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Original Research Article

Influence of directed play on ECD children's holistic development in Homa Bay Sub County, Kenya

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Play has found little, if any acceptance in most of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Homa Bay Sub County. Observation reveals that parents and ECD Managers/Head teachers appear to pressurize the ECD teachers to undertake academic work as opposed to allowing children learn spontaneously through directed play. The purpose of this study therefore was to determine the influence of directed play on ECDE children's holistic development. The study employed correlation research design. The target population comprised ECD children, teachers and ECD Managers/Head teachers in Homa Bay Sub County. Out of a target population of twenty thousand (20,000) ECD children, three hundred and seventy seven (377) were selected for the study through proportionate stratified random sampling procedure. 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 directed play materials and their use in learning. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Hypothesis was tested by use of Pearson's Product Moments Correlation Coefficient. The findings of the study showed that directed play activities influenced ECD children's holistic development. Pearson's correlation output further noted that directed play enhances holistic development (r=0.228 while p<0.05) indicating a significant relationship between directed play and holistic development. ECD teachers should incorporate Directed Play in their teaching and also get involved in children's Pretend Play activities. This can be done by the use of child cantered method of teaching, participatory learning or thematic integrated learning approach.

Key words: Directed play, holistic development, pre-schoolers, ECD teachers

INTRODUCTION

Directed play is where the teacher plans and demonstrates to children so that they may imitate and acquire expected skills Bandura (1986). Maccoby (1983) postulates that peer interaction through directed play provides a critical opportunity for children to acquire holistic competencies. Peer interaction through directed play thus helps the child develop self-control and modify their behaviour as they make acceptable decision. Directed play is essential to development because it contributes to children's holistic development (Rosenberg and Kosslyn, 2001).Holistic development entails changes that take place in children in terms of social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Piaget (1962) stipulates that early years of child growth and development are very critical and thus needs to be handled with care. Simons and Santrock (1994) confirms Piaget's findings that a child's early years matter very much and may reflect what a child may be holistically when fully grown. Children's directed play has been recognized as the major agent in ECDE children's holistic development and learning (Liberman and Philiph, 1977). Through directed play children learn societal norms and values. McConnel (1992) states that children are like young

plants that can be transplanted, pruned, watered without breaking. Olds and Papalia (2005) continues to state that children should be nurtured, that is fed on a balanced diet, given a clean bill of health, trained on good habits, given time to play with essential play materials. Maccoby (1983) notes that children's holistic development is a must if we are to bring up an all-round individual. Parents, teachers and care givers in our society need to realize and understand the importance of the word "good care" in handling children in their early years. Good care does not only stand for food, shelter, clothing and health, but care in totality, observing all the needs of children from the basic one to play and rest for holistic development.

Elkind (2003), states that directed play is rapidly disappearing from our homes, our schools, and our neighbourhoods. In support of this, Isenberg and Quinsberg (2008) noted that over the last two decades alone, children have lost eight hours of free unstructured and spontaneous play a week. More than 30,000 schools in the United States have eliminated recess to make more time for academics. Joan (2007), states that children's time spent outdoors fell by 50% per cent. The amount of time children spend in organized sports has doubled, and the number of minutes children devote each week to passive leisure, not including watching television, has increased from 30 minutes to more than three hours. In recent years, and most especially since 2002 passage of the "No Child left Behind" Act in America, educators, policy makers, and many parents embrace the idea that early academics leads to greater success in life (Elkind, 2003). Yet in another study by Olds and Papalia (2005) which compared the performance of children attending academic pre-schools with those attending play-oriented pre-schools, the results showed no advantage in reading and math achievement for the children attending the academic oriented pre-schools. But there was evidence that those children attending academic oriented pre-schools had higher level of test anxiety, were less creative, and had more negative attitudes towards school than did the children attending the play-oriented pre-school (Hurlock, 2006).

In Kenya today, pre-school children are subjected to academic work due to pressure from parents who would like to see their children read and write within weeks upon joining pre-school. The ECD curriculum developed by KICD has provision for directed play but this is overlooked by parents and private school managers who insist that the ECD children have to be taught numeracy, literacy and have the ability to read and write. This fact is compounded by the fact that the primary school head teachers subject the ECD children to both oral and written interviews for them to be admitted into standard one. Waithaka (2005) observed that most ECD centres in Kenya emphasize academics and give little or no time at all for directed play activities. According to Joan (2007) directed play is emphasized as a factor in a child's holistic development, but most ECDE teachers ignore using it effectively to promote holistic development.

