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Teachers' Competence as an Avenue for "Learning Through Play Pedagogy" in Preschools: A Case of Makindye Ssabagabo Division

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The purpose of this study was to establish whether teacher competence can enhance the use of learning through play (LTP) pedagogy in preschools. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to; examine how teachers' knowledge of the strand matter influences the use of learning through play in preschools, to establish whether teachers' knowledge about learners influences the implementation of learning through play in preschool, and to assess teachers' pedagogical knowledge needed on the use of learning through play in preschools. The study was guided by scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy from the social constructivist theory by Levy Vygotsky (1978). The study adopted a case study design. The study population comprised preschool class teachers, heads of sections, head teachers, and pupils in class observation. Purposive sampling was used to apportion individual members selected. Data was collected using the interview schedule, focus group discussions and documentary analysis. The qualitative data was analysed using content analysis and presented in narrative form. These techniques involved observing the study participants & behaviour and drawing conclusions based on their responses and actions in the way they engaged in incorporating the learning through play pedagogy. The main findings of the results highlighted and approved that some of the teachers were competent in using the learning through play pedagogy while others still used the teacher-centred approach. Teachers conducted play without a pre-conceived pedagogical purpose. Others still involved children in the learning process in the absence of play. Further investigation revealed that those doing it well had received continuous professional development support, unlike the rest. In terms of contribution, the research recommended pedagogical advancements by showcasing the benefits of learning through play. The novelty of the study concluded that the problems addressed in this research and the suggestions presented provide the basis for improving ECD practices while using play in learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Education has been a very necessary event in life. Throughout the years, education has greatly evolved. In ancient times, education was primarily gender-based and informal, with fathers teaching their sons hunting and survival skills, whereas mothers taught their daughters how to take care of their children and do household work (May 2002). This form of education was transmitted in various ways, which included songs, plays, storytelling, poetry, and hands-on induction.

Greek civilisation then brought fourth counting using an abacus and introduced the alphabet from which writing was later developed (Elijah, 2019). Greek civilisation diverted education from a play-based to a theoretical approach. This, therefore, points to the fact that education has been a fundamental path of society over the years, whether formal or informal.

Today, education is also viewed as a basic necessity. Given the technological transformation worldwide, learning has greatly become diversified and several methods and instructional materials have been invented to foster better and easier learning (Foray and Raffo, 2012). People with a good education background have the windows of the world of education open to them. Other than simply reading and writing, education has a lot of meaning attached to it. One uses it for their benefit, such as acquiring a good job or earning a living, as opposed to the fact that one might depend on others for a living. This highlights the need to develop individuals' social and cognitive abilities from a tender age to achieve a holistically nurtured and educated future (Court, 2007). This can be achieved by allowing children to learn through play pedagogy.

Kamogawa (2010) reported that for Malaysia to become an advanced nation by 2020, it is valuable to have this focus on attaining Universal Primary Education (UPE) in early childhood, as has been the case from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. To improve the quality of preschool teachers, the qualifications for their appointment will be raised to a diploma or a bachelor's degree in early childhood, where they are taught learning through play. This rise in qualification will profoundly impact the Early Childhood sector. For example, the government will implement measures to establish teaching as a profession of choice (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). Like many Western governments, the Hong Kong government advocates -learning through play as the central pedagogy for Hong Kong nursery education. Curriculum Development Council (2006) reiterated that play is an indispensable and important tool for facilitating children's learning.

International bodies such as the United Nations and the European Union have begun to consider and develop policies concerned with children's right to play, the educational and societal benefits of play provision, and the implications of this for leisure facilities and educational programs (David, 2012). In Uganda, play is promoted through providing play opportunities indoors and outdoors, creating child-friendly spaces in the home, classroom, compound and neighbourhood, where a parent or an adult can supervise children at all times and ensuring play areas are open, comfortable, and clean (Mafabi, 2017). If this is emphasised in the ECDE, it will help improve teacher's competencies in regard to play pedagogy.

In Uganda, the competence of nursery school teachers was not taken seriously until after the Kajubi Report 1989 and the Government White Paper on Education 1992. Since that time, a lot of effort has been put in place to train competent nursery school (NS) teachers, with today's PhD course in ECD at Kyambogo University as a climax. Despite this historical development, teacher-centred methods and inappropriate content still linger in nursery schools in Uganda.

