

Abstract

Play has found little, if any acceptance in most of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Homa Bay District. Observation reveals that parents and ECD Managers/Head teachers appear to pressurize the pre-school teachers to undertake academic work as opposed to allowing children learn spontaneously through play. The purpose of this study therefore was to determine the influence of play on pre-school children's holistic development with special reference to social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. The study employed correlation research design. The target population comprised ECD children, teachers and pre-school Managers/Head teachers in Homa Bay District. Out of a target population of twenty thousand (20,000) pre-schoolers, three hundred and seventy seven (377) pre-schoolers were selected for the study through proportionate stratified random sampling procedure. This enabled the selection of the subjects from the two categories of pre-schools, namely Public and Private ECD centres to represent the 7 Divisions in the District. Purposive sampling was then used to select thirty three (33) ECD Managers / Head teachers and twenty six (26) ECD teachers. Two sets of questionnaires were used to gather information from the Managers/Head teachers and ECD teachers while an observation checklist was used to establish the presence of play materials and their use in learning. The study collected both Quantitative and Qualitative data which was then analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics involved Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Qualitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics which comprised of percentages, means, frequency tables and value judgment. Hypotheses were tested by use of Pearson's Product Moments Correlation Coefficient. The findings of the study showed that various forms of play activities influenced pre-school children's holistic development. Majority of pre-schoolers who were involved in meaningful play activities were found to have a high degree of holistic development. The findings are significant to stakeholders, mainly ECD Teachers, Managers/Head teachers and parents in that it may change their perception about pre-school children's play. ECD curriculum developers and supervisors, especially KIE and MoE would also find the study useful in designing pre-school curriculum to incorporate more play time to enhance holistic development of ECD children.