According to Bernnet (1993)directed play activities are those "having no rules other than those the player himself imposes and no intended end results in external reality." It is any activity engaged in, for the enjoyment it gives without consideration of end results. It is concerned with means by which it is done but not the end results. Intrinsic play is free from external rules and is non-serious but highly engaging. Boyle (2008) observed that directed play activities were kept strictly for the end of the day in schools or holidays. But recently there has been radical shift of attitude towards directed play as a result of what directed play can do for ECDE children's holistic development. A study by Bergen (2001) in Germany found fourth grade children who had attended play oriented Kindergartens surpassed those from academic oriented Kindergartens in social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. The findings were so compelling that Germany switched its Kindergarten programmes back to being play oriented centres. Rosenberg and Kosslyn (2001) in an exclusive experimental research in US found that children who attended directed play oriented pre-schools succeeded in school and life significantly better than the children who attended a more academic direct instruction program. This makes directed play to be very important and hence should be used in pre-schools to enhance holistic development.

The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education (MoE) participated and endorsed the deliberations of 1990 Jomtien Thailand world conference on Education for All (EFA) and the 2000 World Education Forum Dakar Senegal (MoE, Sessional paper No. 5,2005). The Jomtien and Dakar conferences underscored the importance of directed play in ECD programs in improving the holistic development of children. The Government has further translated all these international initiatives into national targets to be implemented at regional, sub county and local levels. Waithaka (2005) observed that the existing ECD policy guidelines has gaps as there is no central organization mandated to register ECD centres. The MoE only register ECD centres following Dicece or Nacece curriculum but not Madrasas, Kenya Headmistress Association (KHA) or Montesori some of which are registered as Faith Based Organizations (FBO).The ECD training curriculum is congested and the in-service training mode does not allow the trainees ample time to comprehensively cover the 23 units in the syllabus. Lack of employment has made the sector lose very competent teachers due to poor remuneration.

The children's directed play time worldwide is facing problems. According to Elkind (2003)directed play is rapidly disappearing from homes, schools and neighbourhoods. Over the last two decades alone, children have lost eight hours of free unstructured and spontaneous play a week. Hyun (1998) states that more than 30,000 schools in the United States have eliminated recess to make more time for academics. Rao (2002) found that the

amount of time children spend in organized sports has doubled, and the number of minutes children devote each week to passive leisure not including watching television, has increased from 30 minutes to more than three hours. Waithaka (2005) noted that single and working parents now outnumber the once predominant extended family, in which a stay at home grand-parent could provide the kind of loose oversight that facilitates directed play. Instead, busy working parents outsource at least some of their former responsibilities to coaches, tutors and trainers. Simons and Santrock (1994) holds that global economy has increased parental fears about their children's prospects in an increasingly high – tech market place. Many parents have bought in the idea that education is a race, and that the earlier you start your child in academic, the better (Isenberg and Quinsenbery, 2008). ECDE children tutoring in math and programs such as Kumon system in Germany, which emphasizes daily drills in math, reading, are becoming increasingly popular. Hurlock (2006) notes that many Kindergartens, once dedicated to learning through directed play, have become full day academic institutions that require testing and homework. In such a world, directed play has come to be seen as a waste of precious learning time by both parents and teachers.

Rao (2002) as quoted by Waithaka (2005) observed that adults have increasingly thwarted self – initiated directed play and games, which has resulted in ECD children loosing important milestones in their child's development. In the absence of such developmental milestones, it is difficult to determine what is appropriate and not appropriate for children. We run the risk of pushing them into certain activities before they are ready, or stunting the development of important intellectual, social, or emotional skills. Isenberg and Quinsberg (2008) states that it is only after age six or seven that children will spontaneously participate in games with rules, because it is only at that age that they are fully able to understand and follow rules. In our ECD centres in Kenya the pre-school child at times is subjected to interviews upon admission to standard one which forces the pre-school teacher to resort to more academic work at the expense of play. A survey by K.I.C.D (1985) found that most ECD centres used standard one textbook instead of the prescribed ECD curriculum activity books. In Homa Bay Sub County, 30% of the ECD centres are located behind shops or in squeezed compounds (inspection report, 2008). Thus they seem not to have enough playgrounds for the pupils to engage in meaningful play, neither do the teachers use play as a method of teaching. Parents in Homa Bay Sub County do not allow their children to play or play with them. They see play as a waste of pre-schoolers precious learning time and would like their children to learn to read, write and speak English upon joining pre-school. ECD teachers even gave their children homework and some offer tuition in order to appease the parents and pre-school managers. Sdorow (1993) states that most social interchanges with peers occurs during directed play settings as children engage in potato race, sack race, filling bottle competitions. Children spend more of their times outside school playing with friends than they spend in any other activity. Natal (1995) as quoted by Elkind (2003) observed that directed play seems particularly important in the development of holistic competence. It allows children to practice their future roles as well as experiences and the roles of others in a playful context. According to Wolf (1994) directed play teaches children to function as part of the social group and to co-ordinate their activities and roles with those of other children. Elkind (2003) further stipulates that directed play activities are resources that stimulate social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth in the child which in turn affects the child's success in school.