Teacher competencies refer to the ability of the teacher to make the school a desirable place to be, a home outside the home (Jackson, 2009). Competence is understood as excellent capability and includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences, which have to be the target category of the educator profession (Milan, 2008). Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) and subject matter knowledge (SK) are essential and critical elements in determining a teacher's success in handling the teaching and learning process (Hill et al., 2004).

According to Soysal (2018), pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge (SK) are unique to teachers and are based on the manner in which teachers relate their pedagogical knowledge to their subject matter knowledge. Aggarwal (2009, p. 57) says that the soul of effective teaching and learning is a good command of subject matter knowledge. Having a quality teacher in every classroom is a goal all Ministries of Education aspire to attain. However, there is a need to be more explicit about what teachers know and do, what they need to know, and how well they need to perform to become more effective.

Teacher competence is to know how to teach, what to teach and to whom to teach. In preschool, if play pedagogy is to be used effectively, it must be done by effective teachers. Muton (2002) reports that a strong, effective teaching profession requires well-trained teachers. Teachers need a depth of knowledge about the developmental stages of the students they are teaching and how to reach those students effectively using age-appropriate pedagogy. Taguma and Litigens

(2010) state that there is strong evidence that enriched stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by better-qualified staff and better-quality pedagogy. All those factors considered lead to better learning outcomes.

Rosbach and Gross (2011) report that learning through play enables teachers to connect with children and provide guidance without imposing authority, fear, and hierarchy. It is a useful tool in teachers' in-service professional development and in teacher preparation. As discussed by Wyver (2008), within the early childhood field, learning through play has long been acknowledged as an important context for children's learning and development. Learning through play is a significant aspect of children's lives, reflecting their social and cultural contexts.

Contextually, all nursery schools in Kampala and the rest of Uganda are in the hands of the private sector and out of the financial reach of most Ugandans. Very few children are benefiting from institutionalised ECD centres (MoES, 2018). The rest sit at home with their parents, yet the services given to the parents to be able to address the ECD needs of those children are minimal. The net enrolment ratio in nursery education in Uganda was 23%. According to the National Development Plan (NDP) (2010/11 - 2014/15), in 2008, Early Childhood Development (ECD) enrolment stood at only 89,296, yet there were about 3.5 million children aged 3-5 years.

Nursery schools in Kampala are characterised by teachers who are adopted from higher primary school classes, which indicates that their competence towards teaching nursery classes is highly questionable. There is minimal use of play as a form of teacher instruction. In addition to that, the major methods of instruction are highly teacher-centred. This could primarily result from insufficient teacher competence in the use of learning and the lack of appropriate materials to enhance learning. A step taken by Mafabi (2017) intended to find out what learning materials the schools used to implement the 2007 Early

Childhood Development Education (ECDE) policy.

According to Miller (2009), it is indicated that in some schools, the teachers are in class with pupils aged between three and five on average, exercising with them by jumping. There are, however, not many playing materials. In some schools, teachers say they seldom use learning through play for many reasons. These include inadequate funds and play materials because either parent cannot raise enough funds, the proprietors want to maximise profits, or both. Some preschool teachers are under pressure to drill children academically in preparation for Primary One entrance written academic interview, so teachers see - play as a waste of time. In view of the preceding evidence, this study established how teachers' knowledge of the strand(subject) matter influenced the use of learning through play, whether teachers' knowledge about learners influenced the implementation of learning through play, and also assessed whether teachers' pedagogical knowledge on the use of learning through play can be used to enhance the pedagogy without compromising curriculum implementation and quality education in preschools of Makindye-Ssabagabo Division, Uganda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

Teacher competence is an intellectual potency that exists in a teacher's mind and is realised in doing his/her job according to professional standards. Teacher competence refers to the ability of a teacher to use professional standards efficiently to help, guide and counsel his/her students to achieve achievement (Tope, 2012). As Taguma and Litjens (2010) put it, there is strong evidence that enriched stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by a better-qualified teacher and better-quality pedagogy, which leads to better learning outcomes. Once a teacher is competent in using play pedagogy, there is no reason why they wouldn't use it. While Darling (2006), emphasises the need for teachers to prepare students for higher-order thinking and

performance skills, it's essential to consider that each student has unique learning styles and strengths and therefore effective implementation relies heavily on teachers' competence. Teachers with high competence are those with the most significant factors that manipulate the students' learning and serve the school to meet its objectives and missions (Theall, 2012).

