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Influence of Instructional Practices on Play-Based Activities In Pre-School Curriculum Implementation In Homabay County.

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Abstract: Play in Early Childhood Education is paramount in all aspects of growth and development in young children. Play based learning has both developmental and educational benefits. Many children exhibit increased learning difficulties, inability to solve simple problems associated with socialization and control of emotions, many cases of truancy, and aggressive behavior, compounded with total lack of interest towards learning and as a result the study sought to investigate factors influencing instructional practices on play-based activities in Pre-school Curriculum Implementation in Homabay County**.** The study was guided by social constructivism theory lev vygosky (1934) employed concurrent triangulation research design. The study targeted 1257 Pre-school teachers, 908 key informants (lead teachers) and 8 Sub-county directors. The sample size for both pre-school teachers and lead teachers was 297 and 48 respectively. Both Proportionate sampling and Systematic Simple random technique were used to get the actual sample. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the lead teachers and Sub-county directors. Data collection tools were questionnaire, interview schedule, and Focus Group Discussion. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics using Statistical Package for Social Science version 24. The results of the study showed that most of the teachers always used child centred rather than teacher centred approach in play-based activities, 169 (83.7%) of them always allowed learners to explore and discover on their own through play-based activities. On the contrary, the findings of the study established that some preschool teachers used instructional practices that had adverse effect on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum. There was statistically significant plausible (n=202; r =.568; p<.05), positive influence of instructional practices on play-based activities on pre-school curriculum implementation. It was also a significant predicator [F (1, 200) = 95.299, p < .05] to curriculum implementation and it accounted for 32.3% (R^2=.323) of the variation

Key words: Instructional, Practices, Play-based, Pre-school, curriculum, implementation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood educators have long believed that play based activities makes important contributions to children's development and therefore must have a key role in pre-school curriculum. These educationists have also known that play is a rich, varied, and complex process that requires ample time, materials, and resources. However, these teachers face mounting pressure from parents and administrators to provide structured, formal instructions as a result, the amount of time allocated to play has been severely reduced in many early childhood programs (Bodrova and Leong, 2007). Insufficient time for play affects children's growth and development.

Despite the numerous benefits derived from play-based activities for children, time for play has been markedly reduced for some children (Shankoff and Philiphs, 2000). This has even affected pre-school children, who have had free play reduced in their schedules to make room for more academics. In the present state, many schools are giving children a less free time and very fewer physical outlets at school. Many schools have reduced time committed to recess, creative arts, and even physical education in an effort to focus on reading and arithmetic. This trend may have implications on children's ability to store new information, because children's cognitive capacity is enhanced by a clear-cut and significant change in activity. (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005).

Through play experiences, children learn about themselves, their environment, and the people in their lives, experiment with different ways to solve problems; develop body control; practice social skills; and

express their creativity hence they gain confidence as they choose toys and materials that are of particular interest to them. An environment that encourages children to make their own choices helps them feel safe, valued, adventurous, competent, and confident to take the initiative (Elis and Arnold, 2000). These two further argues that play materials for children add value to play. Children should be provided with playing materials as a way of enhancing their play. Teachers and parents are required to provide playing materials to their children so as to help them get engaged in meaningful play which influences their social skills development.

Play is the first and most important defining behavior of a young child. Integration of play in learning activities lead to children's development on language skills; memory; concentration; imagination; creativity; learn about the world and new things (Morita, 2004). Play activities are educational in that they enforce certain skills such as mathematics, spelling and reading. Play is essential for optimal development of a child. It has been recognized by the United Nation High Commission for Human Rights as a right for every child (UNHRC 2006). There is a score of games used in early childhood to enhance learning. Play is important when your child enters school. Play can assist children in adjusting to a school setting. It enhances children's learning readiness and their cognitive development by allowing them to tackle learning experiences without fear of failure. Integration of play in learning, allows practicing of basic social skills.

A study carried in Boston in U.S.A. Chalufour, and Worth (2003) argues that children's play does more than stimulate physical, social-emotional, and creative development. In support of this, Isenbearg and Quisenberry(2002) have stated that, Play is also the primary means by which children explore the world, investigate its properties, and build an understanding about how the world works (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). A study by Rebecca (2002) revealed that play is an integral part of the curriculum, founded on the belief that children learn through self-initiated free play in an exploratory environment. She suggested that play is the principal means of learning in early childhood.

Play based activities promotes social interaction skills in children and strengthen the desire to interact in the process (Mahindu, 2011). (Njoki 2007 and Wangari 2011) argues that play is one of the important ways through which children learn. It is an important and key need for the children to develop cognitive social and religious boarders. Evidently, if this unfortunate trend persists, play as a curriculum implementation process is at risk of being completely ignored by many ECDE curriculum implementers in Kenya. When curriculum implementers ignore play, some things are likely to happen, and none is plausible .It will lead to poor performance in ECDE centers as teachers won't recognize and appreciate the relevance and influence of play to teaching and learning of small children (the Republic of Kenya, 2006).

