



The Effect of Dramatic Play on Children's Social Development in Early Childhood in the Kumbo, Central Sub Division.

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ABSTRACT

This research was carried out in the Kumbo Central Sub Division. The objective was to find out the impact of dramatic play on the social development of children in early childhood. Specifically, to investigate the role of playing doctor on the social development of children. The study adopted the mixed method and the design was the convergent parallel. The population of the study was 428 pupils (205 girls and 233 boys) nursery two school pupils. The sample was 128 pupils (64 boys and 64 girls) divided into groups one and two. Data was collected using the researcher made test and dramatic play was observed in action using an observation guide. Structured questionnaire were used to get teachers opinion while interview guide were used to appraised parents perceptions of dramatic play. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.0 while qualitative data was analyzed with the support of Alasti 3.0 software. The results showed that dramatic play to a large degree affect the social development of children in early hood. Through playing doctor, or playing at hospital, children learn to cooperate with their peers, share responsibility, coping skills and team work. Also, children learn to be empathetic, develop emotional wellbeing, turns taking and problem solving. Therefore, dramatic play can be a necessary engine that elicits social development in children.

INTRODUCTION

According to Play England (2011), play is a universal activity the world over. It is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as for the social, emotional, intellectual and physical development of humans especially children. In this view, the relevance of play cannot be over emphasized. A lot of emphasis has

been placed on play and playful activities especially for children. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted on 20th Nov 1989. This convention places a huge responsibility on individual governments to work for their own as well as the world's children's welfare (UNICEF, 2001). Article 31 of the UNCRC indicates that, "state parties recognize the rights of children to

rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and participate freely in cultural life and the arts", (UNESCO, 2000:8).

The social development of children is very important as well because it does not only prepare children for the present but also for future survival. Through play children learn social graces such as empathy, emotional wellbeing, collaboration, forgiveness and fair play just to name these few that accompany them into later life experiences (Rogers, 2003). Dramatic play is that kind of play where children take on roles and act them out as a way of exploring themselves and their surroundings. By pretending to be someone or something else, children can learn new ways to express themselves, share thoughts and ideas and even get in touch with their feelings (Polak, 2003). Dramatic play is one of the best forms of play-based learning as children enjoy pretending to be *doctor* or *nurse* trying to treat someone to get well or a judge dispensing justice. Through this, they learn how to understand other people and so improve their ability to socialize and develop skills that they will need for the rest of their lives (Lancy, 2012a). Through dramatic play, children begin integrating the roles of society and the full range of feelings are expressed and experienced as the children play with others (Sierra, 2005).

Kumbo Central Sub Division is within the Nso clan and generally, children imitate dramatic plays through African traditional games and songs. Through these games and play songs, children learn to handle interpersonal relationships and develop more social competence (Nyota and Mapara, 2008). Alidou (2002), confirms that while western children use artificial toys such as cars, bikes, dolls and bricks among others to play, indigenous African children play with natural objects like the soil, stones, plants, mud, sticks, trees, water and others or construct their play objects from the natural environments. Hirasawa, (2005) observes that in African culture, as the children grow their social world is not as limited as their counterparts in the west. Their general learning is beyond the immediate family circle as they engage in various types of plays. Children generally engage in dramatic plays like playing doctor in which they genuinely interact with one another taking turns, playing games or devising contests (Ellis, 2008). Thomas (2000) adds that children reliably interact during dramatic play by participating in setting rules, occasionally offering to share, inviting peers to play, expressing disapproval of their playmates behavior and communicating their feelings.

Dramatic play like other types of plays has enormous social benefits to children in early child hood

(Udouchukwu, 2011). These social gains accompany children into adulthood. Unfortunately, educational stakeholders do not place a lot of importance and turn to neglect and relegate play. It is for this reason that this study is carried out to establish more evidence on the importance of play (dramatic play).

Research question: Does dramatic play have an influence on the social development of children in early childhood?

Research hypothesis

A: Dramatic play has no significant influence on the social development of children in early childhood.

B: Dramatic play has significant influence on the social development of children in early childhood.

METHOD

The study adopted the mixed method and the design was convergent parallel. The population for the study was 438 children (233boys and 205 girls) with a total of 13teachers in 4 nursery schools. The stratified sampling technique was used to group schools into strata and simple random sampling used to select four schools and a cohort of 13 teachers for the study.

Instruments

The researcher made test was developed in which participants were grouped into the experimental and control groups. The observation guide was used to observe children demonstrating social development traits as a result of 'playing doctor' (dramatic play). The structured questionnaire was used to appraise teachers' knowledge on dramatic plays and social development while and interview guide was used to appraise parents understanding of dramatic paly and children's social development.

