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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES FACING TEACHERS IN UTILIZATION OF PLAY IN ECDE CURRICULUM CENTERS IN KERICHO SUB- COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Play is one of the approaches used in the teaching and learning process. In normal growth, play enhances the social, behavioral and psychomotor development. In the absence of play, the learner misses a major component of growth which may led to members of the community having poor unwholesome development. The objective of the study was to investigate the challenges faced by teachers in utilization of play in ECDE curriculum centers in Kericho sub-county. The study adopted Piaget's theory (1896-1980) of intellectual development which emphasizes that children learn best through play by discovering, doing and actively exploring their environment. The study used mixed methods approach. The population was 161 head teachers and 347 pre-school teachers from where sample size of 48 head teachers and 104 pre-school teachers were selected. Simple random and stratified sampling techniques were used to select samples from every educational zone in the sub-county. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation schedules and checklists. Using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data which was analyzed as themes emerged. The study concluded that teachers face different challenges in utilization of play in ECDE teaching and learning activities which included inadequate resources and time allocated for play. The study recommends that teachers need to be motivated and all stakeholders need to cooperate to help equip preschools within their locality with enough play materials necessary to promote participation of outdoor activities. The study may inform the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development and the MoE, Science and Technology to produce relevant instructional materials on play for Early Childhood Education in Kenya and Teachers may change their attitude towards the utilization of play to enhance learning outcomes in early childhood education once the relevant play resources are provided.

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INTRODUCTION

Hart (2002) states that city authorities have created several public playgrounds in New York to keep children away from the road and avoid negative influences. It turned out, however, that only 20% of target children have attracted this play. Researchers from many parts of the world show that children prefer not to be isolated on playgrounds, but in closer and more interactive relationships with family, friends and neighbors. Kruger and Chawla (2002) reports that children who live in a low-income neighborhood in Johannesburg. The current study seeks to find out the challenges facing the use of play. Play is very crucial in growth and development of the child, this was according to the study done by Han, Moore, Vukelich and Buell, (2010). They investigated about how play activities affects the vocabulary learning of at-risk preschoolers. Play are activities in which the children are involved in for self-amusement that elicit behavioral, social and psychomotor benefits. Allen, Kelly and National Research Council, (2015) in their study on early learning and child development noted that play nurtures all aspects of children's development.

Frost (2010) argues that the learning environment requires that teachers be involved in children's' play activities, that is to be with them in the field or play grounds, classroom play and anywhere they have a play lesson in a formal set up. When teachers join in play; while playing, they create space for children's creativity, decisions, initiatives and thoughts, focusing on topics and educational activities that develop their understanding of the various characteristics of the world around. Ostrosky & Meadan, (2010) in their study on first-grade teachers' perceptions of inclusive education noted that a well-equipped ECDE environment improves the development of children through learning and play, facilitate class management and support the implementation of program objectives. (Tumbokon, 2014). The study intended to find out the extent of teacher involvement in children play. Studies by; Patrinos, Velez & Wang, (2013) on framework for the reform of education systems and planning for quality, physical environment found out that: learning is a direct reflection of teacher good planning and implementation. Here, teachers and students spend most of their time and place where they can create their own names.

