



Original Article

## Activity-Based Learning Strategies used by Teachers in Public Pre-Primary Schools in Kenya

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23 May 2022 The purpose of this paper is to investigate how activity-based learning is implemented in public pre-primary schools in Kenya with specific reference to West Pokot County,

**Keywords:** Kenya. The new curriculum being implemented in pre-primary schools in the country demands that activity-based learning be used to foster learning by children in schools. *Activity-based, Learning, Pupils, Pre-Primary.* The research utilised a mixed methodology research approach. The target population comprised teachers (1677) and headteachers (417) drawn from 417 Pre-primary centres in West Pokot County. A sample size of 10.0% representing 41 headteachers and 168 public pre-primary school teachers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. to collect data, questionnaire was administered to pre-primary teachers, interview was conducted for sampled head teachers and researcher collected secondary data through observation method. Data collected was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis. The study found that activity-based learning was occasionally used ( $M=3.19, SD=0.54$ ) by teachers in public pre-primary schools in the study area. Teachers failed to use the recommended methods because of the non-availability of adequate and quality instructional resources. The study recommends that teachers should be supported by parents, government, and school management in the acquisition of the right infrastructure and instructional resources. Teachers also need to be provided with additional training on activity-based approaches implementation in schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early years of a child is considered to be a critical period for development basic motor skills (Chepkonga, 2021). Therefore, the methods that early years learning teachers use in pre-primary schools are an issue of concern by many researchers. Therefore, pre-primary teachers need to take time to think about the methods that they use for classroom instruction. The approaches that pre-primary teachers utilise in the classrooms are somewhat created by curriculum guidelines that for a long period of time have assumed that children merely learn physically skills purely through involvement in play. Methods to Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) instruction differ from one nation to another and raise many queries with regard to suitable methods that pre-primary teachers need to employ in class. Children learn and grow through various domains. Large gains in other domains rather than cognitive development may need to have a balance of child initiated and teacher directed initiatives including aspects of play as used in ECDE (Barnet, 2011). This paper looks at how activity-based approach is used by pre-primary teachers in learning process in pre-primary schools. activity based learning approach is measured by instructors being in a position to maintain an open mind about a child, cross thinking pupil information to observe what the pupil is interested in (Hariharan, 2011). A teacher communicating informally to the child parents, recognising personal conversations, maintaining supervision, and awareness, paying attention being a good observer and a listener of each pupil(s) needs characteristics (Chepkonga, 2021). The activity-based learning is the instruction where a teacher spares time to allow creative learning like teaching through drama arts among other play activities. This paper looks at how pre-primary teachers were integrating activity-based approaches in their learning process in classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Role of Activity-based Approach to Learning in Preschools

Activity based approach is a technique which is utilised in ECDE programmes to meet the needs of young children in schools. it is a child centered methodology which is naturalistic and child directed method of teaching that occurs in a context that is normal for pre-primary children like at home, community settings and also classrooms (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2004). Activity based approach addresses the educational and developmental goals of young children through motivating child involvement in daily meaningful activities through using behavioural learning strategies. Activity based learning is a method that teachers adopt through performing an activity in which the pupils are involved thoroughly and result to effective classroom learning experiences. This child centered approach ensures that the child is actively involved in contributing physically and mentally. Learning through doing is the principle focus of this approach. Learning through doing is crucial in effective learning because it has well been established that the more the senses are stirred, the more a child pupil and no longer retains. According to a survey conducted in India to determine the effect of activity-based learning in public Pre-primary centres in rural areas by Nehru and Raghupati (2011) indicated that this approach permitted pupils to be actively involved in the instructional activities hence more effective learning output. There have been improvements in classroom enrolments, a decrease in the dropout rate, and improvements in infrastructure resources in pre-primary due to the continued learning experienced by pupils due to the activity-based approach (Yadav, 2007).

A Baseline Survey was conducted by Akila (2009) to measure the effect of activity-based learning in 750 public primary schools in Tamil Nadu which were randomly chosen. Various aspects of classroom operations were recorded including classroom physical layout, engagement and behaviour of pupils and teachers techniques of learning and classroom interactions. So as to completely assess the degree of pupils' involvement in the learning process, their research integrated aspects of the emotional, social, cognitive and physical environments of the classroom. The results revealed that activity-based learning was more successful than other teaching approaches. It is very essential in primary education and pupils education programmes. Learning through games among other games associated activities are very essential in pre-primary teaching and learning of pupils. Teachers need to know the association between games activities and learning. They have to uncover new games associated with learning and have to utilise these games in classroom instructions. In recent times, various teaching approaches are being discovered as associated with activity-based learning (Andiema, Kemboi, & M'mbone, 2013). Educators have to select the most efficient approaches for their pupils. The learning process need to be a fascinating thing for instructors and the pupils. In another research, Wangui (2011) researched on the effect of learning environment on comprehension reading among pre-primary children in Kikuyu Sub County, Kenya. The study found out that one of the issues affecting use of activity-based learning in reading comprehension was: failure by teachers to use various activity-based approaches, lack of adequate instructional resources and teachers' lack of preparation for activity-based learning in comprehension. This means that various aspects acts as a hindrance towards allowing the use of activity based learning in teaching and learning process in public ECDE process.