RESULTS

Research question: this research question is, does dramatic play have an influence on the social development of children in early childhood? To answer this question, answers were extracted from the data collected from observing children in dramatic play. The data were presented using percentages and presented in table 1.

Table 1: Observation of Children Social Development after Introduction of Dramatic Play

Items	Most Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Children imitate doctor role which enhance parental role	10(50.0%)	9(55.0%)	1(5.0%)	0(0.0%)
During dramatic play, children dramatize turns taking through social roles depicting team work	8(40.0%)	11(55.0%)	1(5.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children model peers depicting understanding and cooperation	10(50.0%)	8(40.0%)	2(10.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children always try to correct when their peers make errors depicting cooperation	11(55.0%)	8(45.0%)	1(5.0%)	0(0.0%)
Disputes crop up from time to time during plays and children settle and continue playing showing problem solving skills	10(50.0%)	8(40.0%)	1(5.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children accept peers views depicting cooperation and listening skills	10(50.0%)	8(40.0%)	1(5.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children invite new children to play with them which lead to new relationships	7(35.0%)	11(45.0%)	2(10.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children sometimes leave the group due to disputes showing dissatisfaction	2(10.0%)	5(25.0%)	7(35.0%)	6(30.0%)
Children develop new friendships as a result of socialization	5(25.0%)	15(75%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Children demonstrate excitement after each dramatic play scene showing a sense of accomplishment and emotional wellbeing	8(40.0%)	12(60%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	81 (40.5%)	97 (48.5%)	16 (8.0%)	6 (0.3%)

From the observation carried after the introduction of dramatic play, cumulatively, majority of the children 89.0% consistently display social development attributes while 8.0% of them display them occasionally. For instance, all the children 100% developed new friendship due to socialization and demonstrate excitement showing a sense of accomplishment and emotional wellbeing. Also, 95% of the children of equal proportion constantly develop collaboration and

listening skills, problem solving skills, cooperation and team work attributes while only 35% of the children show attributes of dissatisfaction.

Presentation of results from Teachers' questionnaire on Dramatic Play was done using mean and standard deviation

Table 2: Teachers' Appraisal of Dramatic Play

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
I know and understand the social interactions that take place when children model elders during play depicting socialization	3.54	.519	Agreed
I use play way methods to help children play together to enhance emotional wellbeing and a sense of self in children	3.31	.480	Agreed
I help children in my class to play house or together to enhance proper social interactions and tribal belonging	3.54	.519	Agreed
During free choice play, I guide children to choose symbolic play materials depicting decision making skills, sharing and tolerance	3.77	.439	Agreed
I see to it that children support each other towards building a house, cooking a dish, treating a patient to enhance team spirit and good relationships	3.54	.519	Agreed
Children feel for others when they cannot actively play with them depicting empathy	3.54	.519	Agreed
Children endeavor to complete their task even they are tired showing team spirit	3.38	.506	Agreed
Children allow other children to use what belong to them during play depicting cooperation and sharing	3.62	.506	Agreed
Aggregate	3.53	0.500	Agreed

Based on teachers' opinion on dramatic play, majority of them with an overall mean of 3.53 on a scale of 1-4 indicate that dramatic play influences social development among children. For example, many of the teachers with mean values ranging from 3.31 to 3.77, all above the cut of point of 2.5 agreed that during dramatic play, socialization and social interaction takes place among children, emotional wellbeing is enhanced, children develop decision making skills, tolerance, team building skills, empathy and cooperation.

The qualitative results on dramatic play were presented in prose. For example, In response to allowing children play dramatic play, some of the parents allow their children to play with other children and take part in playing doctor, nursing a child, cooking food, singing like in the choir and others play the role of

a Rev. Father as captured in the statement of parent one who said: "*I allow my children to play dramatic play with other children in the compound whereby some of the children cook food and share with others, instruct others to sit properly and directing others. Also, some of the children engage into singing like they are in the choir. During singing, some of the children plays the role of a father (in the church) while others playing the baptism role and sharing communion. They also imitate how they treat a sick person in the hospital*".

The hypothesis was tested (Ho): Dramatic play does not significantly influence the social development of children in early childhood.

Table 3: The Effect of Dramatic Play on Social Development of Children in Early Childhood

Group	Test level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean	T-test value	P-value
Control group	Pre test	16	16.81	2.228	.557	8.694	0.000
	Post test	16	23.31	1.702	.425		
First formative assessment		16	23.13	1.821	.455		
Second formative assessment		16	25.69	1.778	.445		
Experimental group	Pre test	16	17.13	2.986	.747		
	Post test	16	28.50	1.673	.418		

The mean at pre test and post test was also compared.

