

# Teachers' Attitude towards Utilization of Play in ECDE Curriculum in ECDE Centres in Kericho Sub-County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Play strengthens all areas of child development socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively, linguistically and literacy. Statistics in Kericho county show that 90% of ECDE teachers do not fully utilize play in ECDE centers. The aim of this study was to examine Teachers' attitude towards utilization of play in ECDE centres in Kericho Sub-county. The study adopted Piaget's Intellectual Development Theory (1896-1980). The study adopted mixed methods based on both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study was conducted in Kericho Sub-County. The target population was 161 head teachers and 347 pre-school teachers, of whom a sample of 48 school heads and 104 pre-school teachers was selected using simple random and stratified sampling techniques from each educational zone in the sub-region. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and observations and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results were presented using frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed in topics and categories identifying similarities and differences that appeared. The study established that teachers in Kericho County have a positive attitude towards the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum. The teachers further indicated they believe in various aspects related to play and the ECDE curriculum. Majority strongly believe that children learn through songs, music and drama, need to make connections between concepts through play rather than learning isolated ideas, children should be involved in all-round play activities rather than work activities.*

**Keywords:** Attitude, utilization, ECDE curriculum, play activities

## 1. Introduction

Attitudes and beliefs of pedagogues are important variables that should be taken into account when studying in class (Erden and Sonmez, 2011, Maier et al., 2013). Attitudes towards use of play activities can be classified as personal and

professional (Van Aalderen-Smeets et al., 2012). Individual feelings, thoughts and interests in learning and the desire to learn more about learning are personal attitudes. The professional approach to learning includes the nature and degree of difficulty in teaching science. Whether preschoolers see value in science education linked

to professional attitudes. Both personal and professional attitudes have been taken into account when van Aalderen-Smeets et al. (2012) developed their theoretical framework that builds the basic attitudes of teaching in their study. The Components for the framework were derived from an extensive review of the concepts of attitude used by existing studies that claimed to investigate the construct of interest. The review of the concepts aimed to elucidate and structure the often incomplete construct of primary school teacher attitudes. The study conducted by Puteh (2013) in Malaysia found that many teachers confirmed that they did not use play to teach languages and reading skills. Apparently, factors such as time allocation for playing activities, limited and inadequate scope and lack of knowledge and skills needed to use inclusive development training, including play. These are the main reasons teachers have often given as to minimize play. If the teacher's views in this study are representative of a wider community of preschool teachers in the country, the hypotheses suggest that kindergarten teachers are not willing to follow lesson plans not just for language development and literacy, but for all other learning areas (Jamison, Forston and Stanton-Chapman, 2012).

## 2. Literature Review

ECDE teachers' attitudes towards the use of play is key to child development and the utilization of play in the early childhood curriculum. A comparative study by Izumi-Taylor (2010), on the perception of play by American and Japanese teachers showed that teachers in both countries felt that play was clearly related to their cultures. The results showed that Japanese teachers taught children in classrooms that reflected an orientation to the needs of the group as opposed to the American counterparts. Japanese teachers saw play in a child as an expression of vitality and the fundamental basis of their feelings, desires, and attitudes, while American teachers held play more in the context of learning and development. The same research has shown

that Japanese children play more structured play than their American counterparts. However, the Izumi-Taylor study had a smaller sample of 40 teachers than the current study, with a larger sample of 104 teachers. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all teachers in the United States and Japan. In a related study in Sweden, which examined the use of play and the entire learning process in preschool programs, subsequent interactions between teachers and children were analyzed. The following three categories of interaction have been distinguished: exploratory interactions, narrative interactions, and formal interactions. In the first two categories, Ingrid and Maj, (2006) emphasizes that play and learning are closely related, although there were some differences between the two. For example, exploratory interactions seem to contain challenges for innovation and creativity and narrative interactions often tend to work together between children and teachers. In the third category of interaction, which is formal interaction, interactions were generally guided by teachers trying to guide children towards a "correct answer", a category in which play and learning were strongly separated (Ingrid and Maj., 2006).

The Swedish teachers who participated in the study had the following perception of play and learning: children always learn when they play, children play with what they have already learned in kindergarten and children can learn aspects related to learning and learn in play (Goldstein, 2012). They were worried about the inadequate combination, arguing that in nursery school, the act of learning has so far focused much more on the learning object.

