's development are mainly universal but very much on the importance of both growth and development of

children at age 3-5 years. Hughes (1999) stated that, play is a way in which other people understand child's abilities, skill and development, consequently how the child views the world. According to Kuffaro (1999).Play is a visible language of children where one sees and hears the total child functioning revealing his concerns, conflicts, information and misinformation, wishes, hopes, pleasures and questions Play contributes to physical growth, fitness, which also improves growth and development of the brain. Children take part in play that requires a lot of imagination. For a child, play is a form of self-expression as a significant part of social development.

As children interact with peers during play and with family members, vocabulary increases, this is because a child has adequate opportunities to communicate and practice what has been learnt. Through play children gain knowledge and acquire problem solving skills. Children in make-believe plays can stimulate several types of learning. They can strengthen their language skills by modeling other children and adults. Play aids children in many ways According to Catherine (2013) children learn effectively through play. Play makes two most crucial contribution; one children's developing abilities which relate to their development of language, two their development of the abilities to control their own cognitive and emotional process or self -regulate. In play an individual can try out new behaviors, exaggerate, modify, abbreviate or change the sequence of behaviors. (Bradley 2000) explains that these characteristics of play give it a vital role in development of problem solving skills. Playful children are securely attached emotionally to significant adults Access to a variety of materials and toys related to children's cognitive development provide children with a wealth of opportunities for creativity, for social interaction, for authorship and for deep engagement. There are many ways that children learn through play like, observation, role, reinforcement, exploration and trial and error. When children play, many opportunities arise for example, skill development as language, social skills gross and fine motor skills for sorting and sequencing. Conclusions can be drawn that when children act they do not separate between play and learning although they separate them in their talk.

Sensitizing teachers on development of children helps them to maintain a consistent and a good teacher –child interaction. The basic social activity of children is play and an aspect of quality in ECE program. Through quality ECE programs the poverty circle can be broken and instead promote equity in the society. Use of play in teaching in ECDE centers enable children to learn various skills and responsibilities in the society such as gender roles in addition to modeling directions at their own pace. Through play, children are able to recall, repeat, differentiate sounds, accurately recite poems, and hence provide many opportunities to experience what they have learned. Mbise (2002) in his survey in the coastal and rural areas of Mwanza, Kilimanjaro and Mtwara regions in Tanzania found a variety of opinions on the need to allow children to participate in play as well as provision of play materials which are local and naturally found for the optimal cognitive development and effective child stimulation. There is evidence that children's use of songs and a wide range of playing materials in ECDE centers settings builds and develops remarkable abilities in perceiving various concepts about different objects, situations, relationships and environment. Since play dominates any interactive teaching, the purpose of this study will be to assess the determinants of use of play in ECDE centers.

Available evidence suggest that play deprived children become disturbed, aggressive and violent adults.(Wales 2007) exclaims play is the highest expression of human development in childhood , for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul. Parents, teachers and government bodies all recognize the value of play. (Guldberg 2009).Yet opportunities for play continue to diminish, with fewer play spaces, less freedom to roam outdoors, and decreasing school time for free play.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Play is critical in learners' development. It enables children develop physically, socially emotionally and intellectually. Play also enhances learning. ECDE teachers are encouraged to teach content using play. Indeed learners need not differentiate between the content and play, but teachers should make sure play results in learning. However play is sometimes mistaken for a waste of time and sometimes administrators insist on teachers sitting down ECDE learners for content instruction. This results in boredom and unfriendly learning and teaching environment in ECDE centers. Despite this, ECDE teachers must use play as a teaching tool and for learners own understanding of the environment. The problem is that it is not understood how much play is incorporated in teaching and learning at ECDE canters in these conflicting circumstances. Studies have shown that if early child hood is not well lived, it may lead to maladjustment in later life. The kind of education given to children in early years largely determines the kind of adults they become. If children are given

adequate opportunities to play there will be change in how they express and release emotions inacceptable ways without hurting others.

Therefore the study aimed at finding out the extent to which play is being used in the learning centres, the training offered in teacher training colleges emphasizes play as the main method of teaching. The problem is that play may not be utilized in the field. Could the administrators and teachers be emphasizing alternative methods, could the teachers be experiencing other challenges in the use of play, what are the ECDE teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards the use of play? In addition the connection between play and learning is still not clear and educational planners and implementers know little about play in development of the child.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

i.   To examine teachers' attitude towards utilization of play in teaching at ECDE centers in Nyamira County

ii. To assess the extent of use of play in teaching at ECDE centers in Nyamira County

iii. To investigate challenges faced by teachers in the use of play in teaching at ECDE centers Nyamira County

iv. To establish the availability of play materials in ECDE centers in Nyamira South Sub-County

1.4 Research Questions.

The study intended to provide answers to the following Questions

  i.   What are the teachers' attitudes towards utilization of play in teaching at ECDE centers?

 ii.   To what extent is play used in teaching at ECDE centers of Nyamira County?

iii.   What challenges do teachers face while using play in teaching ECDE centers in Nyamira County?

iv.   Are there enough and appropriate play materials in ECDE centers Nyamira South Sub-County?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

The study was confined to some selected ECDE centers drawn from Nyamira South Sub-County. In addition there are be other educational issues, problems and requirements that affect provision of ECDE in the County but the study only confined itself to ECDE centers, teachers and head teachers in Nyamira County. This implies that results obtained may only be generalized for all ECDE centers

