

**THE USE OF PLAY-WAY METHOD AS LEARNING STRATEGY
FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION IN SOME SELECTED PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS
OF IJEBU-ODE LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

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EDUCATION.**

NOVEMBER, 2021.

DECLARATION

I hereby declared that this project work was carried out by
me _____

Supervised by _____

Date and signature _____

DEDICATION

I hereby dedicate this project work to God Almighty and to my parent Mr & Mrs Utomojili who encouraged and supported me in my academics.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the determinants of pre-primary school teacher's use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood Education in some selected pre-primary school in Ijebu-Ode Local government. So far some studies have revealed problems in teacher's use of relevant teaching strategies to pre-primary learning at their own pace. Considering that one of the effective strategies of teaching is play-way method, this study sought establish the use of play-way method as a learning tool in the adequate preparation of childhood and future Education.

Literature showed that there was lack of awareness among educators on the potentials that exist in the use of play-way method in facilitating and enchancing children learning. A descriptive survey design was employed with independent variable play-way method as a learning strategy while the dependent variables are the skills development which are: cognitive skills, social skills, motor skills and attentiveness of children. Schools used for this study were selected using the simple random techniques which involved one hundred (100) early childhood teachers and caregivers from ten(10) different schools(both public and private) in Ijebu-ode Local government. The Data collected was coded and analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics computed included frequencies and percentages. Chi- Square was used to test the strength and direction of relationship between dependent and independent variables at level of significance 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). The findings showed that play-way method as a learning strategy have significant influence for skills development in early childhood (i.e on the cognitive, social, attentiveness and motor skills). To improve the use of play-way method as a teaching strategy in pre-primary schools, capacity building and sensitization seminars for school managers, pre-primary school teachers and other stakeholders should be encouraged.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Play-way method is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. It is also a range of intrinsically motivated activities done for recreational pleasure and enjoyment (Wikipedia) .In contrast to games, play behavior is more disorganized, and is typically done for its own sake (i.e., the process is more important than any goals or end points (Broadhead, 2011). Recognized as a universal phenomenon, play is a legitimate right of childhood and should be part of all children's life. Between 3% to 20% of young children's time and energy is spent in play (Isaacs, 2012).

Over the last decade, it has been observed that there is an on- going reduction of playtime in favour of educational instructions, especially in modern and urban societies. (Boardhead, 2011) Play-way method is essential to young children's education and should not be abruptly minimized and segregated from learning. Not only play -way method helps children develop pre-literacy skills, problem solving skills and concentration, but it also generates social learning experiences, societies and helps children to express possible stresses and problems. (Laine&Neitola, 2004; Erikson, 2006, Lawrence, 2012). Deeply entrenched within the historical roots of early childhood education, play-way method has long been a dominant feature of early childhood teaching pedagogy (Rogers 2011). Over many centuries, philosophers, theorists, educationalists and more recently, policy makers have worked hard to define the nature of childhood, play and the purposes of education (Fisher 2008).

In particular, researchers have become increasingly interested in how traditional and contemporary theories on play-way method and childhood have informed conceptualizations of childhood (Grieshaber and McArdle 2010), and the development of early childhood curriculum (Graue 2008). Wood and Attfield (2005) claim that until the nineteenth(19th) century, "childhood was seen as an immature form of adulthood and children from all social classes had little status in society".(Wood and Attfield, 2005) suggest that it was the studies of classical play-way method theorists, such as Rousseau, Froebel and Dewey, that dramatically changed societal views and attitudes towards children, to the extent that "freedom to learn could be combined with appropriate nurturing and guidance", (Platz and Arellano 2011).through the strongly held the belief that play was critical to children's learning and development in teaching and learning.

In the submission of Almon (2009), play-way method is a central activity in the lives of healthy children. Almon, (2009) opined that play-way method helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it and that it allows them to digest life and make it their own. Hewett (2007) sees play-way method as an outlet for the fullness of children's creativity, viewing it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood. With play-way method children blossom and flourish; without it, they suffer a serious decline. (Almon,2009).Young children are born with an innate urge to grow and learn (Henninger, 2005). They continually develop new skills and capacities, and if they are allowed to set the pace with a bit of help from the adult world they will work at all this in a playful and tireless way. Rather than respecting this innate drive to learn however, we treat children as they can learn only what adult can teach them (Henninger,2005).

As a result of this approach, Henninger,(2005) concluded that these children are stripped of their innate confidence in directing their own learning. All aspect of development and learning are related in play-way method particularly the effective and cognitive domains. when children have time to play, their this method grows in complexity and becomes more cognitively and social demanding (fragen,2007).through free play children, explore materials and materials and discover their properties, use their knowledge of material to play imaginatively, express their emotions and reveal their inner feelings.

