

ROLE OF PRETEND PLAY ON PRE- SCHOOL CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN HOMA BAY SUB COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Play has found little, if any acceptance in most of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers in Homa Bay Sub -County. The purpose of this study therefore was to determine the influence of pretend play on pre-school children's holistic development. The study employed correlation research design. Two sets of questionnaires were used to gather information from the Managers/Head teachers and Pre-School teachers while an observation checklist was used to establish the presence of pretend play materials and their use in learning. 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. The findings are significant to stakeholders, mainly pre-school Teachers, Managers/Head teachers and parents in that it may change their perception about pre-school children's pretend play. Pre-School curriculum developers and supervisors, especially KICD and MoE would also find the study useful in designing pre-school curriculum to incorporate more pretend play time to enhance holistic development of pre- school children.

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INTRODUCTION

Play is essential to development because it contributes to children's holistic development (Rosenberg & 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 pretend play has been recognized as the major agent in pre-school children's holistic development and learning (Lieberman & Philip, 1977). Through pretend 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

pretend 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 pretend play activities and rest for holistic development. Elkind (2003), states that pretend play is rapidly disappearing from our homes, our schools, and our neighborhoods. 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 pretend 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% percent. 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

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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 pretend 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 text 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 Pre-School curriculum developed by KICD has provision for pretend 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 pre- school children to both oral and written interviews for them to be admitted into standard one. Waithaka (2005) observed that most ECD centers in Kenya emphasize academics and give little or no time at all for free play. According to Joan (2007) play is emphasized as a factor in a child's holistic development, but most pre-school teachers ignore using it effectively to promote holistic development.

According to Bernnet (1993) pretend 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. Piaget (1962) suggests that pretend play seems to be intrinsically motivated rather than imposed or directed by others. 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 pretend 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 pretend play as a result of what pretend play can do for pre-schoolers' 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. Rosenberg and Kosslyn (2001) in an exclusive experimental research in United States found that children who attended play oriented pre-schools succeeded in school and life significantly better than the children who attended a more academic direct instruction program. This makes 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 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, 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 centers. The MoE only register ECD centers following Dicece/ Nacece curriculum but not Madrasas, Kenya Headmistress Association (KHA) or Montessori some of which are registered as Faith Based Organizations (FBO) or under Ministry of Social Services. 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. Though the ECD service guideline pg 18 specify that the ECD teachers will be employed come the year 2010, lack of employment has made the sector lose very competent teachers due to poor remuneration. Elkind (2003) noted that pretend play is rapidly disappearing from homes, schools and neighborhoods. 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 free 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 & Quinsbery, 2008). Pre-school 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 play, have become full day academic institutions that require testing and homework. In such a world, 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 play and games, which has resulted in pre-schoolers losing 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 centers 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 centers used standard one textbook instead of the prescribed ECD curriculum activity books. In Homa Bay Sub County, 30% of the ECD centers 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 pretend play; neither do the teachers' uses pretend play as a method of teaching. Parents in Homa Bay Sub County do not allow their children to engage in pretend

play activities. They see pretend 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. Pre-School teachers even gave their children homework and some offer tuition in order to appease the parents and pre-school managers. Ingule and Rono (1996) stated that pretend play is vital in helping children learn social and cultural rules of interaction and it helps to develop co-operation skills and build friendship. Thus pretend play helps children learn self-control, comparison and negotiation skills which are important to their culture and help them obey rules of the game. Further to these, Hyun (1998) notes that children learn survival skills, independence and how to get along with others. Pretend playing therefore help the children build a foundation of social skills that will benefit them as they mature. Leahy and Harris (1997) indicate that pretend play with others gives children the opportunity to match their behavior with others and to take into account viewpoints that differ from their own. Thus pretend play provides the rich experience children need to learn social skills, become sensitive to others needs and values, handle exclusive and dominance, share space and ideas with others.