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

The study had the following assumptions

i.   The study assumed that use of play as a teaching strategy in ECDE centers would facilitate children's early literacy and also perfect their cognitive abilities even beyond early childhood period

ii. The study assumed that ECDE teachers are aware of the importance of play as a teaching strategy and that guidance designed for ECDE in Nyamira South Sub-County will strictly be used for planning their teaching.

iii. It also assumed that the respondents will be honest in their responses

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the area of study. It's divided into the following subtopics; definition of play, teacher's attitude towards utilization of play in teaching ECDE, assessing the extent of use of play in ECDE centers, challenges faced by teachers in use of play and the availability of play materials in ECDE centers

2.2. Teacher's attitudes in Utilization of play in teaching at ECDE centers

Teachers in pre – schools have different attitudes play carried on from their own childhood. Studies have shown that pre-school teachers believe that play is not different from theirs when they were children. "Teachers look at play as an expression of culture which varies depending on the historical and cultural context". They look at play as an expression of culture which varies depending on the historical and cultural context. Eiharsdoffir(1998)investigated the roles of pre-school teachers in children's play and concluded that pre-school teachers see it wise to guide play in the right direction and participate when they deem necessary. Pre-school teachers have a passive and reserved role in children's play and should participate in their play if their participation is not children initiated.

According to Perry (2001) the role of teachers should be to supervise, he believes that children should be given freedom to engage in activities of their own choice. According to Singer (2006) children learn by constructing knowledge through play. Play allows individual children to build their own knowledge other referred to as constructivist teaching(. According to Brandford etal (2008) play is a teaching strategy for children. This means play is perceived as a tool for learning although play is largely viewed as an authentic children's tool of the mind. Therefore teachers view children as passive and immature and see the need to guide them towards their adult life. Many writers claim that adults need to be involved in play as much as possible.

According to Babic (2005) play in pre-school teachers, childhood, kindergarten, school and professional play experiences influence their practices. Pre-school teachers have a tendency of directly or indirectly regulating children's behavior and use play as a means of direct instruction. According to Hun (2009) teachers do not get sufficiently involved in play or get involved in a way that regulates or corrects play. Possible reasons could be pressure for measurable outcomes, organizational program burdens; pre-school teachers are not able to follow the logic of children's play. Babic and Ivorlic 2004 claim that the position of play in educational practice is questionable despite its potentials and declarative recognition by pre-school teachers the involvement of pre-school teachers in play is not an issue with reviewed literature. Mary authors argue that the involvement of adults in play is necessary, but should have corresponding roles at different levels. This argument of involvement of teacher's liesin the studies Bodrova, Leong as cited which identified the relationship between pre-school teachers involvement and child's learning and development, for instance, Johnson, Christie and yawkey (1999) names the advantage of pre-school teachers involvement in play. Letting children know that play is valuable, attachment of children and adults who play with them, longer attention span, more peer intention span more peer interaction, longer and more elaborate play episodes.

Miller & Almon, (2009) discussed the way pre-school teachers are involved in play there are specified roles of pre-school teachers when they are involved in play as identified by various authors like co-player Rey holds a collaborator model, mediator, responsive pre-school teacher who settles disputes and verbalizes what is happening The roles can be considered within the discourse of regulation and support, depending on the conceptualization of play by the pre-school teacher who takes the role. The passive position of the pre-school teacher in relation to play is exemplified by the roles of the observer who reflects builds these plan. Pre-school teachers are seen as providers of materials, time, space and experience pre-school teacher as a planner and monitor of children's safety, pre-school teacher as the one who encourages children and provides experiences that inspire children, Gnarsdottr (1998) investigated the roles of play and concluded that pre-school teachers think that they should guide play in the right direction and participate when they think it is necessary. Results show that preschool teachers have a passive and reserved role to play in children role play and that are indecisive as whether they should participate in play if their participation is not initiated Einarsdottir, 2005 while researching on the roles of preschool teachers in outdoor play. Davis (1997) concluded that preschool teachers believe that children should be supervised, but also given freedom to engage in activities of their own choice, without interventions by the preschool teachers. They see their role in settling the environment, observing and supervising with interventions and redirections only when children "act inappropriately" Similarly, Bennelt wood and Rodgers (1997) wrote about implicit frames through which preschool teachers perceive and process information, and base it on the assumption that the preschool teachers cognitive and pedagogical behavior are guided by their personal systems of beliefs. Therefore without carefully examining attitudes of preschool teachers towards play and their role in it, we cannot purport to practice play in preschools. In recent studies play is used by teachers as tools of education, results of research indicate that teachers' role in children's' play is that of guiding play towards the correct direction and only participate in it when it is necessary.

Sandberg and Pramling (2003) while studying how preschool teachers remember their own childhood play and how they perceive children's play today, they obtained two perspectives from the results idealized and pragmatic. (idealize here

means to imagine or show as being better than they are) the idealized perspective which is the most common one, refers to play as a reflection of the child's inherent need for expression through play. Sandberg and Pramling Samwelsson, 2003) states that within the pragmatic perspective preschool teachers believe that play today is not different from their own childhood play. They look at play as an expression of culture which varies depending on historical and cultural context. Other research studies into early Childhood Education reality indicate that preschool teachers do not sufficiently get involved in play. They do not get involved as a way that regulates or corrects play possibly the reasons could be among the following; pressure from measurable out comes (academic pressure), social program burdens, teachers lack of being able to follow logic in children's play and preschool teachers implicit theory about play.