In a nutshell, play-way method is needed for the healthy development of a child. According to the researchers, this process helps with the development of fine and gross motors skills. Fine motor skill are actions such as being able to use crayon or pencil .Gross motors skills are action such as jumping and running.(Neitola and Laine, 2004)

More so, through the tools of play-way method children gain knowledge and learnt how to thinkng skill and solve problems. Play- way method gives children the opportunity to test their beliefs about the world. It also helps children to develop language and socialization skills. It allows children to learn to communicate emotions, creativity and solve problems. (Erikson,2006). (Broadhead (2011) also submitted that children gain an understanding of size, shape and texture through play-way method, Books, games and toys that shows pictures and matching words add to child vocabulary. It also help child understanding of the world. Increasingly, however, preschool and kindergarten children find themselves in school settings which feature scripted teaching, computerized learning and standardized assessment. Physical and recess are being eliminated, new schools are built without playground. While allegedly, these approaches are providing what Langsted ,(2004) called quality education, they trivialized and undermine children natural capacities for meaningful and

focused life lessons through play-way method and leaves many children profoundly alienated from school experiences.

Moreover, teachers hope that their teaching pedagogy will help them achieve the objectives that they set out for. Early childhood teachers hope that their teaching methods would foster the growth and development that they want to see in the children. Some research has shown through play-way method the above mention aim could be achieved. However, contemporary early childhood teaching is increasingly being done through elaborates teaching outlines, minimizing the role of play-way method as a tool, but are these outlines as effective as play? It's of this reason that this study examines the assignment of play as principles learning tools in early childhood education.

1.2 Statement of the problem

One of the problems of early childhood education is to determine the teaching pedagogy that will yield the best results. The best teaching methods has to be favored because of the importance of early childhood education in the development of mental functions of children, which include language, motor skills and psychological skills. These functions have however known to be greatly influenced by the nature of educational environment to which the child is exposed during the first six to eight years. (Bowman, Donovan and Burns, 2001).

Thus, this study examines how the best educational environment can be created for children in Early Childhood Education through the use of play-way method as a learning strategy.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in Early childhood Education. More so, this study aims to evaluate the importance of play-way method as a learning tool in the adequate preparation of children for later childhood and future education specifically, this study aims to:

- Investigate the influence of play-way method on the cognitive skills of children.
- Determine the influence of play-way method on the social skills of children
- Evaluate the influence of play-way method on motor skills of children
- Determine the influence of play-way method on the attentiveness of children

1.4 Research Questions

1. Will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children?
2. How will the use of play -way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have significant on the social skills of children?

3. How will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education have significant on the motor skills of children?
4. Does the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children?

1.5. Research Hypothesis

1. Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education will not have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children.
2. Use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early will not have a significant influence on the social skills of children.
3. Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development of early childhood education will not have a significant influence on the motor skills of children.
4. Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education will not have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children.

1.6 Significant of the Study

This study will be source of caregivers, teacher, parents knowledge planners in early childhood education. It will reveal literature on the use of play-way method as a principle learning tool for children, thereby giving these planners greater in empirical platform on which to establish their teaching paradigms.

It will also be useful to curriculum planners as it serves as a further body of knowledge in knowing what to incorporate, what to remove, what works and what not works.

This study will also serve as a source for parents and teachers about how play-way method can facilitate the physical, emotional and psychological growth of children and prepare them for the future.

1.7 Scope of the study/delimitation

The scope of this study is delimited to assessing the assignment of play-way method as principle learning tools in Early childhood, covering the variables of cognitive skills, social skills, motor skills and attentiveness of children and using the descriptive survey research methods. The area covered is Ijebu-ode local government.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

- **Play-way method:** This is a learning method which involves spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activities involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationship.
- **Learning tool:** The teaching design adopted for learning and teaching early childhood education
- **Early Childhood:** The period from birth to five (5) years old, marked by remarkable brain growth.
- **Cognitive skills:** Brain based skills required of a child to carry out task which have to do with learning, remembering and solving problems.
- **Social skills:** These are skills required of a child to facilitate interaction and communication with others.
- **Motor Skills:** These are the skills that are involve using ones muscles. They involve movement of the legs, arm feet or the entire body.
- **Attentiveness:** The ability to pay attention when learning is taking place.
- **Learning environment:** This refers to the physical conditions, context and ideological atmosphere under which students learn.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on studies related to importance of play-way method in early childhood, overview on play-method in early childhood development, role of play-way method as a teaching and learning method and its effective on cognitive, social and motor, skills in teaching and learning in pre-primary school. In a nutshell, the sub-headings of the literature review for this study includes:

