

**INFLUENCE OF CHILD PLAY ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ECDE LEARNERS IN PUBLIC PRE-SCHOOLS IN SABATIA SUB-COUNTY, KENYA****BY****LAVISA EMILY KAVOSA****ABSTRACT**

Child play nourishes every aspect of children's development including the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative. Child play stimulates pre-school learner's senses, arouses their curiosity, interests, stimulating inquiry and helping them achieve significant perceptual growth. This study sought to investigate the influence of child play on social development of ECDE learners in public pre-schools in Sabatia sub-county, Kenya. The study objectives were: To determine the influence of exploratory child play on social development among ECDE learners in public pre-primary schools. The research findings were to assist government policymakers, decision makers and non-government organizations to plan for early childhood education in future and beyond. It was also to be a point of reference for budding researchers. The study adopted Socio Cultural theory that advocates for exploratory child play among preschool learners. A descriptive survey design was used. Target population was 1559 respondents from which a sample size of 163 respondents was obtained through purposive and simple random techniques. Instruments for data collection included questionnaires, interview schedules and Observation check lists. Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) computer software programme version 22 aided in data analysis of quantitative data which was analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics and presented in tables. Qualitative data obtained was analyzed using content analysis in themes and verbatim reports. The findings revealed that child play had a significant influence on social development among preschool learners in Sabatia sub-county. The specific influence was ( $\beta=0.912$ ,  $p<.05$ ) for exploratory child play. The study concluded that child play had a significant influence on social development of learners. The researcher recommended that the ministry of education in collaboration with preschools sensitise stakeholders on child play and do vocational training to improve preschools teacher's skills on child play. The ministry of Education needs to also allocate funds to pre-school so as to buy play items. The study may provide baseline information and offer challenges to other researchers to carry out-more-studies.

**KEY WORDS.**

**Child play;** Child play refers to activities involving perceptions, experiences and expectations that are connected with children

**Social development;** Social development refers to the process where individuals, in this case, children, become functioning members of a particular group and society, and take on the values, behaviors, and beliefs of the group's other members

## OBJECTIVE

1. To determine the influence of exploratory child play on social development among ECDE learners in public pre-primary schools in Sabatia Sub- County, Vihiga County, Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

Child play refers to activities involving perceptions, experiences and expectations that are connected with children. Goldstein (2012) defines play as any activity which is freely chosen, that is self motivated, and which is directed by the person, it is outside ordinary life, and it does not involve a lot of seriousness but one which absorbs fully the mind of the player. According to Synodi (2010) play does not have a particular objective apart from just playing, it has no specificity of behaviour, but an activity carried out with someone's intention of having a playful framed mind. Play is necessary for young people's growth and for make them come together (Anderson-McNamee, & Bailey, 2010). It contributes to the emotional well-being, cognitive growth, physical development and social wellbeing of children and youth. Play also gives parents a chance to be together with their children (Bailey, 2006). As a birth right play is so important to optimal child's social development that it has been recognized as right of every child ( Wathu, 2016).

Play, in all its types, from fantasy to rough-and-tumble, has an important part in the development of children. Play is seen as the lens by which children experience their world, and the world of others (Goldstein, 2011). It has been found that when children are not allowed to play, they will have problems both today and in the long-term. When children get support from adults, if given adequate play space, and when allowed an assortment of materials play to with, they have the best opportunity of becoming healthy, happy, and productive members of society. Although play has a lot of benefits times allowed for free play has been seriously limited for some children.

Using playing children are able to learn and acquire a general mind set towards solving abstract problems and form novel solutions to problems which require restructuring of the thought system or action (O'Connor & Stagnitti, 2011). Bailey (2006) identifies type of play to include unoccupied play, solitariness play, onlooker play, parallel play, associate play, social play, motor-physical play, constructive play, expressive play, fantasy play and cooperative play. These types of play are well defined in Vogler, Crivello , and Woodhead (2008) Socio Cultural Theory. This theory points out the important effect of play on social development among the pre-school age children. The theory has advocated for three main aspects of child play that most suits pre-school learners. These aspects or type include exploratory child play, constructive child play, and physical child play which plays a significant role in the early learners' social development.