They then recommended that it should be orderly, comfortable, personal, and provide various manipulations for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Mills and Mc Carroll (2010) in their study on emotion regulation in early childhood also warn teachers to know what their children are doing, support their efforts, and consciously contribute to further learning (p.6). Teachers can participate in play for children to meet their needs by planning activities such as play and sports that promote children's health and socialization process as was found out by Tuban, (2013). Mrnjaus, (2013) in his study about the child's right to play report that the teacher, while monitoring and managing the interaction in play and within the framework, use strategies to support social inclusion and interaction between children with and without disabilities. Actions for social inclusion are a supportive structure for teachers and peers with children in social contacts. The study is consistent with the study of Van *et al.* (2011), which states that teachers can act as mediators and support the interaction of children with materials and other children. As a mediator, teachers model the flexible thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to establish a peer-to-peer relationship. As reported by Turnšek, (2016) in his study about the teachers implicit theories on child participation in preschool, he recommended that the teacher should supervise and lead play for holistic child development. As part of a teacher-led play, teachers can ensure that learners with little interaction with their peers are involved in roles that lead to direct contact with socially responsible and competent children. This allows children with communication problems to observe socially competent peers, participate directly in social interaction and peer-to-peer networks. When children participate in play led by a teacher, it improves their friendship and enhances pro-social behaviour like speaking, complementing, smiling, encouraging, and sharing. It has been shown that the integrated playgroup leads to more frequent interactions between peers and positive changes in children's interactions, this was according to Ostrosky & McCollum, (2012) in their study on validity and reliability issues in educational research. In most schools, teachers focus on teaching to complete the program. General objective guidelines for the development of small children show that teaching allows children to enjoy playing and learning (Kenya, 2008).

A study carried out in Pokot county, Kenya on relationship between play and learners performance Public ECDE by Andiemba & Kemboi, (2013) revealed that through creative and imaginary play, children have the opportunity to express and process their experiences and feelings. Andiemba & Kemboi asserted that play is of fundamental importance to the academic community because it ensures that the school environment takes into account the social, emotional and cognitive development of children. Bulotsky-Shearer *et al.*, (2011) in their research about peer play interactions and readiness to learn hinted that children can help adapt to the school environment and be ready to improve learning and problem-solving skills in the ECDE centers. Play can be better integrated into academic learning, a problem when learning in class is done at the expense of play time. Unplanned play and schedules that allow interaction with peers, are necessary mechanisms of social and emotional learning. Despite many benefits of play for children and parents, free time for play is quite limited (Fantuzzo2012). This trend influenced even ECDE centers in the country, which limit the freedom of play in their schedules, to make room for other educational activities. The current study seeks to find out the incorporation of play in school learning activities. Anne Syomwene & Marcella Mwaka (2018) shed light on play and its significance in early childhood education. Play is important to children's lives as food. It's a vehicle for learning and enhances children's holistic development. This paper recommended that the school environment and curriculum should support children's play through provision of adequate time for play; provision of a variety of appropriate materials and activities; teachers should support children's play; and provision of open, safe and adequate space for play. Play and outdoor activities require more time than other indoor activities. ECDE Calendar and Development (ECDE) (MoE, 2010) offers five exercises per week for play. It is a reasonable indication that play is necessary to learn in the guidelines for the initial development of the child.

Kenya government education reform program 2014, indicates a helpful and encouraging situation in which children can achieve development in early childhood (Kenya Gazette Supplement, 2014). As a mediator, children's teachers model the flexible thinking and problem-solving skills required in peer-to-peer relationships. However teachers in the process of trying to deliver their mandate in utilization of play as a teaching approach they face a number of challenges. Therefore, it was crucial to examine the challenges the teachers face in the ECDE curriculum centers in Kericho Sub-County.

Statement of Problem: Teachers are the most important single factor to determine the success, growth and development in the maturity of the learner. In earlier years education, learning through play is essential for the child's development and forms the basis for lifelong learning. As the teacher tries to manage, organize and moderate play activities for earlier learning he finds himself faced with a number of challenges. The children often are selfish, active, lack self-control, easily become impatient and need constant care and guidance. In ECDE centers. The curriculum designs prescribe most learning areas as combination of more than one subject to be learnt through a series of play activities. Such learning areas include environmental activities, mathematical activities, religious education activities, psychomotor and creative activities, and language activities. All these learning areas promote play in their own ways. To manage and cope with such a situation the teachers are often faced with a number of challenges. The study intended to assess the challenges teachers face in utilization of play in ECDE centers in Kericho-sub county.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study used a descriptive research design. According to Creswell (2014), surveys can be used to explain or investigate the current status of two or more variables at a given time. This study was concerned with assessment of the challenges facing teachers in utilization of play as a teaching approach in the ECDE curriculum in ECDE centers in Kericho Sub-County.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures: A sample of 48 head teachers and 104 pre-school teachers were used in Kericho sub-county. A combination of observation checklist, interview schedule and questionnaires were used to collect data. The questionnaire used was adopted from Jensen (2004) Early Childhood Curricular Beliefs Inventory ECCBI.