2.1 A review of the concept of play

2.2 The overview of play in early childhood education

2.3 The social, emotional and intellectual benefits of play

2.4 Integrating play and learning in Early Childhood Education

2.5 The role of the adult in the play-oriented classroom

2.6 Fostering healthy play in the Early Childhood Classroom

2.7 Availability of play materials

2.1 A review of the concept of play-way method

The early years of human life provide a unique opportunity for social and cognitive investment, but at the same time this is the most vulnerable period for all forms of stunting development if holistic development is not nurtured. Froebel (1987) writing on children's play contends that, play is not only the children's natural occupation before constraints and formal schooling takes over but it also serves as a major means which children use to communicate to themselves and to the world around. Children's play and teachers' involvement in play activities have received recognition and attention by philosophers and educationist for centuries (Froebel, 1987). The Convention on The Rights of

The Child Article number 31, together with The African Charter on The Rights and Welfare of The Child, Article XIII, clearly stipulate and require state parties to recognize and promote the right of children to engage in play (UNICEF, 2007).

Studies have shown that, at birth, a child's brain growth and development has reached 40%, and it rapidly grows and develops to 80% by the age of three, {UNICEF,2007}.

Sequel to the background above, play-way method can be regarded as a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. It is also a motivated activity done for recreational pleasure and enjoyment (Wikipedia).

The review of Deci & Ryan (2000), concurred with that of Chi, (2009)when he described play-way method as an activity done for its own sake, characterized by means rather than ends , flexibility , and positive affect (children often smile, laugh, and say they enjoy it). These criteria contrast play-way method with exploration (focused investigation as a child gets more familiar with a new toy or environment, that may then lead into play), work (which has a definite goal), and games (more organized activities in which there is some goal, typically winning the game). Recognized as a universal phenomenon, Deci& Ryan (2000) herald play-way-method as a legitimate right of childhood and should be part of all children's life. Research shows that between 3% to 20% of young children's time and energy is spent in play, and more so in non-impooverished environment (Deci& Ryan, 2000). Although play is an important arena in children's life associated with immediate, short-term and long-term term benefits, cultural factors influence children's opportunities for free play in different ways (Gray, 2013). Gray disclosed that , over the last decade, there

has been on-going reduction of playtime in favour of educational instructions, especially in modern and urban societies. Furthermore, the researcher pointed out parental concerns about safety as a factor which sometimes limit children's opportunities to engage in playful and creative activities. Along the same lines, Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl (1999) indicated the increase of commercial toys and technological developments by the toy industry has as a factor that has fostered more sedentary and less healthy play behaviours in children. Yet, play is essential to young children's education and should not be abruptly minimized and segregated from learning. Not only play helps children develop pre-literacy skills, problem solving skills and concentration Hargrave & Sénéchal (2000) but it also generates social learning experiences, and helps children to express possible stresses and problems.

According to Ramstetter, Murray & Garner (2010) identified the different types of play, through childhood developmental stages. They are:

- **Unoccupied play:** In the early months of infancy, from birth to about three months, the child is busy in unoccupied play. Children seem to be making random movements with no clear purpose. This is the initial form of playing (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Solitary play:** From three to 18 months, babies will spend much of their time playing on their own. During solitary play, children are very busy with play and they may not seem to notice other children sitting or playing nearby. They are exploring their world by watching, grabbing and rattling objects. Solitary play begins in infancy and is common in toddlers. This is because of toddlers' limited social, cognitive, and physical skills (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Onlooker play.** Onlooker play happens most often during the toddler years. This is where the child watches other children play. Children are learning how to relate to others and learning language. Although

children may ask questions of other children, there is no effort to join the play. This type of play usually starts during toddler years but can take place at any age (Vygotsky, 1978).