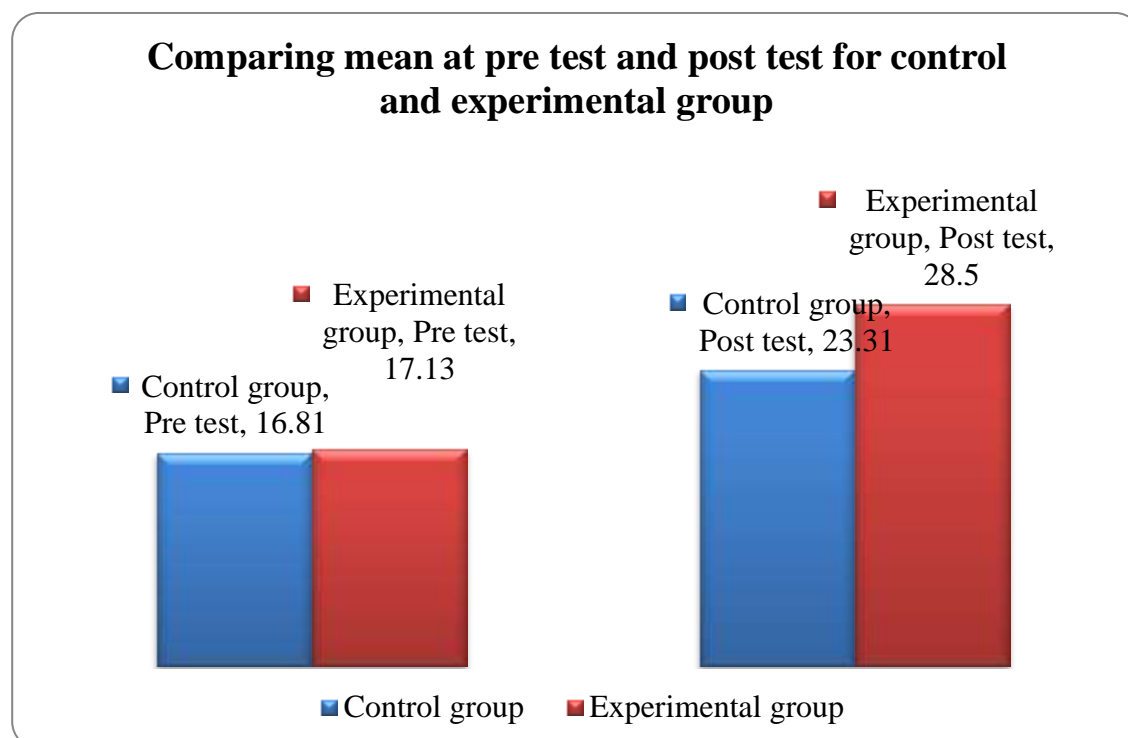


Figure 1: The Effect of Dramatic Play on Social Development of Children in Early Childhood

Finally, comparing the children mean score in social development at pre test level when dramatic play was not introduced and at post test level after dramatic play had been introduced, statistics showed that there was a significant increase in the mean score (T-test value 8.694, p-value $0.000 < 0.05$) with, children in the experimental group at post test level having a high mean score 28.50 plus or minus 0.418 than children in the control group 23.21 plus or minus 0.747. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis that state dramatic play significantly influences the social development of children in early childhood was accepted.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

Validity refers to whether the instruments measure or describe what they are supposed to measure or

describe, Bell (2002). Face and content validity of instruments was done. Face validity is less systematic than content validity and checks if the items are understood by the respondents and how adequate and flexible is the administration (Amin, 2005). The face validity constituted the instruments being checked, revamped and validated by the supervisor of this work. Also, the instruments were pre-tested, the missing Value Index evaluated, notes taken on problems encountered in administering and the timeframe in order to ensure they measured what was intended to measure.

Content validity focused on the quality of the instruments. This looked at the various items if they effectively covered the intended objectives of the study. Furthermore, construct validity was also considered. It made sure that conceptual definitions logically measured the theoretical construct that it aimed at

measuring and aligned with the contextual theories and conceptual paradigms as well as empirical evidence. Here, construct validity was used to ensure the validity of all the items.