According to Babic & Ivovic 2004. The position of play in educational practice is questionable. Though pre-school teachers know the potentials and declarative recognition of play, the authors point out preschool teachers' tendency towards formal tasks and social functions of play and a discrepancy between preschool teacher's implicit theory and their practices. In a nutshell research suggests that noninvolvement of preschool teachers or involvement in terms of regulations is dominant in the reality of early childhood Development Education Centers, which indicate the importance of researching preschool teachers' attitudes towards play. According to Rangel (2014) the results of the research he conducted indicated that, alongside contradictory conceptualization of play theory; preschool teachers have contradictory attitudes towards play. His findings suggested that the perspective of preschool teachers was characterized by balancing between the conceptualization of play as authentically the child's and accentuating acquisition of specific knowledge and skills and using play as an educational means governed by adults in which a child's agency (the ability to act independently) and playfulness are in the background.

2.3 Play activities used by teachers in ECDE centers.

Development theorists Piaget and Vygotsky provide frameworks for considering the cognitive implication of play for development. Piaget describes play as a practice for strengthening skills and existing schema. He describes play as a practice for strengthening skills and existing schema to a more central role of play as a mechanism for building cognitive structures, like symbolic representation where children assign meanings to their play materials. Upon these theories there are many ways through which engaging in play facilitates cognitive skills development. For example through fantasy play children start using symbols. Symbolic representation is the fundamental cognitive skill which supports literacy, numeracy, writing and other complex skills vital for functioning in modern life.

The UNESCO (2005) publication, new trends in preschool education indicates that during the 1960s and early 1970s the major development activities in preschools were carried out in the UK and USA both countries were working towards a child centered inquiry and discovery learning) in the UK the early projects were concerned with resource materials, allowing teachers greatest flexibility in achieving this end. In contrast in the USA the new programs developed a range of educational media including learner's books and work cards, kits and apparatus. In the USA the latter projects continued on the child- centered, hands on inquiry approach. In the UK the projects turned their attention to producing pupil materials in response to many requests from teachers. During the 1970s curriculum development flourished in many countries including Kenya. Initially programs produced elsewhere were adopted though they were often found wanting since they were developed in different cultural environments.

Today's scholars like(Elking, and Chudacoff 1998), agree with those of the past like Froebel, Prtinel (1993) that "learning teaches us what is known; play makes it possible for new things to be learned they suggest that we uncover ones highest intelligence on mankind through play. According to Elkind (2007) there are many concepts and skills that can be learned only through play Clements (2004) states that "play exists at the very heart of childhood. It is the fundamental means to which children learn about themselves, their family, their local communities and the world around them". According to NAEYC (2009) " teachers organize the daily and weekly schedule to provide children with extended block of time in which to engage in sustained play, investigation exploration and interaction" to NAEYC (2009) early childhood programs should furnish materials and sustained periods of time that allow children to learn through playful activities. There are four main theories of learning and are chronologically presented as behaviorism, cognitivism, humanism and constructivism. Behaviorism theory is associated with the work of (Thorridike 1913) and (Ivan Pavlove 1927) they are the very first theories of learning to be developed. To behaviorists learning is produces by stimulation and reinforcement. Behaviorism has three main assumptions, first, learning occurs by change of behavior, second learning is

shaped by the environment and third, the principals of contiguity and reinforcement are pivotal in explaining learning process. The three principals of behaviorism are as follows; programmed instruction proposed by (F Skinner 1954) which consists of self-teaching machines that present materials in a structured logical and empirical sequence.

This used lectures rather than exploratory like inquiry based learning. The third one is the social learning theory proposed by Bandura (1965) this theory claim that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. Another theory of learning is cognitivists who do not consider learning to be simply through stimulation and reinforcement, but also involve thinking cognovits learning is based on two main assumptions, one, that the memory system isan active organized processor of information and that previous knowledge plays an important role in learning (Merriam & Caffarella 1999). According to cognivitism the mind of a child is a "blank state" and needs to be opened to be understood. The learner is perceived as an information processor (learning theories knowledge based 2008) the third humanism which emerged in around 1960s and focuses on freedom, value, dignity and potential of persons (Combs 1981) the core assumption of humanisms that individuals act with intentions and values. This differs with behaviorist's notion of operant conditioning and cognivists knowledge or construction of meaning is key to learning (Learning theories knowledgebase 2008). Humanists believe that learning should be student based. Centered and personalized, so teachers should act as facilitators. They consider key aspects of learning to be effective and cognitive.

The last theory is constructivism which considers learning to be an active, constructive process. Constructivists view the learner as an information constructor: individuals construct or create their own representations of objective reality. According to (Bednar et al 1995) knew knowledge was linked to prior knowledge.

In recent years preschool teachers have started using the deductive methods in their lessons methods that were previously used to instruct older children. Day after day teachers expect young children to sit and listen attentively without interacting with other children (Hamre & Pianta 2007). Such approach of learning weighs down the principle of constructivism that is the very effective according to many research studies. In short many instructors call for one constructivist approach, playful learning as developmentally appropriate alternative to didactic instruction. This could be one way to aid pre-scholars learn in ways they are supposed to naturally. Examples of activities like free play, guided play, to didactic instruction, learning through play occupies the span between free play and guided play according to Fisher etal (2001) free play includes object of play includes object of play, pretend and socio dramatic play and rough and tumble play in all of which children engage without close supervision of adults. Free play is fun, flexible, active and voluntary (without intrinsic reward). It also includes elements of make-believe and often involves peers.