According to Banyard and Hayes (1994) through directed play with water, sand and mind children can develop both fine and gross motor skills as they imitate the teacher and other older children doing activities. Bergen (2001), found that elementary school children become increasingly inattentive in class when recess is delayed. Similarly Elkind (2003), found that regular physical activities had positive effects on academic performance. Spending one third of the school day in physical education, art and music improved not only physical education, but attitudes towards learning and tests scores. These findings echo those from one analysis of 200 students on the influence of exercise on cognitive functioning, which also suggest that physical activities promote learning (Doe, 1997).

Young children need plenty of opportunities to move and engage in recreational activities such as recess, classroom breaks, group games and physical education (Natal, 1995). Brain research confirms those physical activities, moving, stretching; walking can actually enhance the learning process (Rosenberg and Kosslyn, 2001). Group games also provide opportunities to consolidate social, emotional and cognitive skills. On the playground or in the gym games that require skills with balls, ropes, running and jumping may be organized into recess or exercise (Natal, 1995). These recreational activities are powerful ways to influence learning. Rao (2002) observed that directed play often involve physical activity and therefore is closely related to the development and refinement of children's gross and fine motor skills and their body awareness. As children vigorously and joyfully use their bodies in physical exercise, they simultaneously refine and develop skills that enable them feel confident, secure and self-assured (Simons and Santrock, 1994). In societies where children experience pressure to succeed in all areas, confidence and competence are essential.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlation research design. In this study an attempt was made to find out the relationship

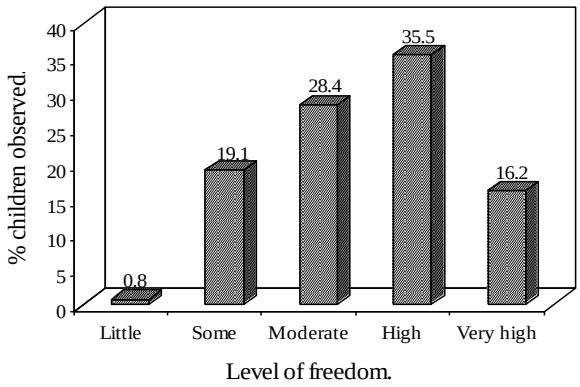

Figure 1: Freedom of expression within which the children showed joy during Directed Play

between play and pre-school children's holistic development. The target population was pre-school children in Homa Bay Sub County. Homa Bay Sub County has seven (7) educational divisions with an accessible population of twenty thousand (20,000)ECD children. Stratified random sampling was used to divide the sub county into seven (7) strata which was represented by the seven Divisions in the Sub County. Simple random sampling was then used to select fifty four (54) ECD children from each division to be included in the study. Purposive sampling was then used to sample twenty six (26) ECD teachers and thirty three (33) ECD Managers/Head teachers with different levels of training to take part in the study. The researcher developed three research instruments. The first was an observation checklist designed to observe the sampled ECD children during various play activities. The second one was a questionnaire for the ECD teachers which were used to obtain information about the ECD teacher's perception about children's play and their use of various form of play to enhance holistic development. The third questionnaire was designed for the ECD Managers/Head teachers to obtain information about their use and provision of play opportunities for the ECD children. Reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method for internal consistency. The questionnaires had a reliability of 0.73. According to (Kothari, 2006) a reliability of 0.70 is considered acceptable for internal consistency levels. Quantitative data was then analysed using procedures that involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to determine if statistically significant relationship existed between play and holistic development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to establish the influence of directed play on holistic development of pre-school children, A case study of Homa Bay Sub County. The data was analysed aided by a computer package Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 22.Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The hypothesis was tested by the application of Pearson's Correlation. The entire hypotheses tests were performed at a significant level of 0.05. Acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis was based on the calculated test statistics and the value of probability of significance (p value). The null hypothesis was accepted if $p \geq 0.05$ and was rejected if $p < 0.05$.The chapter further gives a discussion of the findings and comparison with similar studies done earlier. The conclusions made on whether to accept or reject the stated hypothesis was based on the data collected from the three cadres of respondents (ECD children, ECD teachers and ECD Managers or Head teachers) and a comparison made according to their demographic characteristics (age of ECD children, qualification of ECD teachers and level of training of ECD Managers or Head teachers).