In this regard therefore, there was an urgent need investigate the factors that influence instructional practices on play-based activities in Pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County Kenya. Research has demonstrated the developmental and educational benefits of play. Despite these benefits, teacher-directed academic instruction is prominent in Pre-schools. There is increasing acknowledgment in curricula and policies of the challenges presented by a lack of play in classrooms and the need to support academic learning using developmentally appropriate practices.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Curriculum goals are broad and general statements helpful in the development of programs of instruction or for general goals toward which several years of education might be aimed, such as elementary, middle, and high school courses of study (Pinar, 2012). In it are instructional objectives are precise statements that indicate what students will be able to do as a consequence of instruction (Gronlund, 2004).According to Bloom's Taxonomy, after every learning process, a learner should have acquired new knowledge (cognitive, the head), skill (psychomotor, the hand) and attitude (affective, the heart),which are referred to as holistic education (Clark, 2015). Therefore a teacher training programme should have a curriculum that embraces these aspects.

Gopnik (2011) in America explored how curiosity and imagination impacted on learning. In one study, two groups of children were presented with four tubes, new toys in the classroom. The study used experimental design in that one group of preschoolers, the experimenter presented the tubes to the children and, with excitement and curiosity, pulled on one tube and acted surprised as it squeaked. In the other group, the experimenter demonstrated how one of the tubes squeaked and told the children how the tubes worked. Both groups were allowed to play with the tubes. The experimenters discovered that the children from the first group played with the tubes longer and discovered the special features of the other tubes. The second group had less curiosity and did not play with the tubes as long as the first group did. In response to this study, Gopnik (2011) noted, It's more important than ever to give children's remarkable, spontaneous learning abilities free rein, and that a rich, stable, and safe world, with affectionate and supportive grown-ups, and lots of opportunities for exploration and play. The current study employed concurrent triangulation research design and included pre-school teachers, lead teachers and sub county directors to give in depth information on instructional practices while the discussed review adopted experimental design

Younquist and Joan (2004) carried out a study in Chicago on the relevance of play in early childhood curriculum established. The study employed descriptive survey design with a population of 20 teachers. The finding of the study was that most ECDE teachers in cooperate both relevant and irrelevant play activities in the teaching and learning process. They also pointed out that a relevant play activity is the one which enables both teachers and learners to achieve an educational objective. The population size of 20 teachers in this study seemed to be inadequate, the current study on other side had a large enough size of population of 297 pre-school teachers and it was to find out the aspects of play based activities and their influence on implementation of ECDE curriculum.

Barcelonbymeque, nauria and edelmira (2009) in their study on Mathematical learning in the context of play to find out the relevance of symbolic play activity on the improvement of mathematical thinking carried out with a group of 26 pupils aged 5-6 in public urban ECDE centers pointed out; symbolic play activities as they simplify explanation and ease understanding of complicated mathematical problems. These study differs from this study as it was to establish the relevance of commonly used play activities in ECDE centers other than aspects of play based activities and there influence in curriculum implementation.

Jemma and bull (2008) carried out a study in Aberdeen , Scotland to determine the relevance of linear number board play on the development of numeracy skills using a small development of numeracy skills using a small sample of 10 pre-school age children. They used practical experiment as a method of data collection and found out that ; linear number board play needs teachers guide the teaching and learning processes for it to sound relevant and effect to small children during a mathematical lesson. The findings suggested that playing linear number board games would improve children's numerical estimation skills and number comprehension. Furthermore, the nonlinear number game involving non-symbolic magnitude comparisons and associations between symbolic and non-symbolic quantities also resulted in children's improvement in some basic numerical skills without their showing any signs of improvement in the linearity of numerical representations. This study differed from the reviewed study as it investigated aspects of play based activities and its influence on the entire ECDE curriculum implementation other than studying the relevance of a specific play activity on implementation of a specific subject.

A study carried out in Sweden by NiklasPramling (2008) which examined teacher's use of storytelling as a method of integrating play and learning while teaching division to six year pre-school children. The study employed experimentation as the only method of data collection The findings established that; ECDE teachers have a role of integrating story telling in the process of teaching division in mathematics so as to motivate learners. In this study only one data collection instrument experimentation was used which might have been inadequate for accuracy of data collected while this study employed the use of questionnaires interviews and focus group discussions as methods of data collection which are expected to yield more accurate data hence enable triangulation.

A study carried out by Walsh & Gardner, (2006) Michigan, USA, examined early childhood programs in showed that the children in the programs encouraging self-initiated activity, including play, were faring significantly better than the children receiving more direct academic instruction. The study reported that early childhood programs in which teachers encourage children to initiate and activate their own learning activities are more beneficial than didactic teacher-directed programs. The measures included intellectual and scholastic performance over time, self-reports, various aspects of social behavior and attitudes, mental health, employment and financial affairs. Other studies have also reached similar conclusions. The children in the more formal settings were found to possess a lower degree of social acceptance and more anxiety about school, while those in play-based programs displayed greater academic progress in reading and writing (Walsh & Gardner, 2006). For this reason, it is important to incorporate a play-based approach as part of the pre-school curriculum to help children develop physically, academically, mentally, and socially. However the current study did not focus on the entire early childhood programs but rather curriculum implementation in the ECDE.