- **Parallel play:** From the age of 18 months to two years, children begin to play alongside other children without any interaction. This is called parallel play. Parallel play provides the toddler with opportunities for role-playing such as dressing up and pretending. It also helps children gain the understanding of the idea of property right such as “mine.” They begin to show their need of being with other children their own age. Parallel play is usually found with toddlers, although it happens in any age group (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Social play:** Children around the age of three are beginning to socialize with other children. By interacting with other children in play settings, your child learns social rules such as give and take and cooperation. Children are able to share toys and ideas. They are beginning to learn to use moral reasoning to develop a sense of values. To be prepared to function in the adult world, children need to experience a variety of social situations (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Motor - Physical Play:** When children run, jump, and play games such as hide and seek and tag they engage in physical play. Physical play offers a chance for children to exercise and develop muscle strength. Physically playing with the child teaches social skills while enjoying good exercise. The child will learn to take turns and accept winning or losing ((Vygotsky, 1978)..
- **Constructive Play:** In this type of play, children create things. Constructive play starts in infancy and becomes more complex as the child grows. This type of play starts with your baby putting things in his/her mouth to see how they feel and taste. As a toddler, children

begin building with blocks, playing in sand, and drawing. Constructive play allows children to explore objects and discover patterns to find what works and what does not work. Children gain pride when accomplishing a task during constructive play. Children who gain confidence manipulating objects become good at creating ideas and working with numbers and concepts ((Vygotsky, 1978).

- **Expressive Play:** Some types of play help children learn to express feelings. Here, teachers can use many different materials. Materials may include paints, crayons, colored pencils and markers for drawing pictures or writing. It can also include such items as clay, water, and sponges to experience different textures. Beanbags, pounding benches, and rhythm instruments are other sources of toys for expressive play. The adult can take an active role in expressive play by using the materials alongside the child (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.2 Overview on Play-way method in Early Childhood Development

It is widely acknowledged that experience in early childhood strongly affect human

development. Research evidence from longitudinal and neuroscience studies has shown that children's earliest learning experiences are most significant in determining their future progress in education and subsequent success in life (Kwan, 1998). The quality of ECE has a significant and long term influence on their educational performance and life chances(Sylva, 2004). For young children's optimal development, there is need for consistent and responsive caregivers within stimulating environments where play materials and other opportunities for interaction are abundant. Froebel (1987) argues that play is children's

natural occupation before cultural restraints and formal schooling takes over. Play -way method is the first means of development of the human mind. It is the first effort to make acquaintance with the outward world, to correct original experiences, to reinforce facts and to exercise the powers of body and mind (Froebel, 1987)

The role of play-way method in early childhood education is reviewed through literature obtained from the works of (Wason, 1968). Also this subheading is reviewed chronologically with regard to the developmental stages of the child. Play, in the opinion of (Willingham, 2009), helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it. It allows them to digest life and make it their own. Furthermore, the researchers noted that play -way method is an outlet for the fullness of children's, play-way method and it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood. With creative play, children blossom and flourish; without it, they suffer a serious decline. The central importance of creative play in children's healthy development is well supported by research. And yet, children's play, in the creative, open-ended sense in which , is now seriously endangered and the demise of play will certainly have serious consequences for children and for the future of childhood itself (Wu, Gopnik, Richardson, & Kirkham, 2011).

More so, In the observation of Alexander, Fabricius, Fleming, Zwahr & Brown (2003).It was noted that pre-school and kindergarten children increasingly find themselves in school settings which feature scripted teaching, computerized learning, and standardized assessment. Schaffer also observed that physical education and recess are being eliminated and that new schools are built without playgrounds. While allegedly, these approaches are providing "quality education," as Schaffer termed it, they trivialize and undermine children's natural capacities for meaningful and focused life lessons through creative play

and this leaves many children profoundly alienated from their school experiences.

Many adults are convinced that we need to “teach” young children. It is certainly true that we need to set an example in all kinds of activities. We also need to create appropriate spaces where children can play and learn, and we need to lend a helping hand -- and at times even intervene when things are going wrong. But mostly we need to honor the innate capacity for learning of every healthy young child (Annevirta&Vauras, 2006).

Analyzing the role of free play, Annevirta&Vauras (2006) submitted that, through free play, children: explore materials and discover their properties, use their knowledge of materials to play imaginatively, express their emotions and reveal their inner feelings, come to terms with traumatic experiences, maintain emotional balance, physical and mental health, develop a sense of who they are, their value and that of others, learn social skills of sharing, turn-taking and negotiation, deal with conflict and learn to negotiate, solve problems, moving from support to independence, develop communication and language skills, repeat patterns that reflect their prevailing interests and concerns, use symbols as forms of representation – the use of symbols is crucial in the development from learning through the senses to the development of abstract thought practise, develop and master skills across all aspects of development and learning.

Based on the foregoing, it is clear to see that play-way method has a large role to play on the social, emotional, physical and intellectual development of a child and thus, the secret to helping young children thrive is to keep the spirit of creativity and of playful learning alive and active.

The learning of children learning is a combination of their own deep inner drive to grow and learn coupled with their imitation of the adults in their

environment, as Ashley & Tomasello (2001) noted. These two elements interweave all through early childhood.