According to Nana (2005), generally, any reliability coefficient of 0.05 and above is accepted as a good measure of reliability. To prove the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot-test was done in Mbveh at St John Bosco Nursery School in which the researcher formed the control and experimental groups as required. He then tested them, trained the experimental group and administered the first formative evaluation, trained again and administered the second formative evaluation. Both groups were then tested again and observed using the observation guide. Two teachers of the same school were administered the questionnaire while two parents were interviewed within the same area. After analyzing the results using Gronbach's Alpha method, the reliability coefficients yielded 0.547 and above, therefore the instruments were deemed fit and reliable for the study.

DISCUSSION

To find out the effect of dramatic play on the social development of children in early childhood

The results of the findings disclosed that children in early childhood largely manifest traits of social gains as a result of engaging in dramatic plays. Children take on parental roles, cooperate with one another as they struggle to treat a patient in 'playing doctor'. Through dramatic play children demonstrate cooperation skills as they cooperate with their team mates. Also, children develop the skills of problem solving when they are able to treat a patient to get well. This is in line with the findings of a study carried out by Khaomais (2019) on dramatic play in relation to social development in preschool age. Just like the current study, the researcher concluded that social development could be predicted through the dimension of interactions with others during dramatic play. The current study further found that when children come together to play in dramatic play, they make new friends as they start getting along with the children they were playing together and invite even new children to join them. During dramatic play, children feel deeply for the one who is sick in playing doctor demonstrating empathy. They show a lot of excitement after engaging in dramatic play signifying emotional wellbeing. Khaomais (2019) revealed a significant positive correlation between dramatic play and the social development of children in preschool. Brenfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory sheds light on the social gains that children make as a result of the social interactions that take place within the microsystem in that it explains the relationships between family members including the children and the neighborhood

and the school. Although children's play is often rife with disputes that come up frequently, they show a sense of dialogue by settling them thereby developing the skills of settling disagreements by themselves

Furthermore, the above results are in line with the nursery school teachers perception of dramatic play in relation to social development. To a very large extent, they saw dramatic play as a means for children to properly socialize with each other. The majority of teachers perceived that children get involved better in social interactions, develop good communication skills and socialize properly through dramatic play. In this light, they understood the traits and encouraged the children to engage in dramatic plays. This is in line with Bosah and Anyachebelu (2015)'s study on the utilization of dramatic play for quality social development in nursery schools. The findings of this study revealed that dramatic play enhances quality holistic development of children in nursery schools. The current study also showed that almost all the teachers were of the same opinion that they use play-way methods in facilitating the teaching-learning process in nursery schools in order to enhance proper socialization. They also guide children during dramatic plays in choosing their play items in order to instill in them a sense of organization and share play items to develop a sharing spirit in the children. In addition, the teachers help children work together in 'playing doctor' (dramatic play) and also cause them to be empathetic as they treat the patients in a bit to instill empathy and compassion in the children. Finally, they noticed feelings of happiness and excitement in the children after engaging them in dramatic play depicting a sense of belongingness as well as emotional wellbeing. According to Brenfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, these social interactions take place within the family, the school (nursery school) and the neighborhoods. Going by this, it is therefore imperative that children in early childhood need play opportunities both at school and home owing to the myriad of social benefits they derive from play.

In addition, parents' responses indicated that they understood and engaged children in dramatic plays consciously or unconsciously. They generally allow children to practice dramatic plays in order to socialize among themselves or with other children in the neighborhood. Most parents said they deliberately allow their children to play by themselves. Bosah and Anyachebelu (2015)'s study adds weight to these results as they concluded that dramatic play enhances quality holistic development of the nursery school child. However, sometimes when they are free, they guide and direct the children on dramatic plays that are safe and educative such as 'playing doctor' or 'nursing baby'.

Furthermore, some parents affirmed the importance and relevance of dramatic plays among children as many of them said they allowed children from other compounds to come and play with their children. In the same way, their children also go and play with other children in other nearby neighborhoods.

This is clearly supported by Brenfenbrenner’s (1979)’s ecological systems theory that explains the interconnectedness of information about people and their environment. The social interactions that take place within the microsystem significantly trickle enormous social traits as mentioned above. The present study has established that children make new friends, develop affection for particular professions such as becoming medical doctors and learn to cope with people around them. Through dispute settling, children learn to forgive each other, accept their faults, see things from others views, develop good habits and talents that carry them into adult life. Most parents think that when children fail to socialize through dramatic plays, they miss out a lot and are not able to interact well with people in adult life. This is in line with Khomais (2019)’s study who concluded that dramatic play has a significant positive correlation with social development.