A study by Olds and Papalia (2005) shows that during the third year of life a child's positive emotions become more frequent during pretend play. Pretend play in a playful context support intrinsic motivation that is driven by positive emotions. Positive emotions such as curiosity generally improve motivation and facilitates learning and performance by focusing learners attention on the task. Negative emotions such as anxiety, panic, threat and stress generally distract children's motivation (Simons & Santrock, 1994). Curiosity flexibility, rightful thinking and creativity are major indicators of the learner's intrinsic motivation to learn, which to a large extent is a function of meeting basic needs to be competent and to exercise personal control. Because pretend play is intrinsically motivating learners perceive it to be interesting, personally relevant, meaningful and appropriate in terms of their abilities and their expectations of success Mangal (2007). Boyle (2008) observed that pretend play with equipment stimulates vocabulary and concept building. Children's pretend play with these materials is by grouping them according to size, color, form, texture and function (Doe, 1997). Bordens and Herwitz (2002) states that clay, sand and mind are pretend play materials that give children of all ages opportunities to explore changes in form as they mould the substances. According to Deaux (1984) pretend play is important to children's development. Children need opportunities to act and dress up like people they know.

Equipment's that encourages pretend play includes housekeeping, furniture dolls, dress up clothes, utensils, blocks and other materials encourage initiation as well as conversation and creative expression of ideas and understanding (Doe, 1997, Hurlock 2006). Piaget (1962) has showed that pretend play leads to discovery, verbal judgment and reasoning as well as developing manipulative skills. Children learn to discover about consequences and evaluate risk while pretend playing which helps them in decision making as they grow up. Banyard and Hayes (1994), states that pretend play is a fantastic tool that helps children believe they are competent and capable learners. It is a process by which the child is helped to explore her feelings, attitudes and release pent up emotions. Children should be exposed to more pretend

play activities that have play materials to influence holistic development.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted correlation research design. Correlation research design enabled the researcher to analyze the degree of relationship that exists between the independent variable (pretend play) and the dependent variable which was holistic development amongst pre-school children in Homa Bay Sub County. In this study an attempt was made to find out the relationship between pretend 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 (8) educational zones with an accessible population of twenty thousand (20,000) Pre-School children. The target population included pre-school children, pre-school teachers and pre-school managers/ head teachers sampled from ECD centers in the Sub-County. The study used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of determining sample size from a given population. For a population of twenty thousand (20,000) we got a sample size of 377 Pre-School children. Stratified random sampling was used to divide the district into seven (8) strata which was represented by the eight zones in the Sub- County. Simple random sampling was then used to select fifty four (54) Pre-School children from each zone 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 sample size therefore included three hundred and seventy seven (377) ECD children twenty six (26) ECD teachers and thirty three (33) ECD Managers/ Head teachers. Simple random sampling was used to select twenty six (26) ECD teachers and thirty three (33) ECD Managers/Head teachers 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. It comprised of eleven (11) items. The second one was a questionnaire for the ECD teachers which was used to obtain information about the ECD teachers perception about children's play and their use of pretend play to enhance holistic development. It comprised of thirty one (31) test items. The third questionnaire was designed for the ECD Managers/Head teachers to obtain information about their use and provision of pretend play opportunities for the ECD children. The instruments were developed after a wide reading in Psychometrics and consultation with research experts from the Department of Psychology, Counseling and Educational Foundations at Egerton University to ensure their validity. A pilot study was conducted before the main study. Reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method for internal consistency. This method was used to estimate the reliability of an instrument upon a single administration (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The questionnaires had a reliability of 0.73. According to (Kothari, 2006) a reliability of 0.70 is considered acceptable for internal consistency levels. Hence the instruments were considered reliable enough for the study. Observation checklist was used by the researcher to ascertain the presence of play materials, effective use of play by children in fostering holistic development in pre-school children in Homa Bay Sub County. The data generated was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) windows version 22. Both descriptive and inferential