According to Bishop (2016), to be fully effective in teaching and capable of adjusting to the changing needs of learners in a world of rapid social, cultural, economic, and technological change, teachers themselves need to reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment. Reuda (2002) believes qualified teachers should be able to upgrade students' capability effectively, enhance their knowledge and skills, improve their behaviour and attitude and then contribute to the organisational goal. However, it's crucial to recognise the value of play pedagogy in achieving these goals. Competent teachers should embrace diverse teaching approaches including play that appreciate children's unique interests that need to be considered for any meaningful achievement (Gichuba et al., 2009).

Competence is a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, and attitude. Possessing competence means that one not only possesses the component resources but is also able to mobilise such resources properly and orchestrate them appropriately in a complex situation (Gokalp, 2016). In the context of teaching, competence encompasses tacit and explicit knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, and disposition. Since the pre-primary customers of educational organisations are the learners, teacher competence enables the teacher to remain committed to learners and their learning goals (Adeyemi, 2016). The teacher can use various instructional methods in their classroom to meet students' learning needs, create a relaxing environment, and cater to the needs of the learners regarding language, motivation, and interests. The teacher is the person who facilitates learning; he must take advantage of a variety of teaching

methods and techniques to organise learning experiences and assess whether the desired behaviour has been achieved by the learners or not through the use of playway learning (Kai-ming, 2003). Competence is a set of organised activities that act on content in a given category of situations to solve a problem. As Hakim (2015) explained, competence is described as an ability to carry out a specific task or activity to predetermined standards of attainment. Teacher competence would mean all observable teacher behaviours that bring about desired pupil outcomes through play (Brouwer, 2010).

Thus, in the competencies for teaching system, competency is used to describe professional ability, including the ability to perform specific functions and demonstrate acquired knowledge and conceptualisation. According to Claude (2010), in Uganda, the key competencies required by a teacher to be effective are knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and professional ethics in using play as the method of teaching the learning process. Teachers' competencies include pedagogic, personal, professional, and social competence. In an environment where resources are limited, and many factors contribute to the inadequate performance of pupils, teacher competence comes to the front (Archer, 2011). However, according to Evertson (2013), a better method of teaching is dependent largely on the user (the teacher), and it requires competencies, which may be viewed from pedagogical Knowledge, Knowledge of learner, knowledge of subject matters, skills and behaviour in using play in teaching. According to Mendro (2010), if students have a high-performing teacher for one year, they will enjoy the advantage of that good teaching in future years. Conversely, if students have a low-performing teacher, they simply will not outgrow the negative effects of lost learning opportunities for years to come.

Dealing with young children is tricky as they have a low attention span, and a teacher must be innovative. This is supported by Johansson (2003), who admits that working with young children requires teachers to have a range of

competencies. Vital aspects are the teacher's pedagogical Knowledge, Knowledge of the subject matter, and Knowledge of learners in using play as a teaching tool.

Bascia (2014) defines subject matter as teaching all students according to today's standards. Teachers need to understand the subject matter deeply and flexibly to help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another, and address misconceptions. Jadama (2014) argues that the in-depth knowledge of the subject matter that teachers will teach makes them able to use various methodologies suited to deliver it. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. This kind of understanding provides a foundation for knowledge on subject matter, enabling teachers to make ideas accessible to others.

Harris et al. (2007) elaborate more on knowledge of the subject strand by defining it as a prerequisite for effective classroom instruction. A teacher's understanding of subject facts, concepts, principles, methodology, and important generalisations determine his/her pedagogical thinking and decision-making. Teachers can make their content more elaborate by asking the students inquiry-based questions, explanations, and activities.

Pakistan's professional standards (2009) describe subject matter knowledge as teachers' perception of the main concepts, means of exploration, and designs of discipline, particularly as they linked to the national content/curriculum criterion and formulation of enriching suitable learning experiences making the subject matter approachable and relevant to all learners.

According to Arlington Public Schools (2012), researchers found out from various researches that teachers' subject matter knowledge greatly affects methods used to deliver lessons and consequently on students' achievement. It makes teachers confident and more loved by students. The less expert teacher cannot satisfy the needs of students' learning, which makes them ineffective in their profession.

According to Arshad (2007), a competent teacher has in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, good verbal and non-verbal Communication skills, completes work within time, initiative, takes appropriate decisions, gets adjustments in every situation, believes in research, has a cooperative attitude towards pupils, colleagues, parents, and administration. However in Africa and Uganda in particular, teachers primarily engage in traditional/ rigid subject matter of the curriculum content without engaging active learning styles of teaching such as play hence making education irrelevant to the students.