According to Ashley & Tomasello (2001), an important milestone in play, the capacity for make-believe play - also known as fantasy play - occurs at around two and a half or three years of age. Before that, children are more oriented to the real world: their own bodies, simple household objects like pots, pans, and wooden spoons, and simple toys like dolls, trucks, and balls. Schaffer explained that toddlers imitate what they see around them and that common play themes include cooking, caring for baby, driving cars or trucks, and other everyday events.

These themes continue and expand after age three, but now children are less dependent on real objects and create what they need from anything that is at hand (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Schaffer also noted that the ability of children at this stage to enter into make-believe allows them to transform a simple object into a play prop. A bowl becomes a ship, a stick becomes a fishing pole, a rock becomes a baby, and much, much more. The three-year-old becomes so engaged in make-believe play that objects seem to be in a constant state of transformation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

In contrast, four-year-olds are generally more stationary and thematic in their play (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Carpendale & Lewis (2004) disclosed that these kids like to have a "house" to play in, which might also be a ship or a shop, and many enter the "pack-rat" stage where they fill their houses with objects so that it seems they cannot freely move around which does not bother them at all, however. Like three-year-olds, they are inspired in the moment by the objects before them (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). They are quite spontaneous in their ideas for play (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

The fantasy play of the five-year old is characterized by the ability to have an idea

and then play it out rather than being inspired in the moment by the object at hand as is the case with three and four year olds (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Often, five-year olds will announce what they want to play as they enter the kindergarten. Their mothers report that the children wake up in the morning with an idea for play in mind (Chatzipanteli & Digelidis, 2011). In an attempt to create more insight, Kampmann revealed that kids at this stage may play out the same theme for several days or weeks, subtle variations emerge as they gain focus, come in touch with their own ideas, and acquire the will to carry them out in playful detail.

There is one more important aspect to the development of make-believe play that usually does not occur until children are six years old. At this age they will often play out a situation without the use of props. They may build a house or castle but leave it unfurnished, then sit inside it and talk through their play, for now they are able to see the images clearly in their minds' eyes. This stage can be described as imaginative play, for the children now have the capacity to form a well articulated inner image. It is around this time that a child will say something like "I can see Grandma whenever I want, I just have to close my eyes." To use Kampmann's example.

In all of these stages of dramatic play children may play alone or with others. (Denckla, 2003). The social play of five and six year olds is different. The doors to deeper social

relationships are opening for them, as Denckla (2003). put it. According to the researchers, these children form friendships and talk about their friends at home. They think about their friends when they are apart. The sociodramatic play of this age group is rich and varied.

These literatures have highlighted the invaluable influence of play on the growth, development and maturity of a child. It is pertinent to underline once again that play has an immeasurable contribution to the social, emotional and physical development of a child and thus, its absence in childhood may have long-lasting repercussions on the child's overall development and learning phases.

2.3. Role of play-way method as a teaching strategy in pre-primary schools

Play-way method is an avenue for learning and an important stimulant which accelerates children's intellectual growth. This implies that play-way method can have a significant role in teaching in preprimary schools. Vygotsky (1978) supports this thinking when he asserts: In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior, in play it is as though he were a bit taller than himself ” This statement means that play-way method can stimulate children to think at a higher level. In addition, it is a significant and effective medium of teaching in pre-primary school.

Roberts (1977) argued that educators can most effectively harness the power of children's learning by presenting new ideas and reinforcing concepts by use of play-way method, a potential which is intrinsic in children. Bredekam (1987), while writing on relevance of play-way method in teaching and enabling children's learning, commented that teachers' support in children play activities is an extremely important developmental practice as it enhances smooth teaching and facilitates children's learning at their own pace. Ngasike (2004) purports that teachers in pre-primary schools should focus on investing in play-way method as an appropriate and natural opportunity to reinforce and introduce new concepts to children. This study sought to establish whether pre-

primary teachers in Mwanza district in Kilimanjaro region invested in use of play-way method in facilitating teaching and children's learning processes.

Moreover, Bruner (1975) argues that play serves as a vehicle for social, emotional and cognitive development. This implies that the negative emotional and serious consequences of error and setbacks are reduced in play. In play, children talk freely, explore freely and when one is mistaken, he/she is freely corrected causing no ill feelings on both mistaken and corrected part. By discussing and questioning in such a friendly atmosphere, they develop a critical outlook on issues, which is in itself, prerequisite for academic autonomy. Erikson, (1963) agrees with the idea that children use play to make up from defeat, suffering and frustration.