Validity and reliability of research instruments: The construct validity of the research instruments was ascertained by discussing with colleagues in the department. The reliability of the instruments was determined by pilot testing. The tools were pre-tested in two schools which were not included in the main study. Test re-test method was used to assess the reliability of the instruments. The Cronbach alpha of above 0.5% was deemed reliable (Peighambari, 2007).

Data Analysis: The quantitative data collected fed into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 to generate frequencies and percentages, tables, pie charts, and line graphs this is followed by a discussion of the same. Qualitative data from interviews was analysed thematically by categorizing, identifying similarities and differences that emerged and were discussed.

Ethical Considerations: The participants were assured of their informed consent and confidentiality. The information obtained from participants was used only for academic purposes and not any other purpose. The dignity, privacy, and interest of the participants were respected and protected.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Challenges facing teachers in utilization of play in ECDE centers

Inadequate teaching and learning play resources: Hedges and Cooper, (2014) in their study on relational play-based pedagogy, theorising a core practice in early childhood education, they noted that some of the recommendations and suggested that improve and protect the existing areas in which they play have been Canada. This was to be done, instead of creating special and separate objects for their fun and recreation. Children usually appreciate the settings given by adults. Research has shown that even though children need a place to play, it does not mean that playground is the best or the only solution for the community. In England, studies show that children play in open residential areas that are not designated as playgrounds (Woolley & Ward, 2010). Experience from around the world has shown that even the poorest areas can offer a rich play environment, and children do not need expensive toys and equipment to meet the demands of play (Zosh, *et al.*, 2017). A study by Almon and Miller (2009) shows some kindergarten teachers in New York and Los Angeles report that imagination and dramatic play disappear due to inadequacy of materials and money, that school councils are not compatible and that curricula do not allow this for classes.

A project organization report in Kenya (2014) states that many ECDE centers in Kenya have insufficient resources to teach and learn and the right opportunities for ECDE in their learning environment. These include the absence of well-ventilated classrooms, children's furniture, playgrounds, and gaming materials. It was also noted that teachers do not have sufficient teaching and educational resources to enable effective implementation of the ECDE curriculum. Bitok *et al.* (2014), made the same discovery and states that although physical structures stimulated the physical, mental, social, emotional, moral and mental development of young children, they were insufficient in the ECDE centers studied. They also found that most of the ECDE centers in the Uasin Gishu district were old and did not use material in the classroom. Storage also influenced the quality of the material, as most of them were stored in boxes that limited its use. Children play where they want and not only in-designated places. A playground enables understanding children's perception of play. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) tried to recall childhood memories of its latitudes and found that they differ significantly from the perception of these elements by adults. The most interesting part of the study was that the children seem to be having fun, except in playground. It must also be possible to manipulate the environment depending on the needs (Shackell, Butler, Doyle & Ball, 2008). Otinga. P.W, Onganga .H, M.O (2019) on utilization of play resources in teaching found the following; majority of teachers said that their schools had corners, bottle tops and balls. Nevertheless, other types of play materials such as bean bags, swing bags and sand play were insufficient.