According to Barge and John (2012), teachers are the core of any education system, so trained, skilled teachers are necessary for every student. Teachers with good instructional planning, plan the lessons by merging their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and students' thinking and understanding of concepts. Although there is research on teachers' use of play in the teaching-learning process, little has been researched on teacher competence and more so on teachers' competence and use of play pedagogy in Uganda.

The importance of teacher responsiveness to children's differences, knowledge of children's learning processes and capabilities, and the multiple developmental goals that a quality preschool program must address simultaneously all point to the centrality of teacher education and preparation. According to Smith (2014), among the most challenging and important competencies is the ability to provide differentiated instruction in the classroom for students of individual abilities. Knowing the names of the children helps a teacher to connect with children in class and outside with more confidence. As Kees (2008) said, knowing and using a student's name during and outside of class recognises that a student exists and is important.

Teachers who plan lessons by considering students' needs, cultural values, and global demands to make their lessons actionable and understandable successfully deliver content material (Kinuthia, 2009). While play is considered to be an important element in an early-

year environment, many teachers are unsure of how to plan for such a curriculum (Moyles et al., 2002). Wood and Attfield (2005) suggest that an approach based on curriculum-generated play to support the development of specific skills and knowledge and a play-generated curriculum based on teachers responding to the interests of the children is the best approach to curricular planning. Understanding how school children learn best will ultimately help preschool teachers to assist children in reaching their full potential. Developmental milestones (DM) are a series of practical proficiency and expertise or age-specific tasks that most children can perform at a certain age range. For example, teachers within nursery schools use milestones in order to test how the child is developing. Each milestone has an age level, meaning every milestone takes place at different ages. The age when a normally developing child reaches that milestone can diverge because every child possesses unique characteristics (UMHS, 2012).

In research conducted in Swiss nursery Schools, it was found that the most difficult situation faced by the teachers was to use differentiated instruction techniques effectively to balance their expectations with their personally established standards and with students' differences. Ng'asike (2004) posits that every student has his learning style and learns better in various circumstances with various styles and from various people.

Thus, teachers must identify students' learning styles and apply different teaching techniques according to their needs. The more teachers can involve all modalities and learning styles, the more chances they have of engaging learners in using their whole brains. The classroom environment leads towards peaceful and critical learning that enhances students' capabilities and motivates them to learn and explore the facts. (Freiberg, 2009).

According to Kahtz & Kling (1999), educators should prioritise developing instructional methods and materials that are appropriate for a wide range of cognitive learning styles. Due to the fact that students respond better to instructional methods

that match their learning style, integrating different learning styles in the classroom environment can enhance the benefits for everyone (Kahtz & Kling, 1999). Matching the teacher's teaching methods to the student's learning preferences will allow the students to better understand the subject matter in question (Cegielski et al., 2012).

A sociocultural view of children as capable and competent suggests that children's beliefs might also impact the pedagogy they experience. Furthermore, research on the extent and depth of children's prior Knowledge (Marcon, 2002) suggests that teachers might need subject knowledge to extend children's learning.

According to Agyeman (2005), during a young child's time with academic activities and other preparations for nursery school, you take away something that can never again be reclaimed: the magical years of play. Every early childhood education program should have free play as its central focus.

Anything less than this is developmentally inappropriate, threatens to deprive the child of a solid multi-sensory experiential foundation for all future learning, and causes deterioration in brain connections that are related to art, music, nature, intuition, social interaction, physical expression, and a range of other culturally-valued domains. Teachers must utilise these years well by integrating play in the classroom.

A curriculum is the total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, occurring within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1996). Such a broad definition of curriculum potentially lacks guidelines for teachers with regard to content because it focuses on the learning environment and children's experiences rather than teachers' and children's knowledge.

This lack of guidance, coupled with an integrated, holistic approach, leaves teachers unclear about what kind of conceptual knowledge is appropriate for young children, how to teach it, and what

Knowledge teachers need to support children's learning.

According to Aggarwal (2009), the soul of effective teaching and learning is a good command of the subject matter. For example, according to Ghazi (2013), knowledge of subject matter enquires about the value of knowing everything about a subject. If a teacher does not have first-hand knowledge about the subject matter, how will students learn, and how will his or her teaching method be the best instructional strategy? According to Raths (2001), families also shape children's learning through their cultural and social interactions during normal daily life. Parents' beliefs are formed from a mix of personal and cultural experiences, including their own education experiences. Several studies report that parents can pressure teachers to deliver a structured, subject-focused curriculum (Marcon, 2002).