Andiema et al. (2013) research investigated the relationship between implementation of play activities and pupils' academic performance in West Pokot County Public Pre-primary centres. All 417 public Pre-primary centres were involved. Findings showed that most public pre-primary centres did not have adequate playgrounds to facilitate some of activity-based learning strategies. Furthermore,

teachers were not provided the right instructional resources for ensuring usage of play activities approaches. Since there were no play activities, teachers utilised the scheduled lessons for play to perform other instructional tasks. The pre-primary teachers also did not engage pupils with play activities even in the fields that surrounded their schools.

Another research by Obuchere et al. (2014) examined teachers' role in the incorporation of play activities in the implementation of pre-primary curriculum. The study was anchored on descriptive survey research design where the sample involved 430 pre-primary teachers from 215 public pre-schools. The key informant for the study was ECDE officer. Findings of the research showed that most instructors did not meet all the roles they were supposed to do in ensuring play activities were integrated in learning process. This prevented the actualisation of play activities in schools as teachers did not know how to go about it. The review of the empirical studies shows that less focus has been done on how activity-based methods are used in teaching and learning process in public pre-primary centres in Kenya. This paper intended to fill the gap.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in West Pokot County, Kenya, which is located in the North Rift region. The county is largely populated by members of the Pokot tribe community, and the county name is derived from here. The level of education in the county is low compared to other parts of the country (aside from northern Kenyan counties, which can be categorised the same as West Pokot). Pastoralism is the main economic activity which, in some cases, hinders the education of pupils. The study used a mixed methodology research approach. The study used a mixed methodology research approach. The target population comprised teachers (1677) and headteachers (417) drawn from 417 Pre-primary centres in West Pokot County. Considering the sample size of pre-primary teachers and headteachers was large, a sample size representing 10.0% of the population as supported by Sekaran and Bougie (2010), was chosen. The sample, therefore, consisted of 41 headteachers out of 417 and 168 pre-primary teachers out of 1677.

Considering the teachers and headteachers came from the four sub-counties of West Pokot; North Pokot, Kapenguria, Central Pokot and Pokot South, stratified random sampling method was applied in choosing the head teachers and pre-primary teachers for this investigation. The head teachers who were sampled were subjected to interview while the questionnaire was administered to sampled pre-primary teachers. Further, the researcher collected secondary data through observation checklists from 41 sampled public pre-primary schools.

Data collected through the research instruments mentioned were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was facilitated through coding, entry and analysis with the help of Statistical Product and Service Solutions (Version 20.0). Analysis was through percentages, means and standard deviation. Qualitative data from head teachers' interviews was done using thematic content analysis.

Table 1 shows the output of the analysis.

**Table 1: Utilisation of activity-based approach by teachers (n=157)**

Statement		N	R	S	O	A	M	SD
I engage and participate with pupils in the playing field	f	8	3	41	85	20	3.68	.907
	%	5.1	1.9	26.1	54.1	12.7		
I spare time for creative activities	f	8	7	76	42	24	3.43	.975
	%	5.1	4.5	48.4	26.8	15.3		
I involve poetry in my lessons	f	16	53	42	46	0	2.75	.991
	%	10.2	33.8	26.8	29.3	0		
I provide clay/plasticine materials for art learning	f	16	15	105	21	0	2.83	.783
	%	10.2	9.6	66.9	13.4	0		
I use sound instruments when teaching music, e.g., drums, flute (pipes), horns, sticks & whistles	f	15	14	62	54	12	3.22	1.040
	%	9.6	8.9	39.5	34.4	7.6		

**Key:** N = never, R= Rarely, S= sometimes, O=often, A= always, M=Mean and SD-Standard deviation

The findings of the research from

Table 1 showed that 8 (5.1%) of Early years education teachers never engaged and participated with pupils in the playing field, 3 (1.9%) rarely participated, 41 (26.1%) sometimes participated, 85 (54.1%) often engaged pupils in the playing field and 20 (12.7%) admitted that they always engaged pupils in the playing field. The findings therefore imply that teachers often ( $M= 3.68$ ,  $SD= 0.907$ )

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The response rate for the research instrument was as follows. Out of 41 headteachers sampled, 35 interviews were successfully conducted, depicting an 85.4% response rate. For prep-primary teachers, out of the sample size of 168, 157 responded, showing a 93.45 response rate.