A study carried out in United Kingdom by Couch and Kathy (2008) meant to describe the role of playful pedagogies in early childhood education centers had a population of 20 teachers against 100 children. Descriptive survey design was used in this study and the finding was that story telling is among essential types and methods of teaching and learning through play in ECDE centers. Couch and Kathy's (2008) used inadequate population which might have not given rise to accurate information while this study had a larger population which is expected to give rise to more accurate information and it is meant to establish instructional practice as a determinant of play based activities in curriculum implementation.

A study carried out in London by Laura and Barraf (2007) to establish the relationship that exist between exploratory play and pre-school children's method of learning, cause and effect relationship found out that; play is an effective and convenient method of teaching and learning of small children as it is entirely learner centred. The study was based on observation of free play among 64 pre-school children which is an inadequate population that might not have given rise to accurate data. This study on the other hand had a larger size of population which is expected to give rise to more accurate information. The study by laura et al (2007)

employed experimental investigation method for data collection while the current study employed the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion as methods of data collection.

Monica and Franca (2012) in Milano, investigated the meaning and effect of working with materials at schools, based on two parallel and complementary processes: finished and unfinished objects. The study design was an exploratory survey which confirmed that working with different types of materials makes it possible for children to develop their creativity through different but just as important pathways, useful to develop strategies for experimenting, broadening and deepening the use of materials at school both theoretically and methodologically, so that the choice of which materials to use is more and more intentional on the part of the teachers. Working with finished objects showed that using these materials with different functions than the usual ones allowed for the development of new ideas regarding already known objects, stimulating reflection on the single components which composed the whole, creating novelty and moving away from the expected. The use of unfinished objects highlighted the indefinite qualities of unstructured materials, especially materials discarded from industrial processes, offering new opportunities also both for the teachers leading the workshops, as well as creating very specific areas of investigation for the children who experimented with several languages and thus learned on different levels, stimulating them to find creative strategies to deal with the questions that came up. This exploratory survey confirmed that working with different types of materials makes it possible for children to develop their creativity through different but equally important pathways, useful to develop strategies for experimenting, broadening and deepening the use of materials at school both theoretically and methodologically, so that the choice of which materials to use is more and more intentional on the part of the teachers. The reviewed study employed exploratory survey While current study used a Concurrent triangulation design hence enable triangulation that brings out true picture of events

A study in Zimbabwe by Maphosa, et.al. (2013) that explored teacher's views of the nature of issues handled in clusters and how such issues are important in curriculum improvement. The study had a population of 242 head teachers, Semi-structured questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data. Data was analyzed qualitatively through content and emerging key issues analysis. The findings of the study were that; school clusters handled mostly general administrative and peripheral teaching and learning issues that could not result in major curriculum improvement in schools. The study concluded that; there were serious inadequacies in clusters in so far as dealing with issues that could result in curriculum improvement was concerned. The current study involved a larger population of 297 teachers as its main respondents, it used questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions as methods of data collection, and data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively

A study by Nair, et.al... (2013) conducted in Malaysian on the effects of using the play method and the conventional method to teach the Malay Language to pre-school children. The researchers investigated whether the use of the play method helped to enhance the mastery of Malay vocabulary and interest in the Malay Language among pre-school children. The study employed quasi-experimental design where the population consisted of 100 pre-school children from a Tamil-medium, government pre-school. The Experimental Group was taught using the play method and the Control Group was taught using the conventional method. The study was conducted over a period of six weeks. The finding of this research was that the utilization of the play method significantly enhances the mastery of vocabulary and interest in learning the Malay Language among the pupils. The current study was based on concurrent triangulation research design and was conducted through the use of questionnaires, interviews and FDGs administered to pre-school teacher, lead teachers and sub county directors who enact and supervise the implementation of pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County.

A study by Saayah (2008) in Melaka, Malaysia investigated the effectiveness of using the play method in five kindergartens. The paper was based on a quasi-experimental study. The sample size of the study consisted of 25 teachers and 810 students. The findings showed that kindergarten teachers lacked knowledge on the play method, and the teachers found it difficult to implement the play method in the teaching and learning processes. Saayah (2008) compared the effects of using the play method and the conventional method to teach the Malay Language to preschool children. The researchers investigated whether the use of the play method helped to enhance the mastery of Malay vocabulary and interest in the Malay Language among preschool children. The findings of this research indicated that the utilization of the play method significantly enhances the mastery of vocabulary and interest in learning the Malay Language among the pupils. The results of this study indicated that the implementation of the play method can help to improve the mastery of vocabulary among preschool children compared with the conventional method. The findings also indicate that the play method enhances pupils' interest in learning the Malay Language because they find the learning experience more enjoyable and full of fun. Children are also able to interact with their friends during the activities; as such they master the vocabulary better. Therefore, preschool teachers should consider the play method as an alternative method to teach preschool children. The play method provides opportunity for children to learn through touch, feel and experience especially when they play games. On the whole, the play method offers full benefits to

preschool children in the process of learning. The current study involved more teachers in Homabay County and also involved education officers at the supervisory level in the process of curriculum implementation in ECDE.