Therefore examining the influence of teacher competence on successful learning through play in preschool settings is paramount. A comprehensive understanding of teachers' knowledge about the strand (subject) matter, the pedagogical knowledge and their knowledge about learners is crucial for creating an enriching and developmentally appropriate play-based learning. Investigating these factors not only enhances the quality of early childhood education but also contributes to the overall academic, social and emotional development of pre-schoolers. As teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the learning experience of young children, delving into the specifics of their competence ensures a more nuanced and targeted approach to fostering meaningful learning through play in preschools in Uganda.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded in Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1978), the study explored the nuanced dynamics of teachers' competence as a catalyst for learning through play pedagogy in preschools. Vygotsky's theory states that knowledge is co-constructed and that individuals learn from one another. It is called a social constructivist theory

because in Vygotsky's opinion, the learner must be engaged in the learning process. Learning happens with the assistance of other people, thus contributing to the social aspect of the theory.

The foundational concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) served as a lens to unravel how collaborative teaching practices influence individual knowledge acquisition. The ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help of a more knowledgeable person, such as a teacher or peer, but cannot yet do independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The assistance explained is what Vygotsky terms as Scaffolding. Scaffolding is a key feature of effective teaching, where the adult continually adjusts the level of his or her help in response to the learner's level of performance. In the classroom, scaffolding can include modelling a skill or play, providing hints or cues, and adapting material or activity (Copple, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The study was built on a qualitative research methodology that involved interview schedules, focus group discussions and document analysis. Because the study's approach focused on obtaining and analysing non-numerical data to understand teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and motivations regarding their social reality, the design was ideal (Mohajan, 2018). The study's course was determined by the case study design, focusing on Uganda's Makindye Ssabagabo Division, as the study area. Utilizing interviews, a purposive sample of experts (head teachers-05, teachers-20 and heads of sections of preschools-05) were engaged in semi-structured conversations, enabling an in-depth exploration of the research problem. Thematic analysis was applied to discern patterns and key insights from the interview transcripts. Concurrently, focus group discussions involved the same group of participants sharing experiences and opinions related to the research problem. Thematic content analysis was employed to extract common themes and variations. Additionally, document analysis was used to systematically examine pertinent documents, employing qualitative content

analysis to derive meaningful insights. This tripartite methodology enabled the researcher to investigate the research problem by integrating diverse perspectives from interviews, group discussions and document sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to establish whether teacher competence can enhance the use of learning through play (LTP) pedagogy in preschools. Information was gathered from head teachers, section heads, and teachers using interviews and focus group discussions.

Influence of Teachers' Knowledge of the Strand Matter and Use of Learning through Play

With regard to the first research objective, findings revealed that most of the teachers knew about the ECD learning framework. In consensus, Brooke (2013) highlighted that when learning materials like teachers' guides and textbooks are available, teachers can effectively do their best to deliver knowledge to the learners. However, when it comes to implementing, teachers said it was difficult to interpret. One respondent informed the researcher

“For me, it's difficult to interpret the learning framework, to make play materials and to select play activities according to the topic I want to teach”.

Another teacher in Baby class also revealed that

“We teachers here use song and colouring sheets of jolly phonics to make children learn about the sounds, but we have failed to use play for these competencies”.

These findings were contrary to that of Bandura (2005), who stated that in relation to confidence in Content Knowledge, early childhood teachers should be able to read and understand the content material of what they are supposed to teach. Therefore, teachers teach what seems simple to them, leaving out some key competencies that children ought to acquire early in life. However, when it came to mastery of subject matter, it was observed that teachers exhibited knowledge of the

themes by using play as it is supposed to be taught in preschool. A teacher informed the researcher that *“We teach children about the body and how to take care of the body parts and uses of it, by activities for example: when teaching about cleaning the body, we use materials of different textures; soft and hard, warm and cold water and many other materials”*. Still in relation to mastery of the subject matter, a teacher in middle class revealed that *“As teachers we even include values that children learn at this young age, which stay for life such as sharing, caring for the environment, helping others by using play”*. These findings agree with Harris (2007), who elaborates that knowledge of subject matter is a prerequisite for effective classroom instruction. A teacher's understanding of subject facts, concepts, principles, methodology, and important generalisations determine his/her pedagogical thinking and decision-making.