### Utilisation of Activity-based Approach in Pre-primary centres

The activity-based learning strategy is a child centered teaching method which involves teachers' utilisation of creative activities, plays, modelling, and the use of realia in classroom learning (Babalola & Oyinloye, 2012). The Early years education teachers were asked to rate the frequency to which they used activity-based approaches in the teaching and learning process using the following Likert scale of five: Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4) and Always (5A).

accompanied pupils during extra-curricular activities in the field as part of the implementation of ECDE curriculum objectives. Cognate to the results, Andiema *et al.* (2013), in a study on the relationship between play activities' implementation and pupils' academic performance in Wes Pokot Sub County, revealed that Early year's education teachers did not engage and

participated with the pupils in the playfields. Writing from the United Kingdom, Beard and Wilson (2006) indicate that the extent to which the ECDE learning environment is real, natural, or simulated influences the learning potential of preschool children. The findings of the study also concur with Hanley and Tiger (2011) research conducted in the United States, who noted that play facilities and materials in children's play add value to academic achievement and that children learn best when they are part of a secure and stimulating environment full of play materials for manipulation. In addition to the study findings, Obuchere et al. (2014) established that most the Pre-primary centres integrate all types of play activities commonly available in Pre-primary centres. From this study, the reasons for only construct and manipulative play activities not being integrated into ECDE Curriculum by most teachers and children is that they seemed to be: complicated, not interesting, and irrelevant to the teaching and learning of young children.

On the other hand, the reasons for most of the play activities being integrated into the ECDE curriculum by very many early years' education teachers were associated with: their simplicity, that they were interesting, and relevant to the teaching and learning of young children. One headteacher mentioned this during the interview:

*In my school, pupils play at the same time learn and what they are involved in doing becomes more memorable.*

Another headteacher during the interview also remarked that:

*"We have a big playground for pupils to participate in co-curricular activities. I always ensure that the pupils are accompanied by their teachers during PE lessons so that curricular goals may be achieved.*

From the responses made by headteachers, it is clear that most of them emphasise that teachers should teach play activities as part of fulfilling curriculum requirements. As a result, pupils understood better and therefore were able to share information in content being delivered through play. The research by Wangui (2011) in Kenya found mixed reactions as some preschools had very big playgrounds but

with few play materials. Some of the materials found in nearly all the preschools were: tyres, ropes, and balls. When a school has no playground, it is then evident that children spend all their time in class and are denied a chance to play. Philosophers like Maria Montessori and Froebel agree that play activities are very important to children's growth in all aspects (Madlela, 2014).

Secondly, the findings of the research revealed that 8 (5.1%) of Early years education teachers never spared their time to involve pupils in creative activities, 7 (4.5%) rarely spared their time to engage with pupils in creative activities, 48.4% sometimes spared their time, 26.8% often spared their time, and 15.3% of teachers always spared their time for creative activities. The outcomes suggest that teachers sometimes ( $M= 3.43$ ,  $SD= 0.975$ ) created free time for pupils to be involved in creative activities. Creative activities develop pupils' abilities to reason and understand the world and its cultures. They offer pupils opportunities to respond, perform, and create in the arts (Irish Teachers National Organisation, 2009; Sarah, 2013). In addition, UNESCO's (2015) report indicated that teachers are required to always look for time for creative activities since pupils in ECDE are at a critical stage of their development. The use of creative activities will help pupils to develop encoding skills due to their exposure to the physical environment. Wangui (2011) also said that ECDE pupils should be given many activities to help them develop their abilities and create enjoyment and interest.