Play has a therapeutic value in that, it takes away the attention from the objective worries about self and focuses on an interesting objective pursuit (Bruner, 1975). In addition, Bruner contends that when children play in a rich environment, they can exercise judgment, mastery and competence, and if they are unable to experience power and satisfaction that comes through play, their holistic development is likely to be jeopardized. Thus ECE program is supposed to translate the theories and principles related to early childhood development into practice. This involves concentrating on the use of child-centered teaching and learning methods specifically emphasizing on the use of play as a teaching strategy.

2.4 .The Social , Emotional and Intellectual Benefits of Play-way method

Israeli psychologist Sara Smilansky in the 70's and 80's conducted groundbreaking research on the role of *dramatic play* and *socio-dramatic play* in cognitive and socio-emotional development. She defines dramatic play as having four elements: the child undertakes a make-believe role; the child uses

make-believe to transform objects into things necessary for the play; verbal descriptions or exclamations are used at times in place of actions or situations; and the play scenarios last at least ten minutes. In socio-dramatic play these four elements are present plus two more: at least two players interact within the play scene, and there is some verbal communication involved with the play.

Observing three to six year olds, Smilansky developed a method of assessing children's play in pre-school settings. Using her assessment tools, she and other researchers observed and assessed children from three to six at play in a number of preschool settings in the U.S. and in Israel, observing children from a variety of socioeconomic settings. They also assessed children's ability to organize and communicate thoughts and to engage in social interactions. In one study children were followed and tested in second grade in literacy and numeracy. Children's ability to engage in dramatic and socio dramatic play was found to be directly linked to a wealth of skills all of which are essential for academic success. Smilansky's findings are summarized below:

Gains in Cognitive-Creative Activities

Better verbalization, richer vocabulary, higher language comprehension, higher language level, better problem-solving strategies, more curiosity, better ability to take on the perspective of another, *higher intellectual competence*, better peer cooperation, reduced aggression, more group activity

Gains in Socio-emotional Activities

More playing with peers, better ability to take on the perspective of others, more empathy, better control of impulsive actions, better prediction of others' preferences and desires, better emotional and social adjustment, more innovation, more imaginativeness, longer attention span, greater attention ability performance of more conservation tasks.

Bruce (2006) concludes: Socio-dramatic play activates resources that stimulate

emotional, social, and intellectual growth in the child, which in turn affects the child's success in school.

Problem solving in most school subjects requires a great deal of make-believe: visualizing how the Eskimos live, reading stories, imagining a story and writing it down, solving arithmetic problems, and determining what will come next. History, geography, and literature are all make-believe. All of these are conceptual constructions that are never directly experienced by the child. They are aided by socio-dramatic play.

Bruce's research also points to the fact that imagination is as important a medium for learning in the elementary-school years, as is make-believe for the pre-school child. If a child has been allowed to engage in make-believe play during the nursery-school and kindergarten years and to develop inner imagination before entering first grade, she is then ripe and ready to learn (Bruce, 2006).

A study was conducted in Thailand between 2001 and 2006 (Cole-Hamilton, 2010) to find out the relationship between preschool play and elementary school success. The study compared 50 play-oriented kindergartens with 50 academically oriented ones. The children were followed until fourth grade, at which point the children from the play-oriented kindergartens excelled over the others in every area measured – physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. The results were especially striking among lower-income children, who clearly benefited from the play-oriented approach. The overall results were so compelling that Thailand switched all its kindergartens back to being play-oriented. They have continued in this mode until the present time (Denckla, 2003).

A recent study carried out by Marcon of the University of North Florida between 2006 and 2010 revealed similar results when children from different pre-school programs were followed through fourth grade. Through this

research, it was found that those who had attended play-oriented programs where child-initiated activities predominated did better academically than those who had attended academic-oriented programs.

Through play, children gain knowledge. They learn to think, remember, and solve problems. Play gives children the opportunity to test their beliefs about the world (Nabuko&Sylva, 2006).

Children increase their problem-solving abilities through games and puzzles (Dufrense & Kobasigawa, 1989). Children involved in make-believe play can stimulate several types of learning. Children can strengthen their language skills by modeling other children and adults (Nutbrown, 2006). Playing house helps children create stories about their roles, such as “I am the Mom.” They also imitate their own family experiences. This helps children learn about the different roles of family members (Dufrense & Kobasigawa, 1989).

Through play, children gain an understanding of size, shape, and texture .Play helps them learn relationships as they try to put a square object in a round opening or a large object in a small space. Books, games, and toys that show pictures and matching words add to a child's vocabulary. It also helps a child's understanding of the world (Dufrense&Kobasigawa, 1989).