statistics were used in data analysis. Descriptive statistics included frequency tables, percentages, and cross tabulation which was used to explain the various attributes of the variables under study, while inferential statistics used Pearson’s Correlation to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to establish the influence of pretend play on Holistic development of pre-school children. The data was analyzed aided by a computer package Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 22. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The hypotheses were 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 hypotheses were based on the data collected from the three cadres of respondents (Pre-school children, Pre-school teachers and Pre-school Managers/ Head teachers) and a comparison made according to their demographic characteristics (age of Pre-School children, qualification of Pre-School teachers and level of training of pre-school Managers/Head teachers). Items in the questionnaires and observation checklist sought to establish the influence of Pretend Play on Holistic development of pre-school children. From the observation checklist, the researcher established that, 36.6% (n =138) of the children very often showed joy, 28.4% (n = 107) often showed joy; 32.4% (n = 122) occasionally showed joy while 2.7% (n = 10) of the children rarely showed joy during pretend play activity.

Table 1. Degree of joy shown by children during Pretend Play

Degree of Joy	Frequency	Percentage
Very Often	138	36.6
Often	107	28.4
Occasionally	122	32.4
Rarely	10	2.7
Very rarely	0	0
Total	377	100%

During pretend play, it was established that 54.9% (n = 207) of the children showed high degree of imagination, 29.4% (n=111) showed moderate degree of imagination, 14.6% (n=55) showed very high degree of imagination, 0.8% (n=3) showed little degree of imagination while 0.3% (n=1) showed some degree of imagination. This is as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Degree of Imagination in the Children in their expression during Pretend Play

Degree of imagination	Frequency	Percentage	Rank (1 – Highest number)
Very high	55	14.6	3
High	207	54.9	1
Moderate	111	29.42	
Some	1	0.3	5
Little	3	0.84	

This confirms Bandura’s (1971) findings that pretend play makes the child believe that he/she is capable as he/she tries to imitate the others. The wide use of pretend play can be

attributed to the children’s nature of trying to emulate significant others in their life. ECD teachers have been faced with a wide variety of challenges from ECD centre Managers/head teachers and parents who demand that their children learn to read and write within the first term of joining pre-school. These stakeholders see play as a waste of time. The head teachers of primary schools also subject the ECD pupils to interviews in order for them to join standard one. This left the ECD teacher with little option but to resort to pleasing the school administration (Waithaka, 2005). This has made the ECD teachers to resort to tuition, holiday coaching and extra lessons. A total of 26 ECD teachers participated in this study. The ECD teachers filled and returned the questionnaires about behaviour of the school children during their pretend play, free play, directed play and socio-dramatic play activities. Judging by the child being not active during pretend play activities, majority of the teachers, 46.2% (n = 12) noted that the children did not at all tend to be shy during pretend play. 34.6% (n = 9) of the teachers noted that the children tended to play quiet well, while 7.7% (n = 2) indicated that the children play highly well and 11.5% (n=3) noted that the children play very well, which confirms Leahy and Harris (1997) findings that pretend play enables children to actively involved in play activities and not to be shy. Pretend play activities therefore helps ECD children to develop outgoing characteristics as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. ECD teachers noticing the children being shy during Pretend Play

Teachers’ opinion on the children shyness	Frequency	Percentage
Highly well	2	7.7
Very Well	3	11.5
Quite well	9	34.6
Well	0	0
Not at all	12	46.2
Total	26	100%

As indicated in figure 1 below, during pretend play activities, 53.8% (n = 14) of the teachers noted that the children like playing with others very well. 23.1% (n = 6) saw the children play highly well and a similar number of teachers noticed the children like playing during pretend play activities quite well. The study established that pre-schoolers do not prefer inactive play time but they are always in flight, their concentration in one play activity is also quite minimal. These findings agreed with previous researches which indicated that pre-schoolers are always on flight and could not concentrate for long in a given activity, Piaget (1968).

