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Original Article

Re-configuring the Rights to Education Through Play with Painting and Clay Modelling among Children Affected by the Psychosocial Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Wanyama Ogutu^{1*}

¹ Kenyatta University, P. O. Box 43844-00100 Nairobi, Kenya.

* Author for Correspondence Email: wanyamaogutu93@gmail.com

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*Psychosocial Effects,
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Rights to Education.*

The devastating COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the closure of all schools for nearly a year, violated articles 43(1)f, 53(1)b, and 55(a) of Kenya's 2010 constitution on the right to education. The Government of Kenya deprived UNDP-SGDs (2015) of goals on quality education and UNICEF (2018); Every Child Learns when enforcing the social distance policy, a direction of World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) preventive measures. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF (2018) cautioned that any attempt to inhibit child learning's welfare, such as play, would harm growth and development in early childhood. Modern educationalists have asserted that play with art plays a role in cognitive and social learning as an extension of recreation and elaboration of their conflicts. The paper aims to reconfigure rights to education on play with paintings and clay modelling among children affected by the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher has focused on descriptive desktop research design art bases research activities such as playing with painting and clay modelling; it has examined the literature on psychoanalysis tools to create a discussion on the paper. The paper acknowledged the mission of WHO (2020), UNDP-SGDs (2015), UNICEF (2018), and Article 53(1)d of the Kenyan 2010 Constitution on Good Health for All Children. It has merited play with painting and clay modelling as a profound tool to re-configure rights to education among children affected by the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the paper suggested a campaign workshop or seminars for play with painting and clay modelling to champion the right to education among children in schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Play with art, according to modern educationist John Dewey, plays an important role in children's cognitive and social learning (Geitskell, 1958). Ogutu (2020) writes that play with art is a vessel for healing depression and violent behaviour in rehabilitation and mental health centres. Botelho (2015) and Schirmacher (2002) affirmed that play with art fosters socialisation and communication skills, which play an important role in a child's growth and development. *Good health and well-being of every child* are critical pillars that drive UNDP-SDGs (2015), UNICEF (2018), and African Union Vision 2063 on "*The Well-Educated Citizen and Skill Revolution*" (2021). In recent years, schools and educational centres have aligned their curricula to UNDP-SDGs (2015) and UNICEF (2018) to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ogutu (2019) presented that the Kenyan government is spearheading the Big 4 Agenda SDGs and is actualising a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), where the paper addresses play with art in psycho-motor and creative curriculum designs according to the CBC Basic Framework (2017).

The devastating COVID-19 pandemic, according to the MoE report (2020), violated Kenya's 2010 constitution's articles 43(1)f, 53(1)b, and 55(a), as well as the Session paper (2019) on education. MoE report (2020) pointed out that the Kenya

government under Uhuru Kenyatta's presidency enforced an executive order of social distancing in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in schools and other social places. UNICEF Report (2020) and Ngwacho (2020) demonstrated that almost 1.5 billion children's welfare, among them play, was violated by the closure of schools and learning centres across the world. According to the Ministry of Education in Kenya (2020), the consequences of the social distancing policy have subdued implementation commitment to basic guidelines and core competence in basic education of the CBC Basic framework (2017). Hence, the overwhelming adaptation of social distance policies by various states jeopardised the realisation of the critical pillar of education SDGs in UNICEF, Africa Union Vision 2063, Vision 2030, and Kenya's Big Four Agenda goals.

Ogutu (2021) writes that the COVID-19 predicament is among other world pandemics that have violated children's rights to education. He indicated that the previous global crises, such as the two world wars, terrorism, the Spanish flu, and HIV/AIDS, among others, had exhibited similar negative psychosocial effects on children. In the past, Ogutu (2021) found out that playing with art was a mitigation tool for global crises such as the Spanish flu, HIV/AIDs, and political violence in Africa. Wambugu (2015) employed drawing as a tool of mitigation for children that were affected by

the aftermath of ethno-political violence in 2007. The researcher found out that the study was a collaboration of non-governmental organisations and the Ministry of Education. Therefore, from a COVID-19 perspective, the paper has re-configured rights to education on play with paintings and clay modelling for children affected by the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is among the responses voice on “*Engineering Issues in Education in the Era of Disruptiveness*” a conference proceeding for *Promoting Sustainable Development through Disruptive Research and Innovation* at Machakos University Conference 2022. Its aim is to re-configure rights to education that were ignored during the enforcement of the COVID-19 social distancing policy. The paper is among the suggested tools to re-configure the right to education in the post-COVID-19 period. The discourse of the paper can be adapted as campaign workshops or seminar tools for various learning institutions in the post-COVID-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Play With Painting and Clay Modelling