From Figure 1 it was realized that in Homa Bay Sub County, 59.9% (n = 226) of ECD children sampled, often showed a sense of humour during directed play. 5.8% (n = 22) very often showed humour, 32.4% (n = 122) occasionally showed a sense of humour while 1.9% (n = 7) rarely showed any sense of humour. This is as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

ECD Teacher's Views on Directed Play

Children's involvement in directed play was judged by the child paying attention, listening to the teacher's instructions or following instructions. 57.7% (n = 15) of the teachers noted that the children involved in directed play activities very well; 30.8% (n = 8) indicated they did involve quite well; 11.5% (n = 3) of the teachers indicated they involved highly well. These children were noted to be able to balance on a beam balance very well 38.5 %(n=

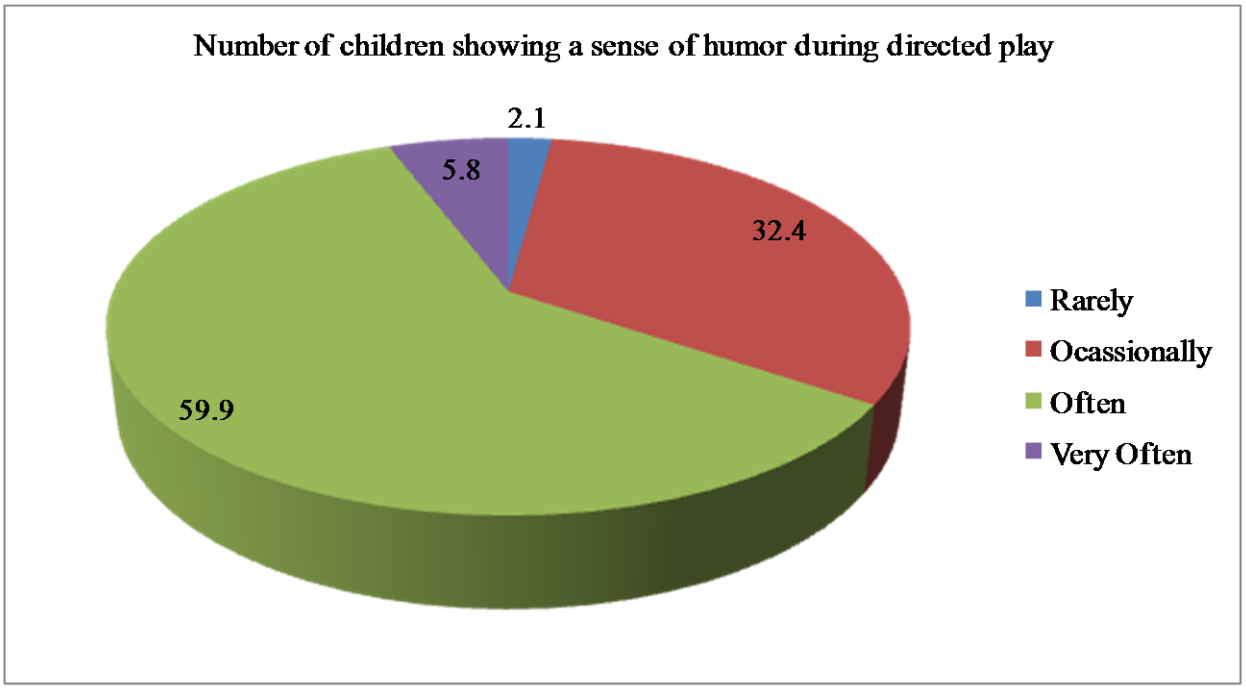

Figure 2: Number of children showing a sense of humour during Directed Play

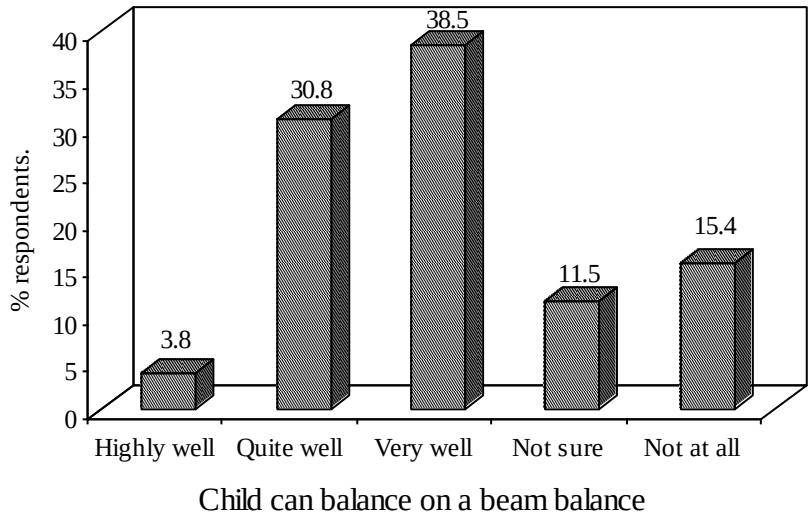

Figure 3: Ability of the children to balance on a beam balance during Directed Play

10).This is as illustrated in Figure 3 above.

During directed play, 38.5% (n = 10) of the teachers noted that the children occasionally got irritated by their play mates; 23.1% (n = 6) teachers realized the children often got irritated; 19.2% (n = 5) noted that they rarely got irritated while 15.4% (n = 4) of the teachers saw the children very often got irritated. One teacher however did not realize any child get irritated during directed play. When they were playing, 42.3% (n = 11) of the teachers saw the children jump forward, backward very well in place and over low objects. This is indicated in Figure 4 below. Children were able to identify letters of the alphabet through directed card games.46.2%

(n = 12) of the teachers believed their children could identify letters quite well; 38.5% (n = 10) feel they could identify letters of the alphabet very well while 15.4% (n = 4) believed the children were able to identify letters of the alphabet highly well. ECD Teachers strongly agreed that