Children play occurs when there is some degree of adult directions /instruction/ guidance in a playful, fun and relaxed way. Contrary didactic instruction is teacher centered and teacher paced and more likely to involve listening to words rather than working with objects. Didactic instruction is commonly associated with school. It is true that teacher education courses emphasize its methods. Playful learning is child centered, constructionist, effective and hands on. In guided play "teacher might enhance children's exploration and learning by commenting on their discoveries co-playing along with the children, asking open-ended questions about what children are finding or exploring the materials in ways that children might not have thought to do. "Recent meta-analyses suggest that more directed forms of "discovery learning" are optimal and consistent with that play learning is the best   approach to help children learn.

Some researchers have cited Montessori education as a prime example of playful learning (Diamond and Lee 2011; Elikind 2007; Hirsh Pasek etal 2009) others have a different opinion that founder Maria Mentessori thought play was "developmentally irrelevant Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg 1994) convention education tends to be less structured in pre-schools and more tightly structured there after although in recent years preschools have become more structured in response to the 2001 Federal law called No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The conventional changes in educational methods for children are becoming more rigid. The structures correspond to an Uptick responsibilities and adult expectations at their age across many cultures (Lillard, 2005). In an educational program that follows play as a method of teaching, teachers provide structures by children through what they learn to achieve the already laid down objectives. Though teachers give some freedom but they still guide the learners. There is freedom of choice but coupled with some guidance. Conventional direct instruction typically lacks material that children manipulate to learn. Teachers can draw a triangle on the board for example but cannot have a physical triangle, such learning only appeals to the eyes and ears but not the hands. Playful learning should involve objects that children play to learn. Learning through play enhances cognition. A lot of evidence suggests that learning is made possible when it is embodied across modalities (Barsalom etal 2003 Lillad,

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2005) activities used by teachers in pre-schools are varied and appeal to different domains of learning. Teachers typically choose activities for children. In conclusion "Children suffering for severe play deprivation suffer abnormality in neurological development, however the provision of play opportunities can at least partially remediate the situation" Whitbread (2011)

2.4 Teaching Challenges faced by teachers in use of play ECDE centers.

According to Lewthnaile (2001) environmental and extrinsic (rewards) factors are crucial element for the effective curriculum implementation. To him the common listed environmental factors are: time constrains, and facilities). Similarly, supportive networks in pre-schools are crucial. It is to say support from school heads and colleague teachers are key for a successful curriculum implementation, apart from knowledge and skills teachers also encouragement and assistance to achieve objectives set for their children. A collaborative environment is necessary for a teacher to give results. Desimone etal (2004) conducted research and found out collaborative relationship and networking was detected as positive factors in increase of teacher's attitudes and motivation in their teaching. Once teachers are motivated they pose better performance in classroom results.

ECDE has many knowledge activities that are rooted in child development PK Smith (2008) teachers need to remain abreast with all the activities offered in the centers. This burdens teachers. Their roles vary from that of an instructor, coordinator lawyer and judge when disputes erupt. In early childhood settings teachers must have a varied knowledge in many areas but not limited to foundation, child development, nutrition, guiding counseling among others MC Dohnell (2007). According to the NAEYC (2009) pre-school teachers have the following roles of: creating a caring community of learners, teach to enhance development and learning, constructing an appropriate curriculum, assessment, and establishing relationships. All this are expected from a pre-school teacher all the time in centers. To make it harder for the teacher, Lundin (2000) viewed the role of a teacher as to: understand needs of children, creating a conclusive environment, balancing teacher initiated and child initiated activities and many more. Teachers' roles can be expanded more depending on the number of stakeholders involved in a centre. There are various factors affecting teachers' roles in education. The factors could be both personal and environmental. Personal characteristics can have an impact in curriculum implementation. Teachers' character can also be illustrated as motivated, responsible, organized Butera etal (2009) in comparison described teachers as unmotivated, and not open to change.

Support from preschool administrator is key to curriculum implementation Payne (2004). Through the level of supportive is wanting. Researchers and administration is wanting. Research studies have shown the relationship between a collaborative environments and level of attitudes and motivation in the teaching of children. Also saw the need for collaboration between the administrators and teachers for a successful curriculum implementation. Lack of resources can also embed the implementation of curriculum. In a study carried out by Wai-lum (2003) teachers had too many tasks to fulfill in the implementation of the curriculum but lack adequate time to accomplish all of them. He also pointed out that interruption by head teachers who frequent their classrooms to countercheck teaching also kills teacher's morale in teaching. Many findings here also show that challenges faced by preschool teachers when implementing the curriculum. (Play) in their classrooms and the shift towards a more academically focused teaching leaves teachers at a dilemma. Research conducted by (Ozbey 2009) in Turkey on challenges teachers face showed that few studies had been carried and solutions were not well stated closer home a little has been done concerning the subject school is traditionally seen as a place of learning and not playing, pre-school is more often associated with play rather than learning from the child's perspective play is considered as a practice initiated by children while learning is seen is seen as a result of practice or activity initiated by an adult. In context of early childhood education, play and learning are often separated in time and space. Teachers acknowledge the role of play in developing skills but they seem unsure of how to utilize play in an instructional manner.

Pre-school teachers as key player in young children education have a crucial role to play in early childhood education curriculum implementation. This may include child guidance and discipline, respecting cultural diversely, adopted the appropriate methods of teaching and learning encouraging self-dependence and many establishing reciprocal relationship with families and other teachers. Creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning in the classroom in time that teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented then the performance of pre-school teachers in the real classroom setting is affected positively during implementation.

Aktan and Comert (2007) conducted a study and found out that one of the source problem realities to pre-school curriculum implementation is facilities available in the school setting. Moreno (2000) in their studies revealed that pre-school teachers had problems implementing the curriculum due to the fact that parents supercritical believe in the early childhood education as playing ground for the children and not as learning setting and this parents attitude resulted in obstacle between the school and home collaboration In conclusion various studies have been conducted focusing on challenges faced by teachers with regards to curriculum implementation in order to achieve high quality standards in ECDE centers. The challenges should continue being analyzed. Realistic and practical solutions should be offered to increase effectiveness in curriculum implementation.