Ogutu (2021) wrote that play is an activity characterised by non-seriousness and freedom of mind. He added that play with painting and clay modelling as activities that involve the manipulation of different elements is anchored in fine art disciplines. He further mentioned that play is associated with symbolic play in painting and clay modelling, which is expressed in abstract representational and ambiguous pictures of child expression. Scribbling (age 1-2) and schematics (age 3-5) are expressed through symbolic play in the child development stage. Ogutu (2021) writes that painting and clay modelling are among the art materials/elements used to express feelings or perceptions of the world. He pointed out that paintings contain colourful fluid that is suitable for expression on the surface. He also proceeded by noting that the process of painting is exciting and intense. Ogutu (2021) noted that fine arts define clay as a malleable soil material that has a smooth

tactile feeling and can be easily manipulated into an abstract representation of three-dimensional basic forms.

Description of Children in the CBC Curriculum

CBC Basic Framework (2017) describes a child from age 4-6 as a pre-schooler or playgroup. The CBC curriculum has factored play with painting and clay modelling activities on psycho-motor and creativity development into the curriculum design for the early year group of education. Ogutu (2021) pointed out that communication and socialisation are characterised by the non-verbal and symbolic play on pre-schematics in growth and development. According to Berk (1989) and Shaffer and Kip (2007), a social crisis, spontaneous reaction, and cognitive development, all play a role in the development of a child aged 4-6. Ogutu (2020) noted that a child of 4-6 tends to manipulate and translate ideas, concepts, and experiences with art elements and materials.

Psychosocial Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The MoE report (2020) indicated that the enforcement of the social distance policy was meant to avoid the spread of COVID-19 viruses. It pointed out that the action disrupted over 1.5 billion learners all over the world. Ogutu (2021) wrote that the consequences of the social distance policy exacerbated psychological disturbance, economic turmoil, and psychosocial disparity among children, parents, education stallholders, and the government. He pointed out the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 that led to an upsurge of anti-social behaviour among learners, as reported by many local and international media. He further highlighted the consequences of the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 on exposure to pornographic materials on the internet, the indulgence of drugs and alcohol abuse, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and defilement of children.

MoE (2020) predicted that the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic manifested into Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Ogotu (2021) pointed to flashbacks and nightmares of the incident of COVID-19, avoidance of reminders of COVID-19 images, sounds, or discussion, hyperarousal, and hypervigilance. He also highlighted the emotional dysregulation that comes with COVID-19 triggers, memory impairments for those who were directly infected or had deceased relatives, and some who will have difficulties with interpersonal relationships. MoE (2020) and Nandkar (2020) concluded that children in schools and learning institutions would display PTSD from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as unproductiveness, anxiety, and disengagement.

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODOLOGY

The paper has employed a description of qualitative research design and Art Base Research methodologies. It has explored desktop information on COVID-19 pandemic government policies and art and craft education. The paper sample a few art-based research activities using literature that attendants psychoanalysis instrument. The methodology noted that a psychoanalysis instrument is a literary tool used to examine unconscious dreams or daydreams, a slip of the tongue, spontaneous action or decision, and autonomous self-expression that comes with an inability to manage contradictory tendencies of personality or intrapersonal perspective. The evidence is symbolic expressions displayed in crises situation (McLead, 2020). He further noted that personal contradiction occurs in crises situation, resulting in spontaneous subvention as a form of trauma. Ogotu (2021) pointed out personal contradiction is an attachment of an object, person, thing, situation, or environment or to a mental representative. He finally pointed out that personal contradiction creates distorts perspective, mental instability, and emotional dysfunction. Malchiodi (2002) demonstrated that personal contradiction effects can be retained as in psychosocial effects for days, weeks, months, years, and even decades. She concluded psychosocial effects are triggered by the

arousal of sounds, images, stories, touch, tests, and people as a reminder of crisis Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD.

Malchiodi (2002) explained Art Base Research (ABR) are methodologies that use creative art activities to test or regulate the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD. The aim of ABRs' creative art activities is meant to determine an individual's ability to cope with and regulate PTSD. Ogotu (2021) has illustrated that most art-based research activities, such as painting and clay modelling, among others, penetrate deeply into a child's mind, hence making it easy to display PTSD symptoms. He pointed out that play that involves art is a clinical diagnosis and healing therapy for a traumatised child. He concluded that playing with clay and painting has virtuous elements for a child to gain a great understanding of their personality, emotions, and environment.