Furthermore, as to whether parents allow children play, the results indicated a majority of parents affirming that having friends in life is very important for children as they socially interact through play and as they play together, they develop love for certain kinds of work such doctor or being a nurse as they see in play. Also, some parents’ perceptions, most of the parents perceived that dramatic plays help children develop socially and fit well into the society where they live or when they move into a new society. This supports the views of Lev Vygotsky in his Socio-Cultural theory in which the role of a more knowledgeable person is very necessary for the learner to achieve desired tasks. Also, when children play dramatic plays with other children, they can develop social skills faster. For

example, when some children appear dull and dormant, they become active and learn faster how to talk and interact socially when they play with other children. Parents generally provide play items to their children such as chalk that would stand for medication, chairs they can use, cloths like loins that stand for bed sheets and even guide them on how to ‘play doctor’ or any other dramatic plays suitable to them. In addition, parents usually feel happy and excited and even wish that children do it better when they notice their children trying to dramatize adult role during dramatic play depicting the importance of socialization to the children. These views support Bosah and Anyachebelu (2015)’s study on dramatic plays who concluded that dramatic play influences the wholistic development of the child.

The relevance of dramatic play to children’s (2-6 years) social development cannot be overemphasized as the above results indicate that dramatic play greatly affects social development. When children come together to imitate what they see adults do, it builds in them formidable foundations that lead them into adult life and help them cope in life.

Contribution to Knowledge in Educational Psychology

From the results of this study, a model has been put forth. This model submits that dramatic play actually affects the social development of children. It explains that the teachers, parents and related others can help elicit most relevant social development traits which children need even for later life.

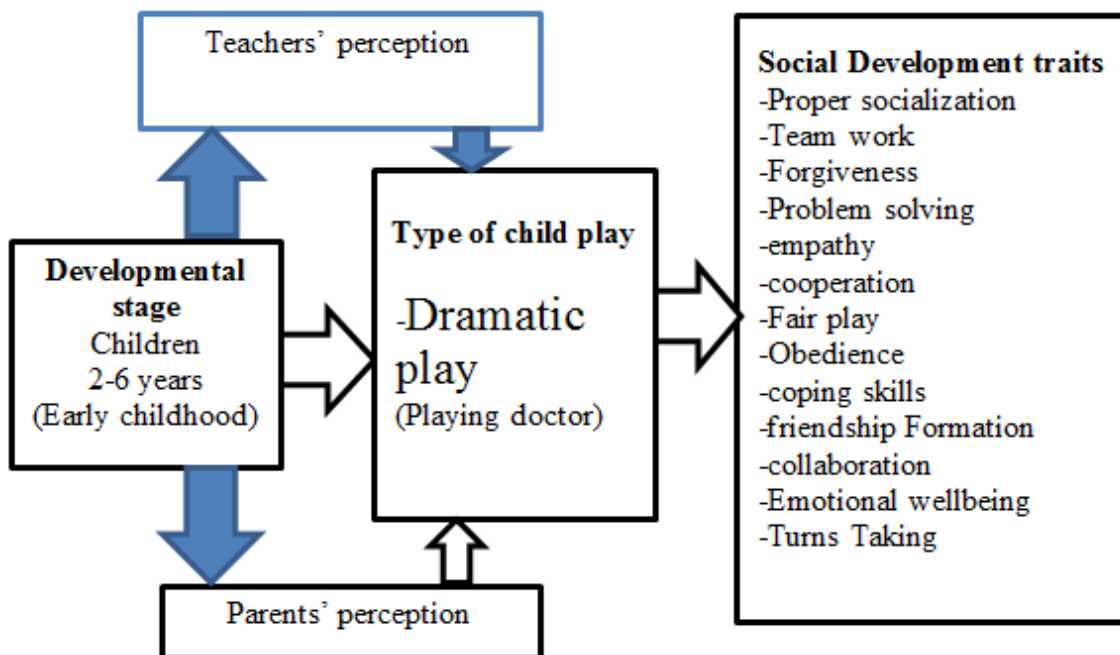


Figure 2: A model depicting how child play influences social development
 Source: Tih (2023).

Figure 2 above explains how dramatic play can effectively influence the social development of children in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that dramatic play influences the social development of children in early childhood in the Kumbo Central Sub Division. Children will develop social gains such as empathy, tolerance, team work and cooperation among others if teachers, parents and related others provide play time and guide them during play. Teacher ought to adapt play way methods in teaching and equally encourage free play among children to help them socially develop. Equally, care givers and parents need to provide play time and guide children to practice dramatic plays that elicit social development. It is in this way that children will develop social gains alongside physical, emotional and cognitive gains that will accompany even into later life.

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