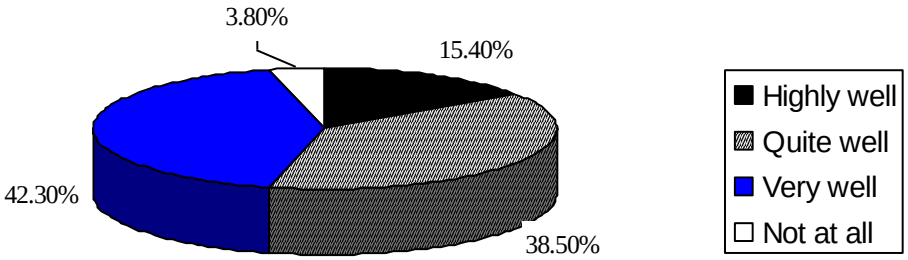

Figure 4: Number of teachers who noted the children jump forward well

Table 1.Teacher's Views on Directed Play

Teachers view on directed play	Directed play improves pre-school children's physical development		Teachers should use locally available materials to enable children engage in directed play	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
S. Agreed	16	61.5	18	69.2
Agreed	9	34.6	8	30.8
Neutral	1	3.8		
Disagree	-	-	-	-
S. Disagreed	-	-	-	
Total	**26**	**100%**	**26**	**100%**

Table 2. Managers / Head teachers noticing ECD Teachers Involvement in Children's Directed Play

Managers / Head teachers view	Frequency	Percentage
Highly well	0	0
Very well	18	54.54%
Quite well	12	36.36%
Not sure	0	0
Not at all	3	9.09%
Total		

directed play improved pre-school children's physical development. Teachers strongly agreed that they should use locally available materials to enable children engage in directed play. Refer to Table 1.

ECD Managers or Head teachers Views on Directed Play

The ECD Managers/Head teachers noted that during directed play time, most of the ECD teachers 54.55% (n=18) involved in pre-school children's directed play very well, 36.36% (n=12) saw the teachers involved quite well in ECD children directed play time, while only 9.09% (n=3) did not at all involve in pre-school children's directed play. These findings are well articulated in Table 2.

The study further established that 63.63% (n=21) of the ECD children followed instructions highly well during directed play activities, 21.21% (n=7) of the ECD children followed instruction very frequently and 15.15% (n=5) followed

instruction frequently. This confirms Piaget's (1968) findings that ECD children's believe in their teachers and will strive to do whatever they are told by the teachers. This is as indicated in Figure 5 below.