Time for play: According to Gubbels, Van Kann and Jansen, (2012) in their study on play equipment, physical activity opportunities, and children's activity levels at childcare found out that children do not have much time to play today because they have more activities both during the week and during weekends. As they observed in Mexico, when the ECE teachers grew, play was more spontaneous and the classes were rarely organized. This view suggests that they could have played longer, which was the main objective. However, interpretations of these circumstances interpreted by the teacher lead to the same assumption; that today's children cannot make their own natural play, because they seem to be doing something that takes a longer period. According to Entin (2011), play is now seriously threatened in the United States and in many other countries. Play has been excluded from the lives of children for many reasons. The study further established that children have become dependent on electronic entertainment like television, movies and computers. Children in the United States spend three to five hours a day in front of the screens outside of school hours. Pre-school programs in the United States focus on literacy teaching, numerical calculation and other academic subjects that many children no longer have time to play in kindergarten. Mungai (2016) reports that early education in Kenya places too much emphasis on formal learning. Children, for example, learn to build words before they begin to pronounce them, which can be done through play. Of course, many ECED programs (if not the

majority) combine aspects of both discourses. However, while the discourse of academic achievement is an overwhelming voice in education, the movement in many early childhood education programs is mainly more formal, technological and academic. Many ECDE centres operate full day, for example, in a typical six-hour public kindergarten in New York or Washington, children spend ninety minutes a day in the first reading and writing exercises, sixty minutes in mathematics, and thirty minutes in learning. They have music once a week, play once a week. Children who show the greatest capacity for social simulation also show greater imagination and less aggression. They also show a greater ability to use language to speak and understand others. Sandseter and Kennair, (2011) study show the strong relationship between the child's ability to play and his general development: physical, social, emotional and intellectual. There is a reason to be deeply concerned that when the fun disappears from childhood, children will suffer in all these areas. In many countries, play diminishes and the first signs of such suffering become visible. However, some nations are quick to eliminate fun from the lives of young children with the erroneous belief that three to nine years are mature and ready to be taught directly in early reading and other academic subjects. Because of the children and the society to which they belong, this direction must now be reversed and the fun must be restored, as a healthy childhood need.

Socio-economic Factor: Hartas (2011) conducted a study in Israel on the social background of families; socio-economic factors, home education, children's language, reading, writing skills and social results. The study confirms what Citizen (2010) stated in his report on social inequalities that the social background of the family is important for language skills, literacy and results social. A was conducted by Nokaliyet (2010), on parental involvement, the educational and social development of children at Bethesda Primary School, Maryland. It shows that parents who support their children's education at the age of three and four years, the children's achievements are seen by the time they are twelve. It has been suggested that the effectiveness of home teaching is how well restored parents, education and finances will maximize educational experience for their children. The study analyzed 1364 children and their primary care givers from 10 US data collections. The study was done in developed country whose findings may not apply in developing country.

The key aspect of pre-school education is the specific role of parents in their attitudes towards the processes of learning and development of children. Parental faith is an integral part of the child's development (Harkness & Super, 1997). Their participation in the development of children is not limited to educational practices. They wonder, plan and evaluate the decisions they make for their children, focus on specific goals they believe they achieve and choose ways to achieve these goals. In addition, they also theorize their roles as parents and the character and behavior of children. His theory is usually unconscious, but indirectly determines the outcome of his children. Parental beliefs are described as a set of ideas that parents represent the nature of the child's socialization (Mills, 2009, p. 188). Faith is a term often used interchangeably with thoughts, ideas, constructs, ethical theories and parents' representations. What parents consider the best is an integral part of their belief system. In a sense, this parental belief system is a kind of popular theory, strict psychological interpretation of parents about themselves and their children's behavior, learning and development (Mills, 2009). These beliefs are the result of the dynamic and active construction of parents. Because construction is a process-based activity, parents' beliefs do not manifest themselves as a closed system.