The English teachers surveyed showed a very positive attitude towards the use of active learning methods. They believed that the use of active learning methods is crucial because it allows students to participate in discussions, integrate their learning experiences and increase their interest in learning English. In addition, the teachers emphasized the paramount importance of active learning, as it helps them improve the methods of teaching English. Although the teachers showed a positive attitude towards the use of active learning

methods, there were many factors that hindered the proper use of this approach. They included lack of sufficient training and experience, inadequate budget for the purchase of instructional materials and lack of sufficient space for children to play. The quality of education is the result of stable and strong leadership, a strong and favorable policy, great attention and long-term commitments, which are extremely important (Latchanna and Dagneu, 2009). Academic administrators can assist in these initiatives, recognizing and rewarding excellent teaching in general, and in particular the adoption of instructional innovations (Goldstein, 2012). Comprehensive programs to demonstrate such administrative obligations should address employment policies and institutional practices, allocate adequate resources for the development of instruction and develop strategic administrative action plans. Researchers also questioned the quality of play (Hujala, Helenius & Hyyonen, 2010) and the possibilities of playful learning environments (Almon, 2013). One reason for both problems is the teacher's belief in play. They often understand play and learn as two opposing concepts that are difficult to integrate, both in thought and in practice. For this reason, play is often seen as a mechanical activity and directed by the teacher. Rengel (2014, p.125), a study on the attitude of Croatian teachers, recommends that "attitudes must be changed so that play is educational". Early childhood educators know the importance and importance of learning and development in the early years. However, these are often broken down into best practices and/or high quality. Rengel also explained that kindergarten teachers have conflicting play configurations that influence their practice. Their results show that the perspective of preschool teachers is characterized by a balance between the clarification of teachers and their perception of play as real for the child. Rengel also suggested that the development and use of play as a pedagogical tool should be supervised by tutors where the child has the ability to act independently and enjoyable in the background.

According to Harris (2012), pre-school education must be child's play, as a pre-school teacher in South Africa did children did not play in the classroom. The teachers held

a pipe in their hands that calmed the children. The results showed that, African children do not have concerns, as opposed to Western children who work carefully with gaming tools during educational activities.

A study by Milimu (2008) in Kakamega municipality Kenya, on attitudes of ECDE teachers towards science curriculum had a population of 238 teachers as the only respondents in the study. The finds were that early childhood education is relevant to children as it lays the foundation for adulthood as this is the period when a child undergoes fast changes in mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. A study by Onditi, Otengah & Ondongo (2018) on the Influence of Teachers Perceptions On Play-Based Activities in Pre-School Curriculum Implementation in Homabay County established that there was varied level of perceptions among the pre-school teachers, with some of them showing fairly strong positive perception and others revealing weak positive perception towards play-based activities in the implementation of preschool curriculum. The study further established that many of the pre-school teachers held perception that play-based activities is important because it enabled children to develop socially, emotionally, physically and motor skills necessary in their life. However, although many of the preschool teachers had a general perception that they were adequately trained on use of play-based activities in teaching and learning, some of them felt they were not adequately trained on integration of play in teaching/learning.

Mweru (2012) agrees with the findings of Goffin and Wilson (2003), as postulated that teachers should also pay attention to the care and hygiene of their children; Encourage children to work, discuss and solve group problems. Familiarize your children with maths, language, science, social sciences, play and play. The survey indicates that teachers should use play, music, illustrations, movies, books, pictures and the like to convey basic skills. Mweru (2012) study focused on the influence of teachers on the selection and use of gaming materials across the country, while the current study focused on the attitudes of teachers in utilization of play into the ECDE curriculum.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. According to Williams (2011), a descriptive survey helps gather data at a specific time, describe the nature of the conditions, set standards that can be used to compare terms and determine the relationships between particular events. According to Creswell (2014), surveys can be used to explain or investigate the current status of two or more variables at a given time. The study was conducted in Kericho Sub-County. It lies on the Nairobi-Kisumu Highway; its geographical coordinates are 0.3673° South and 35.2813° East. Kericho Sub-County was chosen because of its large geographical area with a high population and had four categories of preschools; self-sponsorship, public, private, and faith-based. The target population was 161 head teachers and 347 pre-school teachers from 161 public ECDE centres in Kericho Sub-County (Kericho DICECE, 2016). A stratified sample was used to determine the number of ECDE teachers for the

study. Stratified sampling is a sampling method where the investigator takes the population into individual groups called strata. The researcher classified the zones in Kericho sub-county into seven groups. Stratified sampling was used then simple random later used to get the sample size of 48 head teachers and 104 pre-school teachers in Kericho Sub-County that is 30% of the target population. Kothari (2011) suggests that a sample size of at least 30% is considered acceptable. Questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. To ensure validity of the instruments, they were first subjected to a pre-test through a pilot study to establish their effectiveness in soliciting data. This was done in ECDE centres, which were not used in the actual research. Data from questionnaires were entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 to generate frequencies and percentages. Data was then analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively and presented using frequency tables.