Pellegrini& Smith (2008), in their assessment outlined a myriad of benefits of play on the development of children. To summarise their findings: play allows children to be creative while developing their own imaginations, it is important to healthy brain development, play is the first opportunity for the child to discover the world in which he lives, play offers a child the ability to master skills that will help develop self-confidence and the ability to recover quickly from setbacks, play allows children to express their views, experiences and at times, frustrations, playing with other children helps a child learn how to be part of a group, play allows a child to learn the skills of negotiation, problem solving, sharing, and working within groups and last but not least, children

practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace and discover their own interests during play.

2.5. Integrating play and learning in Early Childhood Education

Goffin and Wilson (2003) in their study state that; teachers have a variety of critical roles in supporting integration of children's play in ECE curriculum. The study further confirms that these roles include; providing materials for play, encouraging high quality play, structuring environments for play, modeling play and introducing children to new play opportunities. The study recommended that teachers should look after children, give them nutrition supplement through initiating a sustaining a feeding program, they are expected to play with children, teach them alphabet and numerals and make them be aware of their cultural patterns through play, storytelling or music activities.

A study by Mweru (2012) concurs with Goffin and Wilson's (2003) findings when it postulates that, teachers should also take care of their children's good grooming and hygiene; encourage children to work, discuss and solve problems in groups; introduce children to Mathematics, Language, Science, Social Studies, Play activities and games. The study emphasizes that teachers are expected to use games, music, artwork, films, books, charts and the like to teach basic skills.

Fernyhough & Fradley, (2005) carried out a survey Britain on teachers' roles in integrating play and learning. They found out that; teachers should act as a role model and guide in the process of teaching and learning through literacy-related play for effective curriculum implementation in early childhood centres. Another study carried out in England by Fisher (1998). on teachers' roles in promoting literacy in the context of play, assessed the role of kindergarten teachers in order to promote literacy during children's play. The study revealed

that; teachers act as; discussion leaders, storytellers, examiners and decision makers.

A study carried out in Nigeria by the United Nations in 2001 on the role and perceptions of teachers in promoting literacy during periods of play with children found out that; teachers are expected to provide teaching and learning materials during learning/play process.

A teacher is an important factor in teaching and learning of language in Early Childhood Development and Education centre and a well prepared teacher could be very effective in the selection, development and use of materials (Fisher, 1998).

2.5 Integrating play-way method and learning in Early Childhood Education

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2.6. The role of the adult in the play-oriented classroom

As it is unadvisable for children to be neglected in their play, which in the context of this study is meant for educational upbringing and nourishment, adults, who, in this case are the early childhood teachers have a couple of roles to play. These roles will be summarized under four sub-headings which are:

- Sensitivity and attachment
- Observing children at play
- Interacting with children in play
- Resourcing the environment

Sensitivity and attachment

The primary role of the adult is to create a context that is both psychologically and

physically safe, within which children feel secure, develop a sense of their worth and that of others, and develop the freedom and autonomy to explore and play (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky offered that the physical environment should be clear of unexpected hazards but should offer children opportunities to stretch and challenge themselves, taking risks appropriate to their stage of development.

From their very early days, babies and toddlers need opportunities to play freely. Adults should respond to their playful responses and be proactive in initiating these too. They should interpret and respond sensitively to the children's gestures and cues (Flavell, 1988). In games, for example, the adult should aim to mirror the child's pitch and tone. In doing so the adult is creating synchrony.

This sensitivity to the child's body language and cues in play is imperative in playwork (Iskala, Vauras&Lehtinen, 2004). During the early months the child is responsive to adults' emotions such as pleasure or depression (Field 2005). Responses to the child's emotional responses, such as smiling and crying, are critical in expressing sensitivity (Iskala, Vauras&Lehtinen, 2004)and for building the emotional exchanges on which secure relationships are built. Selleck (2001) reminds us that in order to be effective in this aspect of practice, practitioners should get in touch with their own emotionaland inner states of mind. Strong emotional bonds or attachments (Ainsworth 2002; Meins et al., 2001; Selleck 2001) are necessary for healthy development. The child's security is bound up in these for they meet the child's instinctive need to be close. Key factors in attachment sensitivity are acceptance, cooperation and responsive interactions with infants in the first year of life (Ainsworth, 2002).