They change with time thanks to many experiences. In addition, beliefs are not completely separated from other areas of social perception. Beliefs interact and are influenced by various factors such as culture and age. The two main competitive views on parents' belief systems are constructivist and cultural (Burr, 2018). Parents' opinions on the character of their children's development depend on how they understand their experience, as well as on their cultural norms concerning education of children. The parents' belief system refers to

more general cultural belief systems as well as to specific experiences that arise when children are educated at a specific time and place. They constitute a convergence between public and private, general, and personal. From a constructivist point of view, parents' belief systems are adapted from time to time because of the different experiences of parents with children. Parents adjust their internal representations of their role as parents to the needs of culture and in response to daily experiences in a specific place and time. Jones & Vagle (2013) found out that parental representations or structures are changing and reorganizing, mainly due to dramatic economic and social unhappiness. They noted that the way in which parents' belief systems were influenced by demographic and social variables was not clear, although research confirmed this impact. However, the existence of different belief systems in gender, race or community groups may explain why studies show that parents' beliefs have a significant correlation with social variables. For example, because of different perspectives on education, trust in children and intelligence, parents can have different faith structures with regard to learning and development of children. Differences in parents' belief systems can be used to explain why so many studies of parents' ambitions regarding their children are related to demographic variables. Parents are a key element of a child's life and play a key role in early child development. The family is the main social network and the first educational environment for children. When parents are busy with their children, they play a major role in the growth and development of their children. Parents have many skills that motivate children to learn through everyday interactions (Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011). An important aspect of parents' opinions about learning in childhood is understanding and appreciating play. Most parents think that this is the best way to offer ECDE. Although scientists and experts have learned to play a role in the education of children (Kelly, 2014). Political leaders supported the school to increase accountability in public education, starting from primary school. Focusing on academic achievements in modern society has led to misunderstandings about best practices in teaching children, but the desire to learn advanced skills for children such as reading and writing has increased (Singer *et al.*, 2006).

Many models and programs of initial education have been published based on different philosophies. Parents often have difficulty choosing the right accommodation for their children. In general, parents really want their children to be successful, best in class, and motivate them to choose mainly programs for academic teachers (Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, Singer, Berk 2008). They also noticed what parents think about play and their contribution influences their expectations towards the pre-school curriculum. Parents' convictions include not only goals and expectations, but also deadlines and specific aspects of development that the pre-school curriculum should refer to. Theory and research support a play-based learning in a positive way, but there is no literature on how parents perceive play and their role in preparing it. Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) found that the parents' opinions about the child's learning process are influenced by unique personal experiences in their culture. For example, if the mother thinks that the best way to teach a child is direct education, her belief is likely to be influenced by the teenager's experience, cultural pressure on educational and personal observation of the learning process. It is important to establish parents' opinions on the child's development and the child's learning process because these beliefs affect the child's performance. They showed that parents with a positive attitude to mathematics engage their children more in mathematics and support the mathematical efforts of their children than other parents. Those who loved to learn mathematics and believed that they play an important role in appreciating children's mathematics, pledged to do math classes with children, just like other parents. In a similar study citing Donahue, Pearl and Hertzog in Fisher *et al.* (2008), it was found that mother's beliefs about the development of spoken language determine the mother's behavior in communication with children during play activities. They also found that parents' opinions indirectly influence the child's development. Parents' points of view organize the everyday lives of children, from items at home (such as toys) to everyday activities and social interactions (Fisher *et al.*, 2008, p. 308). Therefore, the behavior of

parents seems to depend on the way in which a parent perceives a particular behavior and its benefits for a child. Craft, McConnon and Paige-Smith, (2012) conducted a study to determine the child-initiated play and professional creativity: enabling four-year-olds' possibility thinking in Canada. Researchers collected data from discussion groups and surveys between parents and teachers, as well as a review of documents related to pre-school programs. The results show that both parents and teachers were convinced that the pre-school children's curriculum is the most effective way to promote the development of young children. However, some parents also agree with the current practice of accepting more researchers (Mynbayeva, Sadvakassova, & Akshalova, 2017). A study by Fisher *et al.* (2008) reveals the beliefs of American mothers in the field of play-based learning in pre-school education, which should be offered to their children. The results come from two studies involving 1130 American mothers and 99 pre-school teachers. The study concerned research on mothers' beliefs about play and the resulting learning. The study showed that mothers had different views about play. The current study examined whether parents in Kenya were involved in play activities of their children.