A study by Kamau (2010) Mukuyu zone, Murang'a south District on impact of the pre-school programme on mathematics performance in lower primary schools found out that play was the most relevant method of teaching difficult mathematical concepts in pre-schools so as to ensure easy understanding of the concepts. The study used a descriptive survey design to achieve the set objectives. In the Makuyu zone there are 31 public primary schools with a population of 3,593 boys and 3,404 girls, making a total of 6,997 pupils at the lower primary level. In these primary schools there were 15 male teachers and 25 female teachers, making a total of 40. The 31 primary schools had a total of 31 head teachers. A sample population of 60 pupils, 30 teachers and 10 head teachers was chosen for the study, which used open-ended questionnaires and interview schedules for data collection. The data collected was coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics and the results presented in tables and charts. The study found a persistent indication that a discontinuity exists between pre-school learning methods and those in the lower primary schools. Kamau (2010) further recommended that the teaching methods for lower primary should be amended to ensure allowance for play integration that will enhance stages of child's development and provide opportunities to encourage children to improve in their ability to understand and apply mathematical concepts. The study differs from the current because it was conducted in lower primary schools while the current study was conducted in ECDE centers and was not only focused on specific subject area but on the Play- based activities in curriculum implementation in ECDE.

A study carried out by Andiema (2016) investigated the effect of child centered methods on teaching and learning of science activities in pre-schools in West Pokot County, Kenya. The study was descriptive in nature as it sought pre-school teachers and head teachers views. The instruments used for this study were; questionnaires, interview guide and observation checklist by the researcher. A total of 168 teachers and 35 head teachers responded to the research questionnaires. The research results showed that there existed significant relationship ($p<0.01$) between four child centered approaches and pupils teaching and learning of science in public early childhood education centres. For instance, use of child discovery ($r=0.370$ and $p=0.001$) and activity based approaches ($r=0.360$ and $p=0.001$) had higher correlations compared to child interest ($r=0.215$ and $p=0.007$) and child needs approaches ($r=0.181$ and $p=0.024$). The study concluded that teachers' use of child-centred approaches affected pupils' acquisition of science skills in schools. Andiema (2016) recommended that teachers should change their classroom learning to allow learners regular interaction with the outside the classroom (active learning). The proposed study used FGDs in addition to questionnaires and interviews to investigate the instructional practices on play based activities used in pre-school curriculum implementation

A study by Wasiche (2006) in Kisumu, Kenya on school factors influencing implementation of early childhood development and education curriculum. The sample size of the study comprised of 19 ECDE centers, 19 head-teachers and directors, 57 ECDE teachers, 190 ECDE learners and 4 DICECE officers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques as well as inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation. The findings showed that Instruction related factors influence the process of curriculum implementation and the learning environment. Language and literacy develop concurrently and influence one another. What children learn from listening such as stories and talking contributes to their ability to read and write. Instructional approaches are critical elements during curriculum implementation, and it is assumed that as the curricula change so should the instructional methodology. The reviewed study aimed at establishing the influence of instructional methods on the pre-school curriculum implementation. Whereas current study on the other hand investigated aspects that influencing play based activities in pre-school curriculum implementations

A study by Mweru (2012) conducted in Kenya to establish role of a teacher in integration of play in ECDE curriculum, agreed with Goffin and Wilson's (2003) findings where it postulated that, teachers have a responsibility to also take care of their children's good grooming and hygiene; encourage children to work hard, discuss and solve problems in groups; introduce children to Mathematics, Language, Science, Social Studies, Play activities and games. The study was based on Descriptive survey design. It involved; 430 teachers drawn from 215 pre-schools (33% of the study population) and1 District Program Officer, selected using Simple random sampling and Saturated sampling techniques respectively. Data was collected by a questionnaire, an interview schedule and a lesson observation schedule. The study found out that: Most teachers do not fulfill some of the roles specified to them in integration of play in ECDE curriculum. The study emphasized that teachers are expected to use games, music, artwork, films, books, charts and the like to teach basic skills. Mweru's (2012) study focused on the teachers' influence on children's selection and use of play materials in the whole country, while the present study was focused on the perception of pre-school teachers 'on play based activities in curriculum implementation.

Research Methodology

The study used mixed method research approach. This approach draws the strength of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Acccording to Oxman et al (2009) mixed methods approach can be used in exploring behavioral process that cannot be captured by using either quantitative or qualitative methods in

isolation. Use of both quantitative and qualitative provides rich answers to the research questions. The approach enabled the study to gather adequate information that provided a better understanding of a research problem and answering the entire research questions other than using qualitative or quantitative research approach alone (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). It increases the overall strength of a study by enhancing the validity and trustworthy of data collected (Denscom be 2010). There as on behind mixed method is that both approaches may be in sufficient by themselves but in this study, either filled in the gaps of the other to provide different evidences that could be corroborated(Mugendaand Mugenda, 2003).