Exploratory child play refers to object play or sensory play for very young pre-school learner's involving exploring objects and environments through touching, mouthing, tossing, banging, and squeezing others. Crivello , and Woodhead (2008) Socio Cultural Theory.

Skills such as empathetic emotional involvement with others, expressions of appropriate emotions, active listeners, being initiative and maintaining good verbal conversations, being able to use and understand non-verbal communications like facial expressions and body language, a consideration that others may think and feel differently to themselves, cooperating, sharing and taking turns, using a variety of skills to join social groups, negotiating and being able to say 'no' and seeking help are

some of the good social skills (Brockman, Fox , & Jago, 2011). As pointed out by Well and Drew (2013) the first way children learn social skills is by watching their parents and family members behave with each other, by copying what other children do and say when they interact, they learn to follow instructions, directions, and cooperate, take turns and share (Bedrova & Leong, 2010). Play helps young children understand their own emotions, feel proud of what they can do, and develop a sense of whom they are (Fisher, 1992).

The Geneva Declaration on the Rights of Children (1986) recognized that play activities for young children was a vital activity in their development of social skills. Piaget (1962) feeling has been that play has a very primary input in a child's development as a factor for social development. More specifically, play helps children understand that other players have different perspectives than their own. The United Nations Children Emergency fund (UNICEF) maintains that Child play develops a foundation of intellectual, social, physical, and emotional skills necessary for success in school and in life such as scientific reasoning, and cognitive, problem solving, social and emotional self-regulation, developing of conversational skills such as persuading, negotiating, compromising, and cooperating (UNICEF, 2010) For this reason, play is of immense importance in education. However, it is the categories, quality and frequency of child play activities that will determine the cognitive, social and emotional development of children.

In the developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa still lags behind and, although most sub-Saharan African countries have included Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) policies in sectorial and multi-sectorial strategic plans in central and local governments. Most countries have concentrated their efforts on delivering EFA goals through primary schooling (UNESCO, 2009). Similarly, all East African Countries have adopted the free education strategy to attain EFA Goals and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of achieving Universal primary Education, however, none of these countries appear to have clear policies on how early childhood development programs should be carried out (Okengo, 2010)

In Kenya, Basic education is compulsory and starts with two years of pre-school (Government of Kenya, 2012). Quality pre- school education is among the major reforms envisaged in the recent sessional paper of 2012 on 'Reforming Education and Training in Kenya'82. The Kenyan education system recognizes child play as an important aspect of child development in the pre-school age and in varied social-cultural learning environments in Kenya not only for development purposes but also for social cohesion (GOK, 2012). However, Okengo (2010) observes that pre-school education in Kenya is still handled poorly mainly because pre-primary education was not mainstreamed in the Kenyan education system in spite of ECDE being critical in laying the foundation for performance in the subsequent levels of education.

Lewis et al (2000) carried out a study in developed Britain among children aged 1-6 years in order to measure their capacity for symbolic play. Children were asked to perform simple tasks such as substituting a teddy bear for an absent object. The findings revealed that there was better performance in languages among children who scored higher on a test of symbolic play, results that remained significant even after controlling for age of the children. This study compared specific tasks under children play, which could be classified under exploratory child play and its influence on language and found a significant effect, almost related to the objective of the present study, there are however shortfalls. This study contains only one specific aspect of child play, which is also predetermined and therefore could not explicitly measure exploratory child play. Vihiga County is still undergoing development and therefore the findings could not be generalized on Kenyan

situation. The current study is therefore of importance to the present problem of child play deficiency among schools thus leading to poor social development. Howes and Farver (2009) carried out a study in Australia to examine the outcome of exploratory play on child development outcome with the use of observation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW.**

### **Child Play and Social Development**

Goldstein (2012) defines play as any activity which is chosen freely and directed personally and that stands outside ordinary life which is not that serious but one that absorbs the player's intensity. Play is essential for the growth of young children as it enhances their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. Play provides a chance to parents to get involved fully with their children. Vitale (2011) highlights the importance of in three distinctive ways, emotionally, socially and physically. Several types of play have been identified in research. This include solitary, exploratory, solitary, and social play (Goldstein, 2011). Smith (2010) reports that this types of play involves a series of play development activities which extends from solitary, to exploration and to sensorimotor play and finally to pretend. In exploratory play very young children explore with objects in their surroundings. In this play toddlers can experiment with their environment while older children can manipulate and control their environment in mastery play