A study by O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012) showed that parents usually do not use play-based curriculum as an effective curriculum. According to them, the fun can be integrated into the kindergarten during the day activities, such as recreation or breaking ice. However, they doubted that their son would learn something while playing. This study contradicts the study of Qadiri and Manhasa (2009) mentioned above, which gave opposite results because most parents thought that the best way to learn early is to have fun. They showed that parents are more and more concerned about the standards. The questionnaire often asked parents how quickly their children could read and learn about student results in reading and mastering academic skills. Parents also believed that knowledge of letters, the alphabet, counting, and using pencils is essential for pre-school children. This may indicate that parents often rely on academic programs or traditional schools because they focus on improving academic skills and productivity. According to McGinn (2017), parents who have already enrolled their children in the pre-school program were positive and open to a play-based educational program. They said they were aware of the fact that play is an important part of a child's life, especially when children can learn while playing. Despite the research base for development programs and educational play, pedagogues encountered parental and public opposition to playing their classes. Adults who have not yet learned the theory of child development may have difficulty understanding how classroom teaching actually promotes learning and development. Elkind (2008) discovered that parents do not remember what it was like when they got acquainted with the world around them. This phenomenon is known as the advantages of child amnesia in the learning process. As a result, some parents may avoid or question programs that include playful study programs. Parents were asked if they watched the pre-school program at the time of registration, they reported that it is not so; instead, they relied on the recommendations of friends and the popularity of the school among friends. In addition, the study suggests that parents generally do not include a curriculum based on an effective play. According to Hirsch-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008), parents have a solid character. When you understand play and its potential, children reach a higher level of play. This information emphasizes the importance of an educational approach to play. Early childhood teachers who believe that play is the most important means for children, can help parents and other players understand play by communicating their learning and upbringing goals. A study by Taylor (2012) found that about 75% of South African children (mostly black children) are trapped in poverty in which they find themselves. Lack of finance and socio-economic problems force them to attend schools that do not work well. A report by the South African Commission on Human Rights (SAHRC) (2014) noted that children with low social and economic life are the most affected by low education and poor parenting. The Kenya Project Organization (2014) reported on the challenges of pre-school education in Kenya and notes that socio-economic differences affect the effective implementation of ECDE in regions, some of which are "marginalized" or "dry" and "semi-arid". Regional differences play an important role in facilitating

access to preschool care and education, where the number of registrations in rural and marginalized areas is low compared to urban areas. Children from marginalized communities in rural arid and semi-dry countries do not have access to pre-school education. A typical example is the nomadic Maasai community in Kenya, one of the communities with the least access to pre-school education and care because of its lifestyle and regional inequalities. Otieno (2010) found out that students from families with a low socioeconomic status value domestic activity more than education. Such children are subjected to child labor and have little time to learn. Financial difficulties and thus poverty in developing countries have been a major obstacle to the effective implementation of large government-funded programs. Nyabuto and Njoroge (2014) also conducted a study on parents' involvement in the performance of mathematics students at public elementary schools in Kenya. The survey shows that students from families with a low socioeconomic status value domestic activities more than education. The survey had a sample of 132 respondents and the data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Respondents included head teachers, teachers and students.