For this study, the target population comprised of 1252 pre-school teachers who were the main respondents, 906 lead teachers and 8 Sub- County directors who were the key informants in the study. The number of public ECDE Centers in Homabay County is 906 (MEO, Homabay County 2016). The research adopted, proportionate sampling systematic random and purposive sampling techniques due to the nature of the target population in order to obtain the sample size, various sampling procedures were used as explained below. The study used questionnaires, interviews, observation and focus grouped discussions in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions. Data was collected by use of the questionnaires and interview teachers' lesson observation schedule in order to get the desired information. For effective administration, the questionnaires, interview schedule and lesson observation schedule was administered to various respondents by the researcher and research assistant. Data collected from administrations of the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively while data from the interviews, Focus group discussions observation, were analyzed qualitative.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examined the influence of instructional practices on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum implementationin Homabay County. This objective was addressed byexploring preschool teachers' instructional practices on play-based activities in preschool curriculum implementation, then an inferential statistics to establish whether there was any statistical significant influence of instructional practices on play-based activities in preschool curriculum implementation. To investigate preschool teachers' instructional practices on play-based activities, ten items from the Instructional Practices on Play-Based Questionnaire was used. The preschool teachers rated the items whose constructs were indicators of instructional practices on play-based activities using: 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree.
Their views were summarized in percentage frequencies as shown in the tables below:

Questionnaire Return Rate
The table below shows the summary of return rate of questionnaires from the respondents, reveals that the questionnaires were adequate for the study.

Questionnaire Return Rate

Respondents	**Questionnaires administered**	**Questionnaires returned**	**Return rate (%)**
Pre-school teachers	297	202	68.8

Source: Survey data (2018)

The above table shows that from a total of 297 questionnaires administered to the preschool teachers, 202 of them were received for data analysis, which is equivalent to 68.8% response rate. Morgan (2006) and Onen (2009) propose that a 50% return rate is adequate, 60% is good enough while the return rate of above 70% is very good. Visser, Krosnick, Marquette and Curtin (2000) on their part observed that surveys with response rates of above 50% for survey data collected from homogeneous population is adequate enough to yield accurate measurements. Grounded on these assertions, the current study's questionnaire return rate of 68.8% is therefore considered good enough. The noted high response rate was attributed to the fact that the questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher to the respondents. The researcher also pre-notified the study participants of the intended and intention of the study, communicated aggressively to track responses and sent reminders to stimulate participation. In addition, the questionnaires were simple, friendly to pre-school teachers whom were assured of confidentiality of the data collected.

Respondents' Demographic Information

The study sought to investigate the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Demographic information was considered necessary for the determination of whether the respondents were representative sample of the target population for generalization of the results of the study. The demographic information investigated include gender and age.

Gender and Age of the Preschool Teacher Respondents

The table below shows the gender and age information of the pre-school teachers who took part in the survey.

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Bio-data	Count	Percent	Cumulative percentage
Gender			
Male	13	6.4	6.4
Female	189	93.6	100.0
Total	202	100.0	
Age (Years)			
≤ 30	71	35.1	35.1
31-40	97	48.0	83.1
41-50	28	13.9	97.0
≥ 51	6	3.0	100.0
Total	202	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2018)

It is evident from the above table that a significant majority 189 (93.6%) of the students were males, with female students being only slightly more than a third of the respondents. This may not be surprising because it is generally believed that male teachers inherently are not keen to teach preschool learners. Pre-school education is generally viewed as female teachers' dominance. However, it is noted that although only 13 (6.4%) of the sampled teachers were males, both gender was represented in the study.

On their ages, it was established from the results of the survey that majority 97 (48.0%) of the respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years. Only 6 (3.0%) of the preschool teacher respondents were aged fifty one years and above, while those under thirty years formed 71 (35.1%) of the entire population of pre-school teachers sampled for the study. These findings imply that most of the pre-school teachers were still young and were able to effectively indulge in play based activities in pre-school curriculum implementation.

Preschool Teachers Ratings on Instructional Practices on Play-Based Activities

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
My method of play-based teaching is usually thematic.	0(0.0%)	9(4.5%)	17(8.4%)	67(33.2%)	109(54.0%)	4.37	0.82
I always allow learners toexplore and discover on their own through play-based activities.	0(0.0%)	12(5.9%)	21(10.4%)	67(33.2%)	102(50.5%)	4.28	0.88
I always use child centred than teacher centred approach in play-	2(1.0%)	10(5.0%)	19(9.4%)	54(26.7%)	117(57.9%)	4.36	0.91
I use play-based activities which are guided by learners' interest and experience.	11(5.4%)	32(15.8%)	21(10.4%)	57(28.2%)	81(40.1%)	3.82	1.26
I always incorporate relevant play activities in the teaching and learning process.	5(2.5%)	14(6.9%)	27(13.4%)	62(30.7%)	94(46.5%)	4.12	1.04
I let learners get involved in the	8(4.0%)	25(12.4%)	21(10	61(30.2	87(43.1	3.96	1.1
I demonstrate and guide the learner in various play activities.	2(1.0%)	4(2.0%)	22(10.9%)	54(26.7%)	120(59.4%)	4.42	0.84
I ensure that there is sequential arrangement of play-based activities during teaching and learning.	0(0.0%)	15(7.4%)	21(10.4%)	68(33.7%)	98(48.5%)	4.23	0.91
I incorporate both ability and mixed ability grouping during play-activities.	6(3.0%)	8(4.0%)	25(12.4%)	80(39.6%)	83(41.1%)	4.12	0.97
I adequately plan and prepare all my lessons with view of incorporating play-based activities.	4(2.0%)	24(11.9%)	22(10.9%)	57(28.2%)	95(47.0%)	4.06	1.11
Mean average ratings on instructional practices on play-based activities						4.17	0.61

Source: Survey data (2018)

Key: Strongly Disagree (AD) =1, Disagree (D) =2, Undecided (UD) =3, Agree (A) =4, Strongly Agree (AA) =5 and SD-Standard Deviation.