DISCUSSION

Article 33(1)b of the Kenyan 2010 Constitution expounded on the rights to expression, creativity, and critical thinking, which are achieved through play, among others (Ngwacho 2020). MoE (2020) pointed out that the closure of schools meant that the right to education, as stipulated in the CBC Basic framework and Kenya's 2010 constitution, was deprived. Staying at home exposed many children to the COVID-19 psychosocial effects, hence leading children to display hyperarousal, hypervigilance, and emotional dysregulation (Ford & Cloitre, 2009; Miller & Johnson, 2012). Play with painting and clay modelling may act as stimuli for critical thinking and creativity, and they are easily expressed in a variety of symbols associated with the traumatic event (Malchiodi 2002). Playing with painting and clay modelling regulates and reduces hypervigilance and emotional dysregulation in the COVID-19 experience. During play sessions, child symbols are interpreted and pointed to direct cognitive restructuring (Gil, 2003), hence addressing negative experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning is a vital aspect of the attainment of SDG goals as anchored in UNDP-SDG (2015), session paper 2019, and article 53(1)b of Kenya's 2010 constitution (2010). The theories that explain the CBC Basic Framework (2017) emphasise the importance of social and cognitive learning in developing children to their full potential. The EdTech Hub Survey (2020), Schleicher (2020), UNICEF Report (2020), MoE Report (2020), and United Nations COVID-19 Report (2020) all stated that the prolonged stay of learning institutions without proper plans violated the right to learn. Nandkar (2020) and Ngwacho (2020) posited that the prolonged reopening of the school contributed to cognitive impairments in learning new material, memorisation, concentration, and attention in a learning environment. Geitskell (1958) noted that social and cognitive learning is easily expressed in play through painting and clay modelling. A traumatised child playing with painting and clay modelling may become a way to motivate the regaining of educational efforts for children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ogotu 2021). Furthermore, it can promote learning in children that have been bereaved or left orphans (Gill, 2003).

Article 53(1)d of Kenya's 2010 Constitution protects children from gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and defilement, among others. However, Ngwacho (2020), Nandkar (2020), the United Nations COVID-19 Report (2020), and Schleicher (2020) reported that during their stay at home, many children were subjected to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, among others. The psychosocial effects of COVID-19 affected the self-concepts and identities of many children (Nandkar 2020). Children's emotional and intimate attachment to their environment is conveyed through play (Botelho, 2015). Peloquin (1996) demonstrated that painting and clay modelling could be psychosocial treatments for fostering interpersonal relations and empathy. A child involved in playing with painting and clay modelling builds self-esteem and creates feelings of mastery and competence (Ogotu 2021). Playing

with clay and painting also increases socialisation and enhances the overall psychosocial well-being of a child (Carey, 2006; Rousseau et al., 2007). It may become an important tool for healing the interpersonal negative consequences for children affected by the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 (McArdle et al., 2002).

Article 36(1) of the Kenya 2010 Constitution gives any citizen freedom to participate in any social activity as long as it does not infringe on other parties' rights. Educational policy (2020) cemented Article 36(1) on guiding principles and core competence areas. However, the call to disband any social activities infringed on children at the community and family levels. Many children were reported to have been under house arrest, and some were divorced from their families. This is noted to impart a negative psychosocial effect on many children (Nandkar 2020). Children engaged in painting and clay modelling provide an opportunity for them to communicate and share their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. During play with painting and clay modelling, both children and caregivers would have a chance to be aware of their difficulties as well as become more aware of the emotions of others (van Nijnatten & van Doorn, 2007). Engaging in play with painting and clay modelling would not be a fun activity for society but a way of processing negative memories associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993).

CONCLUSION

The enforcement of the social distancing policy during the COVID-19 pandemic was a government direction with a good intent to protect its children as enshrined in Kenya Constitution 2010. On the other hand, it infringed the constitutional right to education in extension to the commitment to implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on crystallised in UNDP (2015), UNICEF (2018), Africa Union 2063 (2021), Vision (2030), and Kenya Big Four Agenda. Millions of children were vulnerable to the psychosocial effect of the

COVID-19 pandemic caused by the inhibition to play welfare due to the closure of schools. Children express PTSD of COVID-19 psychosocial effects on symbolic expression and behavioural change. Play with painting and clay modelling accesses the child's brain areas where trauma memories are mediated to symbols, hence attributing therapy healing. Play with painting and clay modelling is squarely reconfigured in the Kenya 2010 constitution rights to education, and the significance is captured in ongoing CBC curriculum designs. The paper attributes that play with painting and clay modelling can champion the right to education for children.

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