Lack of proper government policy on ECDE curriculum

Implementation: Play and the optional development plan is part of the social development program. The principles of playing policy should be in the neighborhood and variety of play should be accessible to all children, regardless of socio-economic groups and physical conditions. Local authorities have a key role in ensuring that children and adolescents of all ages, abilities, and interests have a variety of card options (Shackell, Butler, Doyle & Ball, 2008). The following are factors and problems that are considered by various researchers and agencies when formulating a playing and leisure policy; middle-aged parents want their children to work in a very competitive technological society in kindergarten and girls are excluded and their playing needs are not taken into account in traditional playing equipment. The downward trend in children's play areas like rapid unplanned urbanization and administration have created a series of serious obstacles to safe play in many urban areas (Bartlett *et al.*, 1999, Spencer & lame., 2006). The damage was reported in Bangladesh newspapers to open spaces, playgrounds, and parks, in the city of Dhaka (The Daily Star, 2009b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008e, 2007b). Because there is no regulatory body that opposes the invasion of the City of Dhaka, it is almost common to participate in playgrounds, parks, and open spaces in Dhaka (The Daily Star 2010, Prothom Alo, 2009a, 2009b). Consequently, the unauthorized construction by influential local people and the rental of these playgrounds and parks for commercial purposes are also common for DCC. These limited facilities are used for commercial purposes, so children do not have access to these facilities. The relationship between the recreational space and the total area in the city of Dhaka is well below the standards that apply in other countries of the world.

Lynch (2014) reports that many teachers in the United States do not have play or play centers in their class because time is kept away from mandatory activities. Furthermore, public school teachers reported that they spend less time with children playing in kindergartens because the Abandoned Children Act (NCLB) was mandatory. Teachers said they felt overwhelmed by meeting all educational needs and saving little time during the day. Goldstein (2012) also finds that a set of educational standards for districts and countries resulted in more lesson content needed for daily teacher interaction and faster enrollment rates. Lynch (2014) notes that teachers often described their desire to play, but stated that they could not do so for reasons unrelated to their beliefs or knowledge. One reason was the rejection of the school board, head teachers and parents, as well as the forbidden playing requirements. Another study was conducted by Ejuu (2012) on the state of implementation of the ECDC educational policy in Uganda. A study was conducted by Musyoka *et al.* (2012) on teacher training, terms of service and customer awareness of ECDE guidelines in the southern district of Bungoma, Kenya established that most teachers did not have harmonized conditions for services, although QASO emphasized the conditions of the services

during inspection. The study recommended the facilitation of education, ECDE teachers, collaboration of parents, administrators, religious and ECD managers to improve their functioning. The study used samples to evaluate 40 ECDE teachers in the southern district of Bungoma. Data was collected through questionnaires, interview programs, and observation checklists. According to the National Council of ECDE in Kenya, many stakeholders are involved in providing services for babies and children, but the resources available are too small for the number of children in need of services. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize the use of available resources and ensure that services are reasonably accessible, nearby and culturally relevant. This will also ensure a more effective coordination of services between partners (ECDE directive, 2006). Jalu (2013) examines policies and practices that promote access, gender equality and capacity building in child development centers in Kenya: The Likuyani case. The study concluded that ECDE is the basis for learning and that serious attention to justice, access and practice should be maintained in the best interest of the child. Kang'ethe, Jane, and Karanja (2015) conducted a similar study and establish that due to inadequate funding for ECD at the Ministry level, parents have largely taken this responsibility. Parents largely view education of children as a responsibility of the government (especially after the implementation of free primary education policy), and few will take the initiative to pay the agreed amount of fees, and on time, to pay the teacher. Relevant learning outcomes indicate that the teacher-student relationship significantly influences learning outcomes. The results show that the government should prioritize the use of teachers and train them according to standards for early childhood development policy. The study found that the Ministry of Education needed more ECD officials to increase incidence and visibility. To achieve this, the ECD and the department or secondary departments must become a department headed by a director. They noted that ECD teachers and directors should be informed about the policy. Once awareness has been raised, some of the educational needs, such as curriculum, play, and nutrition, can be implemented without much resources (Kang'ethe, Wakahiu & Karanja, 2015).