Hypothesis was tested by correlating the scores on children's directed play on holistic development. The result of the test is as stipulated in Table 3 below.

From the computed Pearson's correlation it was noted that directed play enhances holistic development ($r=0.228$ while $p<0.05$) which indicated that there was a significant relationship between directed play and holistic

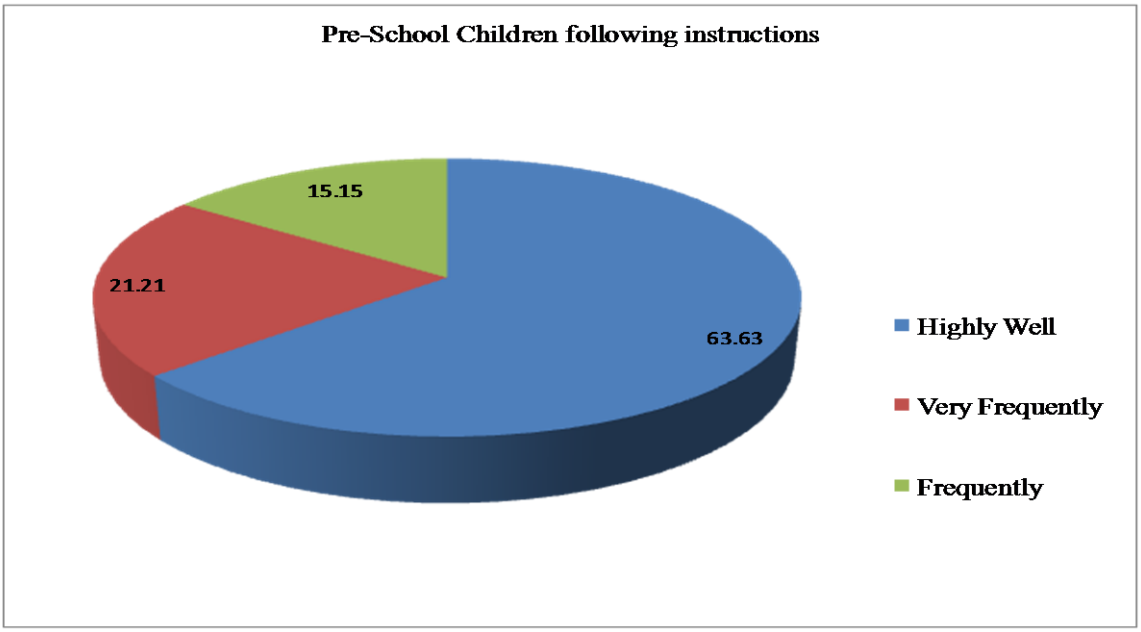

Figure 5: Pre-school children following instructions

Table 3. Relationship between Directed Play and Holistic Development

		Directed Play	Holistic Development
Directed Play	Pearson Correlation	1	.228**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.625
	N	373	373
Holistic Development	Pearson Correlation	.228**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
	N	373	373

development. The study therefore rejects the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between directed play and holistic development.

It was noted from the findings that children whose motor-coordination during directed play activities are excellent, were found to significantly very often show a sense of humour. 80% of the children, who had very good motor-coordination, while only 2.1% had fair motor-coordination. The study also noted that 59.9% of the children showed a high degree of humour during directed play activities.

Conclusions

It indicates the theoretical value of the study in terms of filling a gap in knowledge and adding new knowledge on pre-school children's directed play activities in Kenya.

i) ECD learners develop their motor coordination very well as they take part in directed play activities.

ii) Directed play activities enables the pre-school children pay attention, listen keenly and follow instructions from the ECD teacher as he /she direct the play. This in turn enables the children to obey and follow rules of the play activities.

iii) Identify and recognize numbers and letters of the alphabet.

The ECD teachers, parents and managers/head teachers should get involved in production of playing materials to make directed play more enriched and meaningful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions the researcher made the following recommendations.

i) ECD teachers should incorporate Directed Play in their teaching and also get involved in children's Pretend Play activities. This can be done by the use of child cantered method of teaching, participatory learning or thematic integrated learning approach.

ii) ECD teachers to be around during ECD children's Directed Play activities to offer security and to avoid accidents of scrambling for play materials or some domineering ECD children to deny the weak ones to get involved the on-going play activity.

iii) ECD parents and teachers to be actively involved in the provision and development of directed playing materials in the ECD centers. This can be done by having a common materials development workshop day at the ECD center.

iv) The ECD managers /Head teachers that there are adequate indoor and outdoor directed play materials.

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