### 4. Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Teachers' Ratings on Attitude in Utilization of Play in ECDE Curriculum**

	Strongly Believe		Believe somewhat		Unsure		Don't believe	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Play activities should be used during instruction	94	90	7	7	1	1	2	2
Play integration helps children learn concepts and skills faster	99	95	5	5	-	-	-	-
Play integration trains pupils to think and reason positively	94	90	10	10	-	-	-	-
Use of indoor play corners to helps children master the newly taught concepts	92	88	10	10	2	2	-	-
Children learn best through songs, music and drama	96	92	7	7	1	1	-	-
Children need to make connections between concepts through play rather learning isolated ideas	75	72	25	24	3	3	1	1
The children should be involved in all round play activities rather than work activities like sweeping sawdust or washing tables.	68	65	25	24	4	4	7	7
Having the child recall what he/she learnt through play allows her to reflect on and exhibit what he/she has done.	86	83	17	16	2	2	-	-
The teacher must keep the lessons interesting by including play to keep the children's attention and to maintain the momentum of the lesson	97	93	6	6	1	1	-	-
During play time, teachers should pay close attention to the children, checking the status and being actively involved with the children.	100	96	3	3	1	1	-	-

The findings on teacher attitudes established that 90% of teachers strongly believed that play activities should be used during instruction while 7% believed somewhat, 1% was unsure while 2% do not believe. The results suggest that teachers believed that playing activities should be used to teach ECDE students. The results coincide with those of Latchanna and Dagnev (2009) who reported that the teachers in their study showed a very positive attitude towards the use of active learning methods. They felt that the use of active learning methods is crucial, as it allows students to participate in the debate, integrate their learning experiences and increase their interest in child development. Furthermore, teachers emphasized the primary importance of play, as it helps them improve their English teaching methods.

Furthermore, it was established that 95% of teachers strongly believed that the integration of the play helped children learn concepts and skills faster, while 5% believed somewhat. This implies that the teachers understand the importance of the use of the play in teaching and learning, although this contradicts the results of table 1.

Integration in the play trains students to think and reason positively, 90% firmly believe while 10% believed somewhat. This shows that most teachers believe that children think and reason positively through play. In previous literature, Rengel (2015) found that early childhood teachers know the importance of using play in learning and development in the early years, but they are often divided in terms of what constitutes the best practice and high quality. He said that kindergarten teachers have contradictory attitudes towards play, which has implications for their training, which has the support of the researcher.

Furthermore, the results showed that 88% of teachers strongly believed in using internal angles to help children master the concepts taught, 10% believing in something, and 2% not sure. This implies that teachers agree to use inner corners, and the use can be hindered by the lack of available resources for them. It was also observed that 92% of teachers strongly believed that children learned better through songs, music, and drama, while 72% firmly believed that children should make connections between concepts through play instead of teaching ideas being isolated.

As for the fact that children have to participate in all playing activities instead of working activities such as sweeping sawdust or washing tables, 65% believe, 24% believe somewhat, while only 7% do not think so. Eighty-three percent (83%) firmly believed that having a child remember what they have learned through play and allows them to reflect and show what they have done, while 16% believe in somewhat.

The 92% majority firmly believes that teachers should hold engaging lessons by including the play to keep the attention of children and maintain the momentum of the lesson compared to 6% who somehow believed. Almost 96% of teachers firmly believe that during playing time, teachers should pay close attention to children, monitor the status and actively participate with children compared to 3% who believed in some way. The

results suggest that teachers have a positive attitude towards using the play in the classroom because they understand the importance of integrating the play into ECDE.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that 90% of the teachers in Kericho County have a positive attitude towards the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum. The teachers further indicated they believe in various aspects related to play and the ECDE curriculum. Majority strongly believe that children learn through songs, music and drama, need to make connections between concepts through play rather than learning isolated ideas, children should be involved in all-round play activities rather than work activities like sweeping sawdust or washing tables, having the child recall what they learned through play allows them to reflect on and exhibit what they have done and they also firmly believe that teachers must keep the lessons interesting by including play to keep the children's attention. The study concluded that ECDE teachers have a positive attitude towards the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum. The study recommended that teachers, head teachers, parents, and the county government need to change their attitude towards play and work together to equip schools within their locality with play equipment.

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