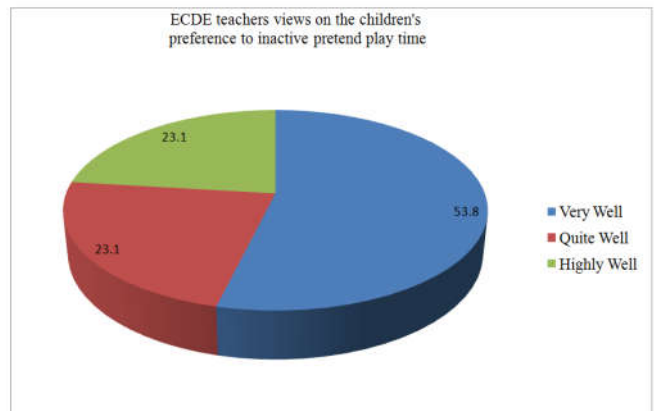


Figure 1. ECD Teachers’ views on the children’s preference to inactive pass time during pretend play

Teachers were found to engage children in pretend play while wearing clothes worn at home by family members. The study found out that 42.3% (n = 11) of the teachers however did not at all engage the children in pretend play, 26.9% (n = 7) of the teachers engaged the children very well, 23.1% (n = 6) engaged them quite well and 7.7% (n = 2) of the teachers agreed to engage the children highly well on pretend play. The study findings as stipulated in Table 8 below about teachers views on childrens pre-tend play activities indicated that, 53.8% (n = 14) of the teachers strongly agreed, 34.6% (n = 9) agreed that pretend play was used by pre-school teachers to enhance holistic development. Pretend play did not waste pre-school children’s learning time but enhances pre-schoolers social interaction.

This finding confirms Waithaka’s (2005) findings in Thika that as children engage in pretend play, they develop their social emotional physical and cognitive acumen thus enhancing holistic development. From the findings the Managers/ head teachers who responded and returned the questionnaires were not satisfied with the support the parents were giving to pre-school children’s pretend play time. This was judged by looking at how the parents got involved in the provision of pretend play materials and allowing children to play. When the children were utilizing their play time 63.63 %(n=21) of the managers / head teachers indicated that they were not satisfied with the parents involvement by provision of play materials to their children. 12.1% (n=4) of the managers/ head teachers were extremely satisfied with the parents involvement, while

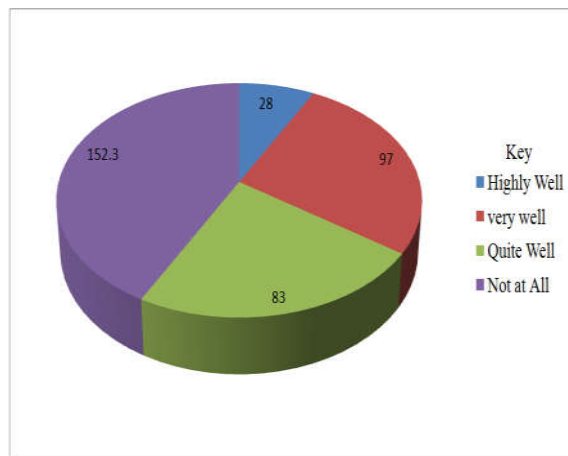


Figure 2. Teachers engaging pre-schoolers in pretend play wearing cloths worn at home

Table 4. Teachers Views about Children’s Play

State about children’s play agreed disagreed	Strongly	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly
Pretend play is used by pre-school teachers to enhance holistic development	14 (53.8%)	9(34.6%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (3.8%)
Pretend play waste pre-school children’s learning time	-	-	-	10(38.5%)	16(61.5%)
Pretend play enhances pre-schoolers social interaction	18(69.2%)	7(26.9%)	1(3.8%)	-	-