### **Exploratory Child Play**

Exploratory play is a type of play for very young pre-school learners of up to two and half years and involves exploring objects and environments through touching, mouthing, tossing, banging, and squeezing. Exploratory play involves activities where children use physical skills and their senses to find out what things feel like and what can be done with them (Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development, 2018). Children explore their own bodies and then they explore the things in their environment. Exploratory play requires availability of play materials which can give children an opportunity to explore and play with different types of materials and in the process learn about the materials (Waweru, 2013).

Studies carried out indicated that when teachers, parents and school administrators provide materials for children to play with they encourage them to play with the materials making them grow very fast in their social status, measured on how well they interacted with others (Pyle, DeLuca, & Danniels, 2017). Play materials range from balls, ropes, dolls, swings, clay, blocks, beads and ladders. According to National Centre for Early Childhood Education (2000), parents should provide security and protection, stimulation, socialization, play and learning materials.

Interactive display and availability of play materials in schools, thematic collections of carefully selected materials entice pre-school children to explore a wide range of ideas (Kiruki, 2011). Children are active learners and if they are to develop the skills and competence, they must be able to work and access play materials (Republic of Kenya, 2008). Exploratory Play is therefore important for language development because when children are in control of an interaction, they are engaged; they speak about and listen to what interest them (Waweru, 2013).

Scholars have attempted to examine the relationship between different aspects of exploratory child play and development. A study done by Elis and Arnold (2006) on effect of selected play materials on children's social skills development, revealed that children who had used variety of play including exploratory play, had developed better than those who were not exposed to variety of play. However, his study did not address how exploratory play influences the social development of early childhood learners and that is why this study wants to investigate the influence of child play on social development of ECDE learners in public pre-schools in Sabatia sub-county, Kenya. Franke and Hobart (2001) studies on the influence of Physical manipulation of play materials on child development indicated a high positive correlation between the two variables, and concluded that play materials promoted coordination an important aspect in developing communication as well as hand-eye coordination.

The anticipation, preparation and instruction from teachers before and after play provide opportunities for listening and use of new vocabularies relevant for that time (Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development, 2018). Other listening skills that develop during play include giving clear, simple instruction for everyday tasks, being a good listener, praising and playing listening games (Pyle & DeLuca, 2017). All these activities are aimed at helping the children acquire listening skills that are vital for learning and acquiring language skills. Language is dependent upon the amount of practice children have in both speaking and listening skills during interactions with good adult models (Mutai, 2001).

I another study by Kananu (2005) a strong relation between exploratory play in resource availability and effective use as related to academic achievement was established. Noting the importance of physical facilities, teaching, learning, and play materials as key determinants performance of pre-school children in the learning of all subject areas the study emphasized the importance of exploratory child play as grounded in social development theory that children learn at the time they play. Play, according to Vygotsky (1962), contains rules for behavior that the child should follow to be successful in play situation. The curriculum and play materials and activities should be based on the children's interest, age and skill level. However, the shortfalls were identified in the findings and the study design which needed a study on the same. The study used observation method to collect data which was not. The outcome variable was psychological development of children, and thus the need for a study on social development to fill the knowledge gap.

Mounts and Roopnarines (2006) conducted a study on the themes and content of exploratory play in children. The study utilized observations and interview schedules to find out whether exploratory play influenced children reasoning capacity. The study however did not find any significant difference among children who engaged in exploratory play and those who did not on their reasoning and hence no significant contribution of exploratory child plays on child reasoning.

Studies by Lewis et al (2000) revealed an association between exploratory play and social development although there was no clear consideration of all the aspects of exploratory child play and social development. Howes and Farver (2009) carried out a study in Australia to examine the outcome of exploratory play on child development outcome with the use of observation. Thirty-five children were engaged as participants in this study and two sets of dyads observed, one same age and the other a different mixed age dyad of the same sex. Data was collected from three observation sessions. The study found that children who engaged in a more significant amount of exploratory play had more reasoning as compared to those that were confined to a particular type of play by their teachers. This study had significant findings that could be useful on the concept of child play.