From the analysis of the responses of the pre-school teachers, it emerged that although they used varied instructional practices it emerged that there was considerable amount of use of instructional methods that were thematic in nature and involved play-based activity areas, as reflected by mean average response rate of 4.17 (SD=0.61) in the scale of 1-5. This was also echoed by the sentiments during focused group discussions, where it was found that the main method of instruction is thematic in the ECDE curriculum and that it's the one recommended in early years. One of the members of the discussion said;

"Pre-school teachers in my center more so the kindergarten one group use pure thematic teaching. Whereby, they use a specific theme to teach all the activity areas at a particular time. This is because it makes learning interesting and relating and makes the learner be able to understand with ease" [FGD, 1].

Similarly, during the interviews, it was noted that effective teaching in pre-school is through thematic teaching. This enables the learning to be systematic and the learners to relate what is learnt with their experiences efficacy,. For instance, one of them had this to say;

During my supervision in most of the ECDE centers I can confirm that most of our pre-school teachers employ thematic teaching and when this is done one is able to observe that the learners enjoy the whole process and are involved in process of learning. I have encouraged all the teachers to embrace the thematic approach to enable them achieve set goals effectively [sub- county director 3].

This is an indication that the mastery of concepts and enjoyment by the learners is well taken care of when the teachers employ thematic approach. This was also echoed by Niklas and Pramling (2008) in their study on teacher's use of storytelling as a method of integrating play and learning while teaching division to six year pre-school children. The study established that; ECDE teachers have a role of integrating story telling in the process of teaching division in mathematics so as to motivate learners.

For instance, it was established by the finding of this study that many of the pre-school teachers always incorporate relevant play activities in the teaching and learning process, as reflected by 156 (77.2%) of the sampled pre-school teachers. Nearly nine out of ten 176 (87.1%) of the preschool teachers confirmed that they always used thematic method in play-based teaching. Similarly, the results of the survey showed that most of the teachers always used child centred than teacher centred approach in play-based activities, as confirmed by a significant majority 171 (84.7%) of the pre-school teachers. Similarly, sub county directors were also interviewed on this they also agreed that most of the ECDE centres incorporated relevant play based materials and the materials are used in the teaching and learning process; one of them had this to say:

Inclusion of relevant play-based materials is one of the most important contributors to a learner's educational success. When teachers use play-based materials well they are able to tackle the learner's weaknesses and support him/her learning together. As such, relevant play-based materials in pre-school are vital [Sub county director 5].

This shows incorporation of relevant play- based materials is very crucial for an effective curriculum implementation in pre-school. However this finding differed with those of, Younquist and Joan (2004), the finding of the study was that most ECDE teachers in cooperate both relevant and irrelevant play activities in the teaching and learning process. They also pointed out that a relevant play activity is the one which enables both teachers and learners to achieve an educational objective. Similarly Barcelonbymeque, nauria and edelmira (2009) indicated that incorporation of symbolic play activities simplify explanation and ease understanding of complicated mathematical problems.

Although 120 (59.4%)of the pre-school teachers who took part in the survey said they were always demonstrating and guiding the learners in various play activities, close to three quarters 148 (73.3%) of them alluded that they always let learners get involved in the discovery of their own knowledge through play-activities. Equally, 169 (83.7%) of them insisted that they always allow learners to explore and discover on their own through play-based activities. These findings imply that most teachers used thematic and learner centre while incorporating play-based activities in curriculum activities. In another Focus group discussion with the pre-school lead teachers, one of them said:

"I personally guide my learners during activity areas and during free play time. Learner's may not be know how to use the materials given to have meaning therefore it's very important to guide so that to get meaning out of the materials in learning process" [Focus group discussion, 2 Homabay]

Another member said this;

'it is important to give learners time to understand their environment on their own so that they can relate with their own experiences through this you find that learners become more creative and can think better so the teacher should just guide but not direct the learners on everything [Focus group discussion, 1]

Similarly, during the interview with the Sub –county directors, one of them said:

"From my own experience in the field and my observation as ECDE supervisor learners can learn a lot on their won than when they are guided by an adult of somebody else they become creative and thinkers and this

*helps a lot in their brain development and even how they socialize they end up socializing more with themselves as they discover their environment. However many teachers in the field don't give learners time to explore on their own due to fixed time to abcd and 123 [*Sub –county director 6*]*

These sentiments imply learners to exploration and discover on their own through play-based activities is important in the learners cognitive development creativity and socialization. These observations also concurs with many studies like that of Walsh & Gardner, (2006) which examined early childhood programs and showed that the children in the programs encouraging self-initiated activity, including play, were faring significantly better than the children receiving more direct academic instruction.

The study reported that early childhood programs in which teachers encourage children to initiate and activate their own learning activities are more beneficial than didactic teacher-directed programs. The measures included intellectual and scholastic performance over time, self-reports, various aspects of social behavior and attitudes. Laura and Barraf (2007) established the relationship that exist between exploratory play and pre-school children's method of learning, cause and effect relationship found out that; exploratory play is an effective and convenient method of teaching and learning of small children as it is entirely learner centred, basing the study on observation of free play among pre-school children.