2.5 Availability of learning Resources in the provision of play.

According to MOEST (2002) children should enroll in pre-school when they attain the age of 3 to 4 years. During the first 3 years of child's life parents become the main Influence of education.

The kind of care children get at this age impacts on a child's development at later times. According to UNESCO (2004) it is important to consider that an early Education facility, caregivers and teachers in the ECDE centres have knowledge on cultural support for the languages and literacy learning of children and families they serve Kochhar (1998) argued that teachers and caregivers should understand the community and the pupil well. The study on use of play in teaching will help bridge the gap of employing teachers who do not understand well the development of young children. At age of 4-5 years old normally children are in pre-school. At this age children need to be given an opportunity to develop individuality decision making thinking and reasoning skills. Jean piaget's theory (1896-1980) states that pretend play helps children to express themselves and events in their lives children assign themselves and events in their lives, children assign themselves or play objects or someone meanings that they understand. For instance they can use playing blocks as cars and so on.

Despite the many benefits in ECDE, Riechi Mbiti noted that ECDE centres have not received much attention from the central government and the community ECDE is vital for it lays a firm foundation for children in preschools to proceed to primary schools and other high levels of learning. Despite its importance, this level of education (ECDE) is characterized by challenges including low evolvement, lack of enough trained teachers, evolvement of uncle rage and overage children in this scenario Nyamira South Sub-County is no exception. According to government of Kenya (2013) ECDE is characterized by challenges including low enrolment lack of enough trained teachers, enrolment of underage and overage children. In this scenario has been included in basic education and therefore it ought to be managed by the managed by the ministry of Education.

This type of play is common and popular with pre-school children but dies away as children progress to standard one and on. The study has highlighted on the importance of this stage of development for better growth and development of children. According to slaughter (1964) the community should be prepared to understand individual differences and take all pupils at recommended age at school. This is so because of benefits a child will get in school. They play for example will help children to process emotions and events in their lives, practice social skills , learn values ,develop language skills and develop rich imagination.

In a research of childhood care Mutua (2011) outlined challenges facing ECDE centres as tuition, transport, too much work completion among children and lack of sleep. The demands in ECDE centres weighs down governments and hence little funds for acquiring leaving resources and physical facilities .

According to the presidential circular no. 1 (1980) on ECDE in Kenya. All ECDE centre were to be managed by MOE "The pre- schools were to be planned and established in appropriate places and housed in public primary schools. The Kamunge Report (1988) recommended the sharing of learning facilities with primary section. However such learning facilities are not enough. The Koech commission (1998) argued that the learning facilities vary greatly in quality and quantity depending on the community's awareness of the needs of ECDE physical facilities including permanent classrooms, toilets and fixed equipment. The Kamunge commission (1988) it was noted that most people in the rural areas are not aware of the guidelines of KIE no KICD introduced in 1904 and revised in 1997. Most teachers teach without the guidelines in mind and Nyamira Sub-County in no exceptional.

2.6 Summary of Literature Review and Research Gap

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The literature reviewed in this chapter shows the importance of play in children's holistic development as well as relevance of use play as a teaching method. Various studies on teaching behavior have also been reviewed. However, a study conducted by Lyabwene (2011) to examine parental demands for ECE in Tanzania in relation to choice and access to early childhood program revealed that, although parents have high demand for ECE they have limited choices and information on the program operations. Thus the study suggested more research in ECE in order to inform the public on trend and basic requirement in the program. In regard, documented evidence on what exactly influences pre-primary use of play as a learning strategy is inadequate. It is from that background that the following study sought to find out importance of play to learning. Based on the fact that the ECE program is relatively new in country's education system, there is need to conduct a research

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The section contains the methodology used by the study. It is subdivided into the following sub-heading; Research design, target population, sampling procedures and sample size, data collection methods, validity and reliability of the methods of data analysis, Operationalization of the variables and ethical considerations in research

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design. This design determined and reported the way things were and attempted to describe such things as possible behavior, attitudes values and characteristics (Mugenda (2013).This technique was carefully selected by the researcher because it is economical hence convenient for data collection process

3.3 Target Population

The total population in the ECDE centers in Nyamira South Sub-County is 100 pre-schools the study will target 100 head teachers 317 pre-school teachers. The total population was 417 people

3.4 Sample Size

According to Kothari (2008) when selecting the sample, the sample size should be kept manageable, Kerlinger (2004) says that the ideal sample should be between 10% and 30%of target population depending on data to be gathered and analyzed. A sample of40 preschool head teachers and 80 preschools teachers. A total of 120 respondents was identified for the study

Table 3.1: Summary of Sample Size

Category of respondents	Population (N)	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)	Sampling technique
Head teaches	100	40	33.3	Purposive
Teachers	317	80	66.7	Simple random
Total	**417**	**120**	**100**	

Source Primary Data

3.4.1 Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used in the study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample is simply a subject of the population that has been selected for the study. It should be satisfactory in size and should represent the population purposive sampling was used in selecting the head teachers, and preschools while simple random sampling was used to select the teachers. This is because all these respondents are deemed to possess the information regarding the use of play in teaching and learning in ECDE centers in Nyamira South Sub-County

3.5 Data Collection Methods

A questionnaire was used to collect information from all ECDE teachers. The instrument was suitable as many respondents were reached within a short period of time. The questionnaire contained four parts namely:

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Part A: item 1-4: Teachers demographic data

Part B: Item 5-11 Attitude towards use of play

Part C: Item 12-16: Extent of use of play

Part D: item 17-19 Challenges in use of play

Part E: 19- 20 Availability of play materials

This score was totaled to measure the respondents to the variables

3.5.1 Validity of Research Instruments.

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) define validity as the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences, this based on research results. The study applied content validity as a measure of degree to which data obtained from the research meaningfully and accurately reflect or represent a theoretical concept the expert judgment method was used to determine content validity. The researcher consulted the supervisors and other professionals to ensure all the areas of the study were covered by the instrument. This ensured that sufficient data ws collected

3.6 Reliability of Research Instruments

Reliability is the consistency with which research instruments measure what it purports to measure. A test- retest procedure was used to test for reliability of the questionnaire. The researcher carried out the same study twice, with the same respondents, using the same instruments, at two different times. The questionnaires was administered to same teachers in the same schools to ascertain whether the responses from the items were consistent. Results from the two tests was analyzed and comparisons made. Cronbach's Apha Coefficient was used to establish the extent to which the content of the questionnaire was consistent in eliciting the same responses when administered at different times to the same group. Cronbach Alpha is a method of measuring internal consistency (repeatability) based on the average inter-item correlation.

3.6.2 Pilot Test

In order to establish the suitability and clarity of the instruments, a pilot study was done in three of the selected ECDE centers. A pre-test is a preliminary test administered on a research instrument to check on its reliability and validity. These preschools that were selected did not participate in the final study. The pre-test allowed the clarification of the question phrasing and response categorization to be done in order to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. The desirability of piloting was to ensure that survey questions operate well and also that the research instruments functioned well.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained a research permit from National commission for science and technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). A copy of the permit and the introduction letter was presented to the county director of education (CDE) and County commissioner Nyamira County and heads of primary schools where the researcher intended to carry out the study. The researcher personally administered the research tools after prior cost that assisted in refining timings of distribution questionnaires it also provided a rough picture of the respondent' expectations. The researcher agreed with the respondent when the research instruments was administered and specifically dates of collecting the questionnaires.

3.8 Data Analysis

Upon completing of data collection, the questionnaires were scored and data was edited, coded and entered into the computer for analysis. A code sheet was used to synthesize the data; Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The data was then analyzed and interpreted using the descriptive statistics on frequency distribution and percentages method to make clear inference on the trends and occurrences on challenges and strategies faced by use of play in ECDE centres. Nachmias (1999) define content analysis as a technique for making inferences on the trends.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all those participating in the study. Those not willing to participate in the study were under no obligation to do so. Respondents'' names were not indicated anywhere in the data collection tools for

confidentiality and information gathered was only used for the purposes of this academic study. The necessary research authorities was consulted and permission granted

4. DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from the study. The chapter begins with the analysis of the questionnaire return rate and then presents the analysis of demographic information of the respondents including gender, age, marital status, academic qualification, category of pre-school and sponsor of pre-school. The sub-topics which cover the research questions of the on teachers' attitude towards utilization of play in teaching, extent of use of play in teaching, challenges faced by teachers in use of play in teaching and availability of play materials in ECDE centers. Frequency tables, percentages, have been used to present the findings of the study. The chapter ends with the summary of the findings

4.2 Questionnaire Return Rate

Out of the 120 issued questionnaires, 90 questionnaires representing 75% of the total questionnaires distributed were returned fully completed, while 30 questionnaires were not returned representing 25% of the total questions distributed to the respondents. It can be inferred that the response rate was good. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a response rate of 70% and over is excellent for analysis and reporting on the opinion of the entire population.

Table 4.1: Questionnaire Return Rate

Response	Frequency	Percentage%
Filled questionnaires	90	75
Unreturned questions	30	25
Total	**120**	**100**

4.3 Demographic Information of Respondents

This section presented the analysis of the demographic information of respondents are revealed from the data collected from head teachers, teachers and pre-school learners of pre-schools in Nyamira County

4.3.1 Pre-school Teacher's Academic Qualification

The researcher asked teachers of pre-schools in Nyamira County to indicate their highest academic qualification.

Table 4.2: Pre-school Teachers' Highest Academic Qualifications

Highest Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Degree B.ED (ECDE)	20	22.
Diploma in ECDE	40	44
Certificate Course (ECEC)	15	17
K.C.S.E	10	11
K.C.P.E	5	6
TOTAL	90	100

The findings on table 4.2 indicate that majority of teachers in pre-schools in Nyamira County 44% had a diploma in ECDE, 22% had a Degree in ECE, 17% had a certificate in ECE, and 11% had a KCSE certificate while 6% had a KCPE certificate. The findings indicate that majority of teachers had a good academic qualification to teaching pre-schools. This implies that they have the knowledge of the use of teaching and learning materials for improved practical skills in learners

4.3.2 Location of Pre-schools

The researcher required head teachers to indicate the location of their ECD centers as shown in the table below

Table 4.3: Location of Pre-schools

Location	Percentage

Urban	22.2%
Rural	77.8%

The findings on table 4.3 shows that majority of pre-schools in Nyamira county 77.8% were established in rural areas compared to 22.2% established in urban (semi-urban, rural urban) areas. These findings are an indicator that majority of pre-schools are served by the rural population where poverty is highly pronounced affecting parents not to provide teaching and learning materials to pre-schools