However, the study only used observation method of data collection and did not assess much of exploratory child play. The outcome variable was also limited to psychological development of the children, and thus the present study on child play and social development is of more importance to the new knowledge gap.

There is therefore adequate empirical evidence on the influence of exploratory child play on social development. However, most of these studies were centered on play and academic performance among learners without clearly addressing social development and preschool learners. This study therefore intends to shed more light on the effect of exploratory child play on social development of ECDE learners in Sabatia, Vihiga County.

### **Research Design**

This study used descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design is a qualitative non-experimental research design which refers to the description of an existing phenomenon using numbers to characterize individuals in group. Meredith (2001) defines descriptive research as a type of qualitative research that involves making careful description of a phenomenon. The purpose of descriptive survey design among others is to describe existing achievement, attitudes, behaviors or other characteristics of a group. It reports things the way they are in the present context and do not involve manipulation of independent variables. According to Isaac and Michael (1990), information gathered through descriptive survey design can also be used to: answer question that have been asked and used when examining social issues that exist in

### **Study Location**

This study was conducted in Sabatia Sub County of Vihiga County in Western Kenya. Vihiga County borders Kakamega County to the North, Nandi County to the East, Kisumu County to the South, and Siaya County to the West. It has 5 sub counties and the headquarters is at Mbale town. The sub-counties include Luanda, Emuhaya, Vihiga, Hamisi and Sabatia Sub-Counties.

### **Target Population**

Target population of the research was a total of 1559 people. These include 1000 ECDE learners in public pre-school centers in Sabatia Sub County who are distributed in 195 pre-schools centers, 195 head teachers of primary schools hosting the pre-school centers, 349 preschool teachers and 15 key informants who are people with critical information on preschool learning in Vihiga County who will include 10 officers from Ministry of Education and five parents.

### **Sample size**

A sample is part of the target population that has been procedurally selected to represent the population in a study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). It is an important feature of any empirical study whose goal is to make inferences about a population (Gill & Johnson, (2010). A sample size is determined based on the expenditure of the method of data collection and the need to have sufficient statistical power (Mkansi & Acheampong, 2012). To have a sufficient statistical power a study considers required confidence level, margin of error, type of analysis and size of the total population (Gujarati & Porter, 2010). Since the population which was being studied was finite and the data was to be analysed at 0.95 confidence level or significance level of 0.05, the following

formula by Kothari (2014) was used to obtain the sample size of 308 respondents from a study population of 1559.

$$nf = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:  $nf$  = desired sample size when population is over 10 000

$p$  = population proportion

$q = 1 - p$ .

$d^2$  – significance level (0.05)

$z$  = z-value at the given significance level

When the values were substituted  $nf = \frac{1.96((1.96)(0.5)(0.5))}{(0.05)^2} = 384$

When this figure is reduced to the definite population size which 9559, then

$$n = \frac{nf}{1 + (n/N)^2}$$

Substituting for values  $n = \frac{384}{1 + (384/1559)} \quad n = 308$

### Sampling Technique

This study adopted stratified sampling technique together with simple random and Purposive sampling techniques to select the respondents for the study hence use multiple sampling strategies. According to Kothari (2014) in social science research, a sample of 10-20 percent is adequate for data analysis. Stratified sampling was used to group responds into their respective categories which included head teachers, preschool teachers, key informants and ECDE learners. After stratification, simple random sampling and purposive sampling was used to select participants from each category as shown on table 3.1. A proportional percentage to the total sample size from each category was selected to participate in the study from the target population. Twenty (20) ECDE learners who were observed were selected from schools whose head teachers participated in the study.

**Table 1.0 Sample Size Determination**

Sample stratum	Population	Proportion %	Sample Size
Head Teachers	195	13	39
Preschool Teachers	349	22	70
Key Informants	15	1	3
ECDE Learners	1000	64	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>1559</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>312</b>

### Data collection Instruments

The study adopted several research instruments which included Structured Questionnaires, Key informant interview schedules, and observation checklist which were used to collect data in this study

## RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents results, interpretations and discussions of the research findings. All the Questionnaires sent out to respondents were followed up and obtained dully filled. This gave a return rate of 100%, which consisted of 39(100%) head teachers, 60(100%) preschool teachers, 3 key informants and 200 ECDE learners who were exhaustively observed by the researcher. The first part of the findings looked at the Socio demographic characteristics of the sample population. This is because the socio-demographic characteristics were important intervening variables.