Influence of Teachers' Knowledge about Learners on the Implementation of Learning through Play

With this objective, findings revealed that the majority of the teachers had good knowledge about their learners in terms of name, age and background when preparing the learning through play pedagogy and more so know how it influences the development milestones. One of the middle-class teachers had this to say

“The first days in this class were very difficult for me because I didn't know learners by name but I kept on learning one by one. Knowing pupils by name helped me to build rapport and to create a positive learning environment where I included the play”.

In relation to knowing the age of the learners and activity preparation, a teacher responded that:

“I know the age of my learners and this helps me in selecting age-appropriate materials and activities. For example, I am teaching a Baby class and as we all know they like touching and playing outside with sand and water etc. If I want to teach them about fish, I add some toy fish in the water and some can

even touch it although very many fear because they think it will bite them”.

Findings further revealed that most of the teachers considered the pupils' background and this helped them to prepare for playway lessons and build upon what learners know. However, a few teachers did not consider it important. When asked for reasons why they were not taking it important, one of the respondents claimed:

“In my class, I have so many children and I teach them alone, so I never consider everyone's background. I generally prepare activities and materials for all children regardless of their background”.

The rest of the teachers who do not know their learners by name, age and background just ignore their responsibility. This finding is in disagreement with Copple & Bredekamp (2009), who discovered that young children are always playful and their level of activity is very high, so it is upon teachers to turn the high level of activity into effective learning.

Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge Needed and Learning through Play

Regarding this research objective, findings revealed that the majority of teachers know how to develop instructional materials relevant to successful teaching. Instructional materials advocate for children's involvement in the teaching and learning process. This agrees with Flottman et al. (2008), who say that early childhood teachers should provide the best support for children's learning and development. One Baby class teacher said; *“Yes I prepare instructional material with limited resources and these materials help me to teach pupils by giving them hands-on experience”*. The study further showed that even teachers are well equipped with developing schemes of work. In line with study findings, New and Cochran (2008) highlight that schemes of work show the availability of both pedagogical content knowledge and content knowledge, which are key competencies to be possessed by any competent teacher. A teacher commented that;

“For me, I cannot teach without a scheme of work because it is very difficult to break content into themes and sub themes without it; I may end up teaching irrelevant content to my learners”.

Since most teachers have the basics of developing a scheme of work, they are in a better position to plan for play-way activities. Naz (2016) pointed out that planning is critical and cyclical. The whole teaching and learning experience is based upon its quality. Teachers plan the play way activities, choose among strategies, implement them in actual classroom settings, assess students' performance and then re-plan to cover the shortcomings or for further improvement.

Furthermore, the study showed that most of the teachers believe in continuous play-based assessment. However, some teachers needed help determining the competencies children learn while playing. This is in agreement with Snow & Van Hemel (2008), who agree that doing assessment well is difficult and designing assessment systems that ensure optimal outcomes for young children requires the investment of time, money, and considerable expertise. The head teacher in one of the schools commented; *“We lack resources and it is difficult to cater for teachers' needs of developing instructional materials”.* The findings also revealed shocking results that very few teachers use learner-centred methods to teach children. In this modern era, most of the teachers are still using traditional methods. When the researcher inquired from some head teachers as to why teachers still used traditional methods, one had to say that:

“We are forced to use the traditional approach because we lack enough resources, pressure from Directors and even from parents; when they send children to school, they only want them to read and write, nothing else”.

A teacher also mentioned that;

“If we don't make them write in books and send homework to these little children for only one day, the next day parents come and

complain. But as teachers, we know that children's fine motors are still developing so we should allow them to play and manipulate with materials, but we are helpless because of the system”.

This agrees with Vavrus et al. (2011) findings that in several Sub-Saharan African countries, schools do not consider teachers' useful concerns on child-centred methods and favourable conditions of teaching. The study has revealed that teacher competence is important while using learning through play pedagogy. Its impact is felt by learners as they move to the primary one.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The result has shown that learning through play outcomes benefits children and improves teachers' competence in effective teaching-learning processes. The results revealed that in-service training and sensitisation workshops should be conducted for teachers to prepare and utilise professional documents that enhance playful learning, utilise the learning resources effectively, and utilise playful learning for assessment effectively. The government should adequately train pre-service teachers and equip them with relevant learning through play pedagogical skills.

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