4.3.3 Sponsorship of ECD Centres

The head teachers were required to indicate the sponsor of their ECD centers

Table 4.4: Sponsorship of ECD Centres

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Government	40	44
Community	25	28
NGOs e.g Religious Organization	15	17
Private ownership	10	11
Total	90	100

The findings in table 4.4 indicate that majority of ECD centers 44% are sponsored by the Government, 28% are sponsored by the community 17% sponsored by NGOs whereas 11% are sponsored by private individuals (privately owned)

4.4 Teachers' Attitude towards use of teaching and learning materials

In the first objective the study sought to establish teacher's attitude towards use of teaching and learning. The researcher designed a likert scale type of items to elicit responses from the teachers on their attitude towards the use of teaching and learning materials to enhance learner's achievement in pre-schools in Nyamira County. The findings were presented in table 4.5

Table 4.5: Teacher's Attitude towards use of teaching and learning materials

Strongly Agree (SA)   Agree (A) Neutral (N)   Disagree (D)   Strongly Disagree (SD)

Response	SA	A	N	D	SD
Teachers recognizes need to use materials	36 45.0	45 14	17.5 22.5	7 87	5 63
Children are interested in materials	44 55	26 32.5	6.25 5	63	
Children concentrate more when using materials	38 47.5	22 27.5	6 7.5	7 8.7	7 8.7
Children able to acquire language skills	42 52.5	22 27.5	9 11.3	33.8	4 5.0
Materials make learning learner –friendly	52 65	12 15.0	8 10	5 6.3	3 3.8
Easier for learners to understand when materials are used	56 70				

Data in table 4.5 indicates that (45.0%) of teachers strongly agreed that they recognize the need to use materials with the pres-schoolers, (17.5%) agreed, (70%) disagreed whereas (6.3%) strongly disagreed. The results indicate that teachers are aware there is need to use teaching and learning resources in pre-schools.

Further, (55.0%) of teachers indicated that children are interested, (3.25%) agreed that (6.3%) disagreed. The study also established that majority of teachers (52.5%) indicated that children who use teaching and learning materials are also to acquire language skills, (27.5%) agreed whereas (3.8%) disagreed whether materials make the classroom learner-friendly, (65.0%) of teachers strongly agreed, (15.0%) agreed whereas (6.3%) disagreed. The findings reveal that teachers acknowledge the fact that using teaching and learning materials in pre-school classroom environments enhances language skills, motor skills development, social development through play -interaction hence enhanced practical skills. The study found out that teachers find more positive benefits motivational skills, concentration, cognitive processing, independent

learning and social relationships. Children discover much more of what they used to know and learn, receive answers to their questions about their learning process and therefore affecting the overall reading and development.

4.5 Extent of use of play in Teaching at ECDE

The researcher interviewed the pre-school teachers and sought to establish the extent of use of play and if the use of teaching and learning materials affect the performance. The findings are presented in table 4.6

Table 4.6: Teachers' responses on effect of teaching and learning materials

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Language abilities improve	35	39
Physical domains developed	5	6
Stimulate growth and development	8	9
Creates mutual relationship with teachers	40	44
Helps in socializations	2	2
Total	90	100

Data in table 4.6 indicates that majority of learners 40(44%) indicated that teaching learning materials creates mutual relationship with teachers, 35 (39%) cited the sharpening of language abilities, 8 (9%) indicated that it helps in socialization whereas 2 (2%) indicated that it develops their physical domain.

The findings indicate that pre-school learners seem to enjoy learning when teaching and learning materials are used resulting in achievement. The findings reveal that if properly used and organized instructional materials such as books, charts, models, visual aids and play materials have some learning in school performance. The findings concur with K.I.E (2003). Eshiwani (1983) and Davis (1975) who asserted that teaching and learning resources play an important role in understanding of concepts and importing of skills to the learner hence promoting experiential learning. The findings indicate that children who are exposed to leaching and learning resources develop a higher level of intellectual functioning which in turn enhances a higher degree of socialization and develops creativity as they play.

4.6 Availability of play materials in ECDE centers

The respondents were asked to name available play objects, indoor play facilities and outdoor play facilities. The researcher also ascertained availability of play materials using an observation check list in every school

Table 4.7: Percentage distribution of play objects

Play objects	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Play cards	30	74.4%
Bottle tops	29	71.8%
seeds	25	64.1%
Tins	22	56.4%
Ropes	22	56.1%
Boxes toys	21	52.6%

Table 4.7 shows that majority of the respondents had basic play objects which they probably used for teaching and learning purposes. These objects are important in the introduction and reinforcement of concepts as well as unstructured play stations

4.6.1 Available indoor play facilities and outdoor play facilities

The respondents were asked to name available indoor play facilities and outdoor play facilities. The researcher also ascertained availability of indoor platy corner using an observation check list in every school

Table 4.8: percentage distribution of indoor facilities

Indoor play facilitates	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reading corners	13	33.3%

Shop corners	11	28.2%
Music corners	11	27.8%
Building corners	10	25.0%
Animals corners	9	23.1%
Hospital corners	9	22.5%
Cooking corners	8	20.5%
Transport corners	7	18.4%
Plant corners	2	5.9%

Indoor play facilities as shown in table 4.11 appeared to be scarce or totally absent in most schools. The absence of indoor play corners facilities may undeniably hinder children's opportunity to freely play the role of different people, for example, the shopkeeper-buyer roles, the doctor-patient roles, the farmer-gardener roles and many more other roles.

Practicing these activities would enhance the development of multiple skills and experiences including the promotion of speaking and listening skills which are basic in language development. The results were similar to earlier findings by Munyeki (1997) who found out that many schools in Nyamira county Kenya had no free choice activity corners as the important indoor play facilities. This situation will most likely inhibit the learner from enhancing some fundamental cognitive skills at this formative stage.