### Demographic Characteristics

This study sought to find out demographic information of the respondents. This information included the gender of the respondents, age of the respondents, years of experience and level of education as presented in the following sub-topics. Table 1.1 presents descriptive statistics therefrom

**Table 2.0 Distribution by Gender**

Category	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Heads Teachers	Males	4	10%
	Females	35	89%
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>
Teachers	Males	25	25%
	Females	45	75%
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>
Key informants (Education officers and SMC Members)	Males	2	67%
	Females	1	33%
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>

**(Source: researcher, 2019)**

Table 1.1 shows that most of the participants, (89.7%) were of the Female gender while 10.30 were males. Majority (70%) of the Key informants were also Males while 30% were female. This finding corroborates with findings of a similar study by Burke (2010) in which he reported that majority of the ECDE teachers were females. This could be because many people still have an attitude that ECDE teaching is more of a female duty because of the cultural gender role dispositions common in most Kenyan societies.



### Age of the Respondents

In order to achieve this, respondents were asked to indicate their age in completed years, the results were as shown in table 1.2.

**Table 3.0 Age Distribution of the Respondents in the Sample Population**

Categories	F	%
20-30 years	30	27.5
31-40 years	50	45.9
41-50 years	20	18.3
above 50 years	9	8.3
Total	109	100

**(Source: researcher, 2019)**

From table 1.2, it is observed that majority of the teachers and head teachers age ranged between 31-40 years as 50(45.9%), a category that was followed by those aged between 20-30 year, 30(27.5%). The least category was those aged 50 years and more. These findings reflect age categories that gave reliable information.

### Level of Education

In order to determine the level of education of the participants, respondents were required to provide their highest level of education they had attained. The results are presented in table 1.3

**Table 4.0 Highest Level of Education Attained**

Categories	F	%
Secondary	43	39.4
College	54	49.5
University undergraduate	10	9.2
University Postgraduate	2	1.8
Total	109	100

**Source: researcher, 2019**

Table 1.3 above reveals that the majority (49.5%) of the respondents had up to college level of education. 43(39.4%) had secondary education, 10(9.2%) had university undergraduate education level, and only 2(1.8%) had achieved university postgraduate education level. However, of the few who had beyond college education, a large section was also not professional teachers. Even though the level of education and profession of the teachers were not fully achieved, they expressed capability to give authentic information.

### Teaching Experience

Respondents were asked to state the number of years they had been teaching ECDE. Results showed that the respondents had been teaching for a period ranging from 3-6 years (Mean 6.4 Years). The results of the teaching experience are presented in table 1.4 below.

**Table 5.0 Teaching Experience**

Categories	F	%
up to 2 years	19	17.4
3-6 years	61	56
7-10 years	20	18.3
Above 10 years	9	8.3
Total	109	100

**(Source: researcher, 2019)**

From table 1.4, we observe that majority of the teachers had 3-6 years of teaching experience. Only a few of the respondents (<20%) had a teaching experience of beyond 7 years. This finding implies that most of the teachers had the necessary experience to teach in the ECDE centers in Sabatia Sub County. The researcher further established that most of the respondents who reported over 7 years of teaching experience were mainly the Head Teachers.

### **Social Development among Preschools in Sabatia sub-county**

This study wanted to identify the influence of child play activities on social development of ECDE learners in preschools in Sabatia sub-county. In order to achieve this, the study was guided objective which could be summarized as the influence of exploratory child play activities on social development. The study sought to find the extent of social Development as a dependent variable, before finding the influence of child play activities on it. This was necessary so as to assess the level of play among ECDE learners in public preschools. Therefore, various techniques to enable mixed methods and triangulation of the findings were used to achieve this objective. This included presentation of the findings starting with descriptive statistics, followed by qualitative finding which were verbatim reports and thematic analysis from emerging themes and observation schedules. The findings were therefore presented starting with Descriptive findings.

### **Exploratory Child Play on Social Development among ECDE Learners**

In order to achieve the influence of exploratory child play on social development among ECDE learners in public preschools in Sabatia sub-county, findings were presented from different perspectives to utilise mixed methodology design. The methods included triangulating descriptive findings with inferential findings and finally qualitative. Findings from literature were added to compare, and contrast the present finding, and make a conclusion. The findings were therefore presented in an order starting with descriptive findings, then qualitative and finally inferential findings.

### **Descriptive Findings on Exploratory Child Play among ECDE Learners**

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which this practice was embraced in schools. The questionnaire consisted of 7 items all on a five-point Likert scale, having questions that reflected different aspects of exploratory child play activities. These were, measures ranging from not at all=1, rarely=2, often =3, more often=4, up to always=5 on the scale, which were consequently rated in ranges for the means that were; not at all (M=1-1.5), rarely (M=1.6-2.5), often (M=2.6-3.5), more often (M=3.6-4.5), always (M=4.6-5.0). The findings are presented as shown in table 1.5 using frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations.

**Table 6.0 Extent of Practice of Exploratory Child Play Activities**

No	Statements on Exploratory Child Play in ECDE schools	Not at all f (%) 1	Rarely f (%) 2	Often f (%) 3	More often f (%) 4	Always f (%) 5	M	ST D
	Teachers allow learners to Exploring objects	45(41)	45(41)	6(5)	13(12)	0(0.0)	1.88	.96
	Teachers encourage learners to touch objects	1(1)	16(15)	53(49)	5(5)	34(31)	3.50	1.1
	Teachers encourage learners to mouth and toss objects	28(26)	24(22)	27(25)	30(27)	0(0.0)	2.54	1.1
	Teachers allow learners to squeeze and bang objectives	50(46)	14(13)	11(10)	21(19)	13(12)	2.39	1.5
	Learners are allowed to mould clay and create objects	14(13)	22(20)	31(28)	31(28)	11(10)	3.03	1.1
	Schools provide child play different materials for exploring	59(54)	26(24)	17(16)	3(3)	4(4)	1.78	1.0
	Learners given material and encouraged to paint and play	15(14)	9(8)	4(4)	21(19)	60(55)	3.94	1.4
<b>Overall mean and standard deviation</b>							<b>2.72</b>	<b>1.1</b>

The findings indicate that teachers do not allow ECDE learners to explore objects as indicated by 41.3% of the respondents who reported that they rarely or did not at all allow them. A mean of 1.88 and a standard deviation of 0.96 were also obtained on the same statement, implying that the response fell in the category of rarely allowing learners to practice exploratory play by exploring objects. Findings further revealed that learners were not allowed to squeeze and bang objects [50(45.9%), M=2.39, SD=1.5], school did not provide child play different materials [59(54.1%), M=1.78, SD=1.0] but often allowed the learners to touch objects [53(48.6%), M=3.50, SD=1.1]. However, learners were always given painting material and allowed to paint and play [60(55.0%), M=3.94, SD=1.4]. The overall mean and standard deviation revealed that ECDE learners often practiced exploratory child play activities [M=2.72, SD=1.1].

### **Inferential statistics on Exploratory Child Play on among Preschool Learners**

In order to determine the influence of exploratory child play on social Development among preschool ECDE learners, a null hypothesis which stated that “Exploratory child play activities have no influence on social Development among ECDE learners in public pre-schools in Sabatia Sub-County, Vihiga County, Kenya” was tested. Simple linear regression model was used to test this hypothesis in order to accept or reject the null hypothesis before reaching the conclusion. Results are presented as shown in table 4.8

**Table 7.0 Regression Model Summary on Exploratory Child Play**

Variables	Social Development Among ECDE Preschool Learners		
	B	SE(B)	B
Exploratory Child Play	0.613	0.027	0.912**
R	0.912		
R Square	.831		
Adjusted R Square	.829		
F Change	526.269**		

KEY: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $N = 109$ ,  $df_1 = 1$ ,  $df_2 = 107$

The findings in table 4.8 indicate that exploratory child play activities were correlated to social development and therefore explained 83.1% significant change in social development among public preschool ECDE learners [R Square=.831,  $F(1, 107) = 526.269$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Exploratory child play activities therefore uniquely contributed to social development among ECDE learners in preschools and hence predicted it ( $\beta = 0.912$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Due to the large percentage variance in social development explained by exploratory child play, it can be inferred that there is a high significant influence of exploratory child play activities on their social development. Hence the more the schools practice child play activities, the more the learners adjust socially, a finding that was further demonstrated by the unique significant contribution, which implies that one standard deviation change of ( $SD = 1.1$ ) in exploratory child play activities leads to 0.912 unit rise in the level of social development among the learners and hence exploratory child play plays a significant role. However, there were still low levels of exploratory child play activities in preschools in Sabatia sub-county, Vihiga County, as indicated by descriptive statistics that showed a mean of 2.72.

### **Qualitative Findings on Exploratory Child Play**

The findings from interview schedule and observation schedule were analysed in themes and reported in themes and verbatim reports. Parents and QUASO officers were approached to share their views on the way in which they perceived the influence of exploratory child play activities on social development among ECDE learners. One of the parents coded as parent 009 was quoted saying,

*“My child is doing very well, though the she always says that teacher wants her to study always. However, she does not do a lot of exploratory activities as you explained, they are prohibited. I think this has created fear in her and her social life is not yet improved according to your explanation.”*

From these findings, the parent has noted that teachers are in most cases encouraging the child to read more and more. It is also clear that the teachers do not encourage much of exploratory child play as observed by the parent, and furthermore, the parent has noted some fear in her child. These findings were not far from the results of interview with other parents, whose views revolved about restriction by teachers on exploratory activities on their children. Others also had complained that their children were duller as compared to when they went to school, a time when they wanted to do a lot of exploration. This means that school's ban and prohibition of exploratory child play activities could be having a negative influence on social development among learners in these schools.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Exploratory Child Play on Social Development**

Exploratory child play is an important play activity among ECDE learners in preschools. This is seen from its high influence on social development. From these findings, the parent has noted that teachers are in most cases encouraging the child to read more and more. The high percentage change in social development among ECDE learners due to exploratory child play was evident. This means that without exploratory child play, learners can lack some stages in their development thus leading to mal-development. It is also clear that the teachers do not encourage much of exploratory child play as observed by the parent, and furthermore, the parent has noted some fear in her child. These findings were not far from the results of interview with other parents, whose views revolved about restriction by teachers on exploratory activities on their children. Others also had complained that their children were duller as compared to when they went to school, a time when they wanted to

do a lot of exploration. According to a study by Kananu (2005), a strong relation exists between exploratory play in resource availability and effective use as related to academic achievement.

**SUMMARY.**

The findings are presented in this sub-section based on the objectives of the study. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of; exploratory child play activities on social development of ECDE public preschool learners in Sabatia Sub- County.

The findings revealed that exploratory child play was often practiced in these schools, contrary to the prevailing hypothesis that they are always practiced. This is a low extent as indicated by a low mean. However, this kind of play was found to have an influence on child's social development as indicated by a significant percentage change in social development that was explained by exploratory child play activities. This was also supported by qualitative findings from interview schedule which summed up, implies that exploratory child play had an impact on learners' social development, though it was not embraced by school systems.

**CONCLUSION.**

Based on the findings of the study, conclusion was made objectively as follows;

Schools are doing very little to facilitate this kind of play activities and this has deprived learners the necessary essential skills for social development. The play is not to the standards, but can have a more positive influence on the learners' social development. If its practice is increased, then learners are likely to progress in their social growth to a very great extent, but this is not the case. The kind of influence achieved is due to the average practice of this activity thus leading to average social development.

**RECOMMENDATIONS.**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings and the conclusions of the study:

- i. School management should be flexible on teachers and encourage them to help learners practice a lot of exploratory children play so as to improve their social development.
- ii. It is the mandate of the ministry of education to promote short term training on learner based creative activities, a program that should be embraced by schools so as to enable growth in these areas by ECDE learners
- iii. Schools should make it a routine to organize dramatic child play activities so as to enable learners improve their social skills
- iv. The government should provide funds to buy play items for all pre schools
- v. The government should make a strict follow up for free time or break times to enable pupils to play
- vi. Schools should provide safe, secure and big areas for playing
- vii. Parents should be encouraged to enhance their children's play activities and allow the enough time to play with others.

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