On the other hand, while many teachers agreed that they used play-based activities which were guided by learners' interest and experience, a respectable proportion 152 (75.2%) of the pre-school teachers indicated that they adequately plan and prepare all their lessons with view of incorporating play-based activities and 166 (82.1%) of them indicated that they always ensured that there was sequential arrangement of play-based activities during teaching and learning. Likewise, about four out of five 163 (80.7%) of the pre-school teachers indicated that they always incorporate both ability and mixed ability grouping during play-activities. A statement drawn from the Focus group discussions with the pre-school lead teachers also confirmed that the sequential arrangement of play based activities in class is always evident. The of the members had this to say;

"A well trained teacher who is committed to his/her work cannot afford to step in a class without a clear guided lesson plan that shows how the lesson will take place and what activity he/she will engage the learners in order to achieve the set objectives. Grouping is a must more so when there are less materials for manipulation it helps in training the learners to share and interact with one another". [Focus group discussions 2]

Similarly Mweru (2012) agreed with Goffin and Wilson's (2003) findings where it postulated that, teachers have a responsibility encourage children to work hard, discuss and solve problems in groups; introduce children to activity areas through Play activities and games. The study emphasized that teachers are expected to use games, music, artwork, films, books, charts and the like to teach basic skills. Kamau (2010) recommended that the teaching methods for lower primary should be amended to ensure allowance for play based activity incorporation that will enhance stages of child's development and provide opportunities to encourage children to improve in their ability to understand and apply mathematical concepts.

On the contrary, the findings of the study established that although many of the pre-school teachers in Homabay County adopted instructional methods that were learner cantered, fully involved the learners and thematic in nature some preschool teachers used instructional practices that had adverse effect on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum. For example, more than a fifth 43 (21.2%) of the pre-school teachers agreed that they rarely used play-based activities which were guided by learners' interest and experience, 33 (16.4%) of them accepted that they hardly let learners get involved in the discovery of their own knowledge through play-activities and 28 (13.9%) of them agreed that they never made any deliberate effort to adequately plan and prepare all their lessons with view of incorporating play-based activities. These was supported by one of the sub county director, where it was found that in spite of the fact that teachers are trained and have documents to prepare most of the teachers do not prepare adequately to teach. One of the sub county director had to say;

"I have been in the field for almost five years but when it comes to adequate preparation the teachers in most schools are rated poorly they don't prepare the professional documents like lesson plan and at times even teaching aids they keep recycling until they become boring to the learners"[sub county director 8]

This is a clear indication that without proper planning the curriculum implementation may be affected adversely because there will be no sequence flow of the lesson and equally play based materials and activities will be in jeopardy.Saayah (2008) findings showed that kindergarten teachers lacked knowledge on the play method, and the teachers found it difficult to implement the play method in the teaching and learning processes. Andiema (2016) investigated the effect of child centered methods on teaching and learning of science activities in preschools recommended that, teachers should change their classroom learning to allow learners regular interaction with the outside the classroom (active learning). Wasiche (2006) stated that a teacher is viewed as the central organizer of learning process; hence the teacher's use of instructional materials is paramount. That the best way of organizing teaching and learning is by use of variety of instructional methods. Instruction related factors are also identified as influencing the process of curriculum implementation and the learning environment. This assertions means that for effective curriculum implementation in pre-school it's important that teachers prepare adequate for the teaching and learning process to be effective and in this planning process.

To investigate whether there was any statistically significant correlation between instructional practices on play-based activities and pre-school curriculum implementation, a bivariate Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation analysis between the scores of the two variables was conducted and to test the hypothesis that

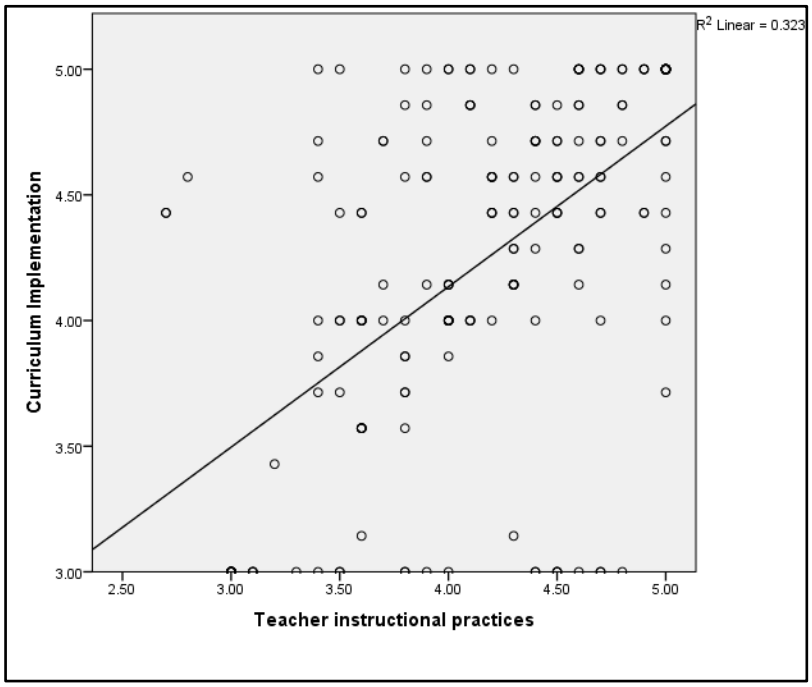
$H_0$1: ***There is no statistically significant influence of instructional practices on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County.***