4.6.2 Available outdoor play facilities

The respondents were asked to name available outdoor play facilities. The researcher also ascertained availability of outdoor facilities using an observation check list in every school

Table 4.9: percentage distribution of outdoor facilities

Outdoor play facilities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Open space	40	100
Sand play	17	43.2
Swings	12	32.4
Water plays	12	28.6
Seesaws	11	27.8
Sliding panels	9	21.6

Table 4.9 Shows that outdoor play facilities were absent in many schools with the exception of the open space, an item which was sufficiently available in all schools. Other outdoor facilities were highly missing in most schools. This may suggest that children were curtailed from exploring, reinforcing or recalling the concepts learned in their classes in an autonomous way due to shortage of these facilities. In order to determine the play materials, three aspects namely play objects, indoor play facilities and outdoor play facilities were merged and gauged to establish the status of play materials in every school.

4.6.3 Types of teaching and learning materials used in pre-schools

The study sought to establish the types of teaching and learning materials used in pre-schools in Nyamira County. The researcher required the respondents to indicate the types of resources and materials available in their pre-school. Head teacher's responses are as shown in table 4.10

Table 4.10: Teacher's Responses on the available materials in Pre-schools

Materials	Frequency	Percentage
Audio-visual	15	17
Visual charts	30	33
Audio	20	22
Tactile	25	28
Total	90	100

Data in table 4.10 indicates that majority of teachers 30 (33%) indicated that visual materials such as charts and pictures are the available materials, 25 (28%) indicated the availability of tactile materials such as toys, dolls, 20 (22%) indicated radio while 15(17%) indicated audio-visual materials. The findings reveal that there are minimal resources that the classroom teacher needs to use to achieve long lasting learning in the pre-schools.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the summary of the findings as obtained from respondents who included head teachers and teachers of pre-schools in Nyamira County. It also contains the conclusion of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further research

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of the use of teaching and learning materials on children performance in pre-schools in Nyamira country. To achieve this, research questions on types of teaching and learning materials, effects of using teaching learning materials, attitudes of teachers towards use of the materials and availability of teaching and learning materials were formulated.

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to establish the influence of teaching and learning materials on the performance of learners in Nyamira County.

The study targeted a sample of 80 teachers and 40 head teachers. Data were collected using questionnaires and an observation schedule, coded, and classified into majority themes from which a summary report was made. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics supported by tables, graphs, frequency distributions and percentages. Data analyzed formed the basis for research findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The findings on highest professional qualifications revealed that head teachers had a minimum qualification to head ECD centres and therefore failure of the ECD program could not very much be attributed to their professional qualifications.

Findings on Ihe location of ECD centres indicated that they were located in rural areas where poverty prevails, limiting performance due to lack of resources. On class size the study revealed that teacher's individual attention to pupils was affected by class size. The result indicated that an increase in class size negatively affected teacher's individual attention to pupils.

The findings obtained from head teachers, teachers and an observation schedule indicated that teaching and learning resources were inadequate in most EC D centres in Nyamira County. The study revealed that desks, textbooks, chairs, science kits, classrooms and were inadequate in the centres.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study

Pre-schools face many challenges as they strive to improve educational standard. The ECD program should be seen as a move to lay a strong foundation on children so that they can have a strong start. The community has become aware of the program and increased their enrolment in pre-schools in order to give their children holistic development. This was however been overshadowed by a number of challenges facing the implementation of the ECD program. Some of the factors such as inadequacy of resources, training of teachers and remuneration should be improved.

Teaching and learning materials are an important aspect of the teaching and learning process of pre- schools. These materials are part of the process. They help children to develop imaginative, discovery and creative skills through familiarization with the materials as they interact with them. Instructional resources if properly used by teachers provide pre-schoolers with a means of expressing feelings, concerns and interests while attaining social interaction. An attentive teacher ought to support children by helping them develop as all-round individuals. The pre-school stage of education is the most important for every child. It is since that basic knowledge is given to children and foundation for an economically productive and satisfactory life is given. For this to be achieved there is reason to provide adequate teaching and learning materials to teachers and pi e-schools. The quantity and quality of teaching materials that are available in the schools determines the quality of education that learners experience. When the learners share instructional materials, this bridges the interactive process of the text and context, which determines the nature and quality of their comprehension.

Reading and manipulative skills develop. This also gives learners chance to discover their position in life as human beings and help them to know the philosophy of life.

The classroom teacher should plan his /her teaching and assessing schedules by considering the learners' needs and weaknesses.

5.4 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendation:

(i) In-service courses for pre-school teachers should be held to remind them the importance of using teaching/learning materials. There is need for the pre-school education to be incorporated to primary so that the government can supply pre-schools with funds to buy instructional materials. This will ensure that there is appropriate and adequate facilities in schools making children in an environment that is conducive for learning.

(ii) The government should take an initiative to ensure that it takes up the responsibility of financing pre-schools in Kenya the way it has done with the free primary education to eradicate the problem of inadequacy of teaching / learning materials. There is need to sensitize parents and the community on the provision of adequate teaching/learning resources in pre-schools through holding workshops and seminars with EC I) facilitators to create awareness.

(iii) The government should employ pre-school teachers and ensure that they are well paid so as to create a service of motivation which would he in turn ensure that teachers do their work perfectly. The government parents communities, and private sector (private companies NGOs', Religious donors and individuals should collectively provide teaching / learning materials to pre-schools.

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