Teachers not taking their role as per their training: One of the challenges faced by teachers in their early childhood is the belief that play has no definitive results. So, they consider this as a problem when trying to reproduce it as a learning tool in the classroom. According to Lillard (2013), "Early childhood teachers in the UK have identified the skills, concepts, and knowledge that these children should acquire at age five, do not treat them in a structured way: these children may not reach their initial learning objectives" (p.647). They also fear that children will learn something unexpected while playing. However, there is also an indication that play has no definitive results and that adults may have no idea what is learned when children have fun experiences that the teacher cancels. In any case, the learning outcomes achieved in the program make the use of play as a learning tool insecure. A study conducted by Goldstein (2012) organizes the festival, which many kindergarten and scientific teachers have heard. A curriculum that brings great pleasure in the classroom encourages teachers to have positive ideas about play-based learning. Many teachers who have been forced to prepare children for later formal education have been considered indispensable in their classes, even though these plans conflict with their beliefs. On the other hand, Lynch (2015) shows the relationship between teachers and older teachers in their research. He learned to eliminate all play materials from kindergarten classes. Class teachers teach students who learn the same language as themselves. Kohl III and Cook (2013) goes on to say that playing time is considered a waste of time that can be used for academic learning. However, according to Holmes (2012), it is counter-productive to eliminate or reduce fractions. This is why school holidays are important and instructive. In Kenya, playing time and play are included in the curriculum, although teachers prefer the curriculum and skip play. Teachers try to address the curriculum and finish the syllabus causing them to use the time for play in teaching the academics subjects (Andiema and Kemboi, 2013).

Lack of proper terms and conditions of service for ECDE teachers:

During the implementation of the curriculum, Erden (2010) observes in New Zealand that ECDE teachers explained there were no problems with the school environment that the program could not cover. Once the teachers were overworked, they said they had problems with parents. Researchers in Kenya have identified several challenges affecting early childhood play (Ndani & Kimani, 2010; Makokha, 2015). They note that demotivated ECD teachers include those with low wages, poor physical working conditions, high work pressure, poor or non-existent service conditions, and poor interpersonal relationships. Hedges and Cooper, (2014) identified inadequate number of teachers and play resources, they did not identify the real challenges these inadequate teachers face when applying the play as a teaching approach. Time for play was identified by Gubbels, Van Kann and Jansen, (2012) as a challenge but for the children in Mexico, not the teachers as this study did at ECDE centers in Kericho County. Socio-economic factor was pointed out by Hartas (2011) in Israel but was addressing children but not strictly to teachers at ECDE centers, this study therefore investigated the challenges faced by teachers in the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum in ECDE centers in Kericho Sub-County.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Challenges faced by teachers in the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum:

The majority 90% of the respondents agreed that time was allocated for play although the allocated time was not adequate. This implies that time allocated for play activities were inadequate, making it hard for learners to participate in playfully. The results further established that 80% of the ECDE centers do not purchase play materials, although 58% indicated that there is enough space for play activities. It was further noted, 75% of the head-teachers reported that teachers support children's play activities while 88% do not agree that parents supported play activities.

The same number disagree that community provided play materials or that the County Government support play activities. Notably, PE lessons in Kenya can accurately be termed as playtime because considering the time it takes for learners to present themselves in the field; a teacher is left with only twenty minutes to teach. Preschool classrooms typically are designed around centers. Participants said they wanted more time for center playtime during the day. They shared that sometimes, center time does not occur because of required attendance at special events. A teacher remarked that time is a significant factor in children. If they are given too much or too little time, it would be disastrous. Children are frustrated if insufficient time is allotted, then bored if excessive time is set aside for a certain play opportunity. Flexibility and following the child's interest is the best solution.

Conclusion

It was concluded that teachers faced different challenges in the utilization of play in ECDE curriculum. The challenges pointed out included; lack of adequate time, lack of parental, and community support.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations based on the study findings:

- The study recommends that more time should be allocated for play activities and enough play equipment and materials necessary to promote participation in outdoor activities should be provided.
- The county government needs to be sensitized on the need to increase its funding towards provision of infrastructure in the preschools within their county to lessen some of the teachers' challenges.

- Parents, on the other hand, need to be sensitized on how they can avail play equipment through donations and improvisation.

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