On the frequency to which Early years education teachers incorporated poetry in their lessons as part of promoting creative activity approach, 16 (10.2%) of teachers did not integrate poetry in their lessons, 53 (33.8%) rarely included poetry in their lessons, 42 (26.8%) sometimes used poetry in teaching and only 46 (29.3%) of the Early years education teachers often incorporated poetry in their lessons. The findings are in contrast with Starko's (2010) opinion that teachers should have the capability to control and guide the child's process of holistic craft making and be able to offer creative solutions to support reflection and problem-solving. The study obtained a mean of 2.75 with standard deviation scores of 0.99, which indicated that poetry was not commonly integrated into ECDE classrooms in the

study area despite its significance in improving pupils' language and oratory skills. Poetry is a creative way in which pupils can memorise information provided by teachers in an easier and faster way (Tzuo *et al.*, 2011). These findings are in line with the research results in Tanzania, where Tarimo (2013) established that the practice of poetry activities by pre-scholars would enhance the development of multiple skills and experiences, including the promotion of listening and speaking skills, which are basic in language development. Poetry was found to be rarely used by teachers in West Pokot County. Therefore, teachers were less likely to bring out a spirit of creativity in the pupils.

When asked to indicate the frequency to which teachers used clay and plasticine resources to help pupils in moulding sculptures, 16 (10.2%) had never provided the materials, 15 (9.6%) of the Early years education teachers rarely used clay in art classes despite it being locally available from the environment, 105 (66.9%) of teachers sometimes provided clay and plasticine while 21 (13.4%) of teachers often used clay or plasticine materials for teaching and learning art in ECDE. The result showed that Early years education teachers occasionally ( $M= 2.83, SD= 0.783$ ) used clay and plasticine in teaching artwork activities to ECDE children. However, due to the parental socio-economic status, most public Pre-primary centres did not have plasticine, and therefore teachers had to resort to utilising clay which is locally available and functions the same as plasticine, although clay cannot be reused later when dry. The results are in agreement with Wangui's (2011) study in Kenya that established that teachers were using plasticine in reading lessons to model letters and animals. Others said that they only used plasticine in creative

activities. The findings concur with a study by Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2008) in the United States which revealed that quality-learning environments support children's learning with a rich variety of materials that enable them to explore and make discoveries. Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2008) suggested that the provision of play materials stimulates children's interest in the learning activities. In the same context, in Tanzania, Tarimo (2013) found out that most preschools had basic play objects, which they probably used for teaching and learning purposes. These objects are important in the introduction and reinforcement of concepts as well as in unstructured play sessions.

Furthermore, the study further sought to know whether the teachers incorporated the use of sound instruments (drums, flute/pipes, horns, sticks, and whistles) when teaching music. 15 (9.6%) of the teachers never integrated sound instruments when teaching music, 14 (8.9%) rarely used them, 62 (39.5%) sometimes used them, 54 (34.4%) often integrated sound instruments and 12 (7.6%) of the respondents always used sound instruments when teaching music to preschool pupils. The obtained mean value ( $M= 3.22, SD= 1.040$ ) interprets that musical instruments were used at times in Pre-primary centres. This could be due to their unavailability in schools, making some teachers apply their knowledge to make traditional instruments (flutes, drums) using locally available materials.

The study also conducted lesson observations to find out how the activity-based child-centred teaching approach was used by teachers in ECDE classrooms.

*Table 2* gives the results.

**Table 2: Results from observation checklist on utilisation of activity-based approach**

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Teachers sparing time for dancing activities	0	0	8	23	10
Teachers teaching through role-play and drama	1	6	9	11	14
Pupils creating models by themselves	0	0	10	18	13
Use of bead strings	3	5	10	10	15
Musical instruments and realia used in creative activities	6	5	20	10	0

Results from

*Table 2* indicate that early years learning teachers were often sparing time (23) for dancing activities in most classrooms in the 41 primary schools studied. Findings also reveal that pupils often created models by themselves, and they made bead strings with the assistance of the teachers. However, the researcher investigator observed that most early year's education teachers were sometimes using musical instruments and realia in creative activities to promote activity-based learning in their classrooms.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study determined how activity-based learning method was utilised in classroom by pre-primary teachers in West Pokot County. The study concludes that these approaches were found to be moderately utilised by teachers for pupils' instruction in pre-primary schools in West Pokot County. The study found out that to a moderate level, pre-primary teachers practiced activity-based approaches through seeking assistance from their colleagues in the school, using a combination of activities and drama, role-play, sculpting, arts and crafts, metaphors and stories. The usage of these activity-based approaches motivated pre-primary pupils to express thoughts and ideas concerning their experiences. Therefore, teachers in West Pokot County did not have access to instructional resources that could provide usage of activity-based methods. The study recommends that teachers should be provided with additional training for pedagogical instruction. There is a need for parents to support schools by working with teachers to acquire the required resources to enable the implementation of activity-based approaches. There is a need for pre-primary school management to make sure that the environment for learning in schools facilitates the effective implementation of an activity-based approach. Lastly, county governments need to provide additional funding to schools to enable them to acquire the right infrastructure and resources to be used to implement activity-based learning.

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