Meins, et al., (2001), who investigated attachment theory, found that maternal sensitivity is a factor in fostering securely attached children. Secure attachment develops from the mother's responsiveness to the infant's actions with objects and appropriate mind-related' comments. The authors describe 'mind-related' comments as those that treat infants as individuals with minds when responding to their child's direction of gaze, actions with objects and vocalisations. When mothers talk with their children about their feelings and how their behaviour impacts on others, and treat them as individuals with minds capable of complex relationships and events, this leads children to understand themselves and others, and therefore they are better able to take the role of a play partner. Parents with children who were securely attached imitated the child's vocalisation were more likely to attribute meaning to the child's early vocalisations and encouraged autonomy, which is a key factor in exploratory and innovative play.(Trevvarthen, 2005)

Practitioners take on the role and responsibility of parents while children are in their care, and therefore the development of secure attachments is central to their work, noted Trevvarthen. Secure attachments through positive relationships give children a sense of value and belonging. Children who enjoy strong attachments with their mothers are more likely when older to be conciliatory with friends and enter elaborate shared fantasy bouts and conversations (Dunn 2013). The reverse is also true, however, for inconsistency and insensitivity can cause psychological damage and trauma, negative self-esteem and, later on, can result in an inability to tune in to others.

Children's early attachments influence the potential complexity of their play and social relationships in later years, Dunn (2013) concluded.

Observing children at play

Observation is a key tool for those working with young children. It opens their eyes to the competencies of young children, deepens their respect for them as

learners (Drummond and Nut brown 2004) and informs them about development and learning (Wood & Attfield, 2006). Observations also inform adults about the child's interests, how long they persist in play, the patterns and rhythms of their play, and the partners who share their play (Selleck, 2001) Through these observations, children who are in danger of exclusion can be identified and supported in accessing play materials and companions, suggested Selleck. Insights into the child's affective state can be gained through observing body language, and the skills of communication and language are also visible in play (Street, 2012). According to Street, observations of children's free play reveal how children differentiate their own learning and set themselves challenges. Familiarity with children's interests in free play also provides information on which adult-initiated activities or visits can be based in order to make them relevant and meaningful to the child(Stoller, Collins & Barnett (2004).

The work of Piaget and Isaacs used detailed observations to understand the learning processes. Working with children today requires astute and observant people to go beyond nurturing to develop effective practice (Selleck 2001).

Selleck suggested that, when observing, adults should place themselves in the child's shoes and ask how the event is being experienced by the child and that observation should be rigorous and reflective.

Observation will sensitise adults to the play cues that children use when drawing peers and adults into their play (Stoller, Collins & Barnett, 2004).

2.6 Interacting with children in play-way method

The extent to which the adult interacts with children during their free play will vary depending on the circumstances. One school of thought advocates non-intervention as an appropriate means of interacting, because a more interactive approach interferes with the child's play (Pellegrini and Galda 2013).

Adults are advised against premature intervention in children's play as this robs them of the opportunity to make mistakes, learn from them, solve problems creatively and negotiate solutions to social conflict (Hohmann and Weikart 2005). Missuna and Pollock (2011) found this to be true particularly when working with children who were disabled, because when the adult solves problems and intervenes inappropriately, the child can become doubly disabled as a result of dependency and loss of power and control.

Therefore, in many situations the adult should act as a nonparticipant in the play, yet actively observe and note what children are doing to develop understanding of the child's affective state, intellectual concerns and physical and social skills, friendships and abilities (Stoller, Collins & Barnett, 2014). The researchers revealed that, if adults are directly involved in play, they may inadvertently transmit their values, rules and traditions to children.

Their literature, however, makes a strong case for a more structured adult role when playing with children who have a lack of mobility or insufficient fine motor skills to enable them to access objects independently. Modelling play with objects, encouraging play with others to develop their social skills (Thomas and Smith 2004), and helping children to initiate and sustain their play (Hestenes and Carroll 2000) adds to the repertoire of the adult in this context. When adults play with children they stimulate their senses. Disabled children cannot always indicate when they are bored (Brodin 2003), and therefore the adult should also observe closely and develop sensitivity to children's individual needs.

In other situations the adult must be available to join children in their play when they are invited to do so. The adult might choose to play alongside children when they are painting, drawing, modelling or building with bricks, with the hope that they will be drawn into the conversation and play. In this way the adult respects the child's right to be in control of the action

(Brodin,2003). Broadhead's (2001) work describes how children in some play situations draw adults in to resolve conflicts, but when engaged in more complex play they are able to resolve altercations and solve problems themselves. Therefore, children are active in drawing in the adult to support them when it is necessary but work toward shaving mastery over all aspects of their situations, and will refuse support when they feel in control.

Children's self-esteem and identity are fostered through the types of interactions and relationships they have with adults and peers. Adults are role models for children, and therefore they have the power to influence values, attitudes and behaviour (Siraj-