As shown in Tablet he below

Correlation between Instructional Practices on Play-based Activities and Pre-School Curriculum Implementation

		Curriculum Implementation	Teacher instructional practices
Curriculum Implementation	Pearson Correlation	1	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	202	202
Teacher instructional practices	Pearson Correlation	.568**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	202	202
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

From the Table above, it is evident that there was statistically significant moderate (n=202; r =.568; p<.05), positive correlation between instructional practices on play-based activities and pre-school curriculum implementation. Given that the p-value was less than .05, the null hypothesis that "***There is no statistically significant influence of instructional practices on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County***" was rejected. It is therefore acceptable to conclude that there is statistically significant positive relationship between instructional practices on play-based activities and pre-school curriculum implementation, with more learner centred play-based approach infused in teaching/learning associated to more effective pre-school curriculum implementation. This was further illustrated with a scatter plot, as shown in the Figure below



Scatter plot graph: Instructional Practices on Play-based Activities and Pre-school Curriculum Implementation.

The scatter plot shows that there was a fairly plausible positive correlation between instructional practices on play-based activities and pre-school curriculum implementation. It is clearly shown that the pattern of the dots slopes from lower left to upper right, symbolizing a positive correlation between the variables. This

was further shown by a line of best fit (trend line); the coordinate points were scattered around the line of best fit forming almost a visible pattern further signifying that the two data sets were agreeing. The fact that the scatters tend to concentrate in the vicinity of the identity line indicate that the relationship was real and not by chance.
However, to estimate the level of influence of instructional practices on play-based activities on pre-school curriculum implementation, a coefficient of determination was computed using simple linear regression analysis whose result is shown in the Table below

Model Summary on Regression Analysis of Instructional Practices on Play-based Activities and Pre-school Curriculum Implementation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.568[a]	.323	.319	.56560
a. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher instructional practices				
b. Dependent Variable: Curriculum Implementation				

From the model, it is evident that 32.3% (R^2=.323) of the variation in pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County was explained by instructional practices on play-based activities. This was a significant amount of effect by a single predictor on the dependent variable. On the other hand, to determine whether instructional practices' on play-based activities was a significant predictor of pre-school curriculum implementation, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed as shown in below Table

ANOVA–Influence of Instructional Practices on Play-based Activities on Pre-school Curriculum Implementation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.487	1	30.487	95.299	.000[b]
	Residual	63.981	200	.320		
	Total	94.468	201			
a. Dependent Variable: Curriculum Implementation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Teacher instructional practices						

F-ratio in the ANOVA table which tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data reveals that instructional practices on play-based activities is statistically significant predictor of pre-school curriculum implementation, F (1, 200) = 95.299, p< .05.
This implies that the regression model is a good fit of the data, demonstrating that knowledge of the nature instructional practices on play-based activities could be used to predict the level of pre-school curriculum implementation. These findings are also supported by Younquist and Joan (2004) who pointed out that a relevant play- based activity and instruction is the one which enables both teachers and learners to achieve an educational objective. According to the findings of Walsh & Gardner, (2006) it is important to incorporate a play-based approach as part of the pre-school curriculum to help children develop physically, academically, mentally, and socially

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study determined the influence of instructional practices on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County. It was established that there was considerable amount [4.17 (SD=0.61)] of use of instructional practices that were thematic in nature and involved use of play-based activity to some extent. The results show that most of the teachers always used child centred rather than teacher centred approach in play-based activities, 169 (83.7%) of them always allowed learners to explore and discover on their own through play-based activities. On the contrary, the findings of the study established that some preschool teachers used instructional practices that had adverse effect on play-based activities in pre-school curriculum; more than a fifth 43 (21.2%) of the pre-school teachers rarely used play-based activities which were guided by learners' interest and experience, 33 (16.4%) of them hardly let learners get involved in the discovery of their own knowledge through play-activities and 28 (13.9%) never made any deliberate effort to adequately plan and prepare all their lessons with view of incorporating play-based activities. On the influence of instructional practices on play-based activities, the findings of the study established that there was statistically significant plausible (n=202; r =.568; p<.05), positive influence of instructional practices on play-based activities on pre-school curriculum implementation. It was also established that instructional practices in play-based activities was a significant predicator [F (1, 200) = 95.299, p < .05] to curriculum implementation and it accounted for

32.3% (R^2=.323) of the variation in pre-school curriculum implementation in Homabay County.Pre-school lead teachers also confirmed most of these statements, when majority of them agreed thatmost of the teachers use learner centered approach in teaching the young ones**.** However, a good number of ECDE teachers did not tell use play based activities in relation to learners experience and interest.Equally, it was established that for each one unit improvement in appropriate use of instructional practices in play-based activities, there is a subsequent improvement of 395 units in pre-school curriculum implementation.

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