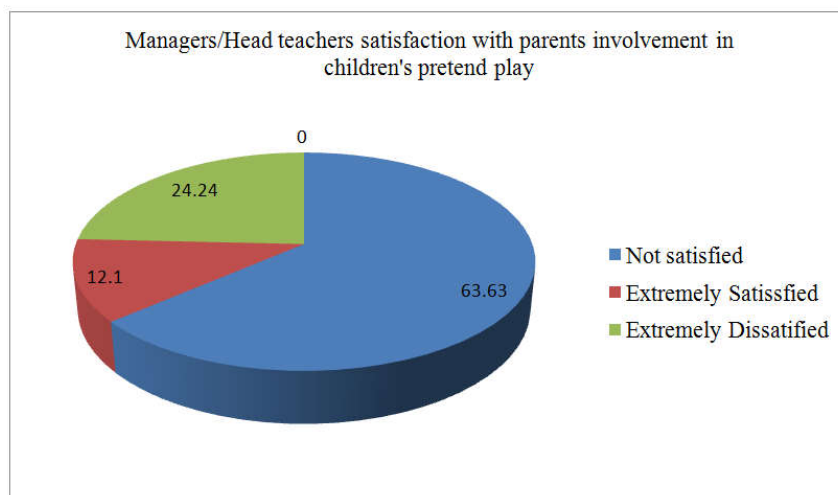


Figure 3. Managers / Head teachers’ satisfaction with parent’s involvement in children’s pretend play

Table 5. Managers / Head teacher’s Views on Parents / Guardians support to Pre-school Children’s Pretend Play

Managers / Head teachers view	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely satisfied	4	12.12
Not satisfied	21	63.63
Extremely dissatisfied	8	24.24
Total	33	100%

24.24 % (n=8) were extremely dissatisfied. This is as stipulated in Figure 3. In this study, the findings showed that 63.63% (n=21) of the managers / Head teachers were not satisfied with the support parents / guardians gave to preschool children's pretend play time. This was noted by managers / Head teachers when parents failed to take part in making play materials for their children or themselves playing with their children. This confirms Waitthaka's (2005) finding that most parents do not involve in their children's play neither do they buy play materials or play with their children. This is shown in Table 5 below. This hypothesis was tested by correlating the scores on pretend play on holistic development of pre-schoolers. The results of the tests are as shown on Table 6 below.

Table 6. Relationship between Children's Pretend Play and Holistic Development

	Pretend play	Wholiste development	
Pretend play	Pearson Correlation	1	.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	376	376
Holistic development	Pearson Correlation	.318**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	376	376

A Pearson's correlation computation yielded a coefficient ($r=0.318$, $p<0.05$.) which meant that there was a positive relationship as shown in Table 6 above. The decision was to reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between pretend play and pre-school children's holistic development.

Conclusion

Most pre-school teachers believed that pretend play activities enabled pre-school children to be active ,play highly well as they develop outgoing characteristics.

- Develop their memory as they recall what they know about the character they are imitating.
- Have a high degree of imagination which leads to high intellectual development.
- Pretend play activities helped ECD children to realize holistic development which is necessary for a healthy living.
- The involvement of ECD teachers in the ECD children's pretend play activities would offer safety to the children to the children and avoid accidents.
- The ECD teachers, parents and managers/head teachers should get involved in production of pretend play materials to make play more enriched and meaningful.
- The ECD teachers should ensure that they involved in the ECD children's pretend play. When teachers act a scene it makes the children to be attentive and their interest in the activity sustained.

Recommendations

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

- ECD teachers to be around during ECD children's pretend Play activity 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 ongoing play activity.
- ECD parents and teachers to be actively involved in the provision and development of pretend playing materials in the ECDcenters. This can be done by having a common materials development workshop day at the ECD center.
- The ECD managers /Head teachers that there are adequate indoor and out doorpretend play materials. This can be done by ensuring that there are adequate playing materials for every child or group of children.

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