Strengthening learning through play for preschoolers in Kenya: Existing approaches, capacity gaps and policy recommendations

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“Play is the most important activity, the central focus and the primary occupation of childhood”

Chandler 1997

“What we learn with pleasure we never forget”

Alfred Mercier
Introduction

- Quality ECE improves school readiness, positively influences learning outcomes, & increases school completion rates.
- Positive effects are particularly strong for children who are marginalized.
- Play is a valued and ever-present aspect of culture and is believed to promote enjoyable learning if fully utilized.
- Challenges with quality and equitable access still exist, particularly effective delivery of content through play-based approaches.
Aims of the study

➢ Determine the existing learning through play (LtP) approaches in preschools and at home

➢ Establish the capacity gaps in the provision of LtP for preschoolers

Provide policy recommendations based on the study results
Methodology

➢ Descriptive cross-sectional study using baseline data from a prospective study

➢ We established parents’ and teachers’ current LtP approaches across the four domains:
  • Fine motor skills
  • Gross motor skills
  • Language skills
  • Socio-emotional skills

Categorical variables were summarized using frequencies & percentages
Continuous variables were presented using means and standard deviations
Study sites

Three Counties – Kajiado, Nairobi & Kiambu

Ten schools from each sub-county

Study sites selected in consultation with the County and National government officials
Results

Parents' characteristics

➢ On average parents were 37 years old
➢ About 28% were males
➢ Over 80% were married
➢ 17% did not have any form of education while 7% had university education
➢ 34% were not employed

Teachers’ characteristics

➢ On average teachers were 41 years old
➢ Only 3% were males
➢ 95% had college level education where majority had diploma training
➢ 47% had more than 5 years teaching experience
➢ 89% are employed by the County government

Preschool children under the study were on average 3.5 years old
Majority of the parents reported drawing and manipulation of small objects while majority of teachers reported modeling and drawing as the main activities.
Existing approaches: Gross motor skills

Play activities at home:
- Ball games
- Skipping
- Running
- Jumping
- Hide and seek
- Rolling tires
- Dancing
- Hula hooping
- Riding
- Swinging
- Swimming
- Bouncing
- Climbing
- Seesawing

Play activities in school:
- Skipping
- Ball games
- Rolling tires
- Hula hooping
- Running
- Jumping
- Swinging
- Climbing
- Seesawing
- Dancing
- Racing games
- Hide and seek
- Riding
- Swimming
- Bouncing

Ball games and skipping are the main activities reported by majority of parents and teachers.
Singing which promotes language development was reported as the main activity at both home and school.
Existing approaches: Socio-emotional skills

Sharing which promotes socio-emotional development was also the main activity at home and school.
Capacity gaps

- Weak linkage between parents at home and teachers in school
- Limited male involvement in promoting LtP
- Inadequate skills in teachers to effectively use LtP for all children
Policy recommendations

➢ Sensitization and awareness for parents and teachers to support LtP in school & home

➢ Increase regular capacity building for teachers through training on LtP

➢ Increase ECDE budgetary allocation to support the development LtP equipment in school.

➢ Partnerships with local, national and international organizations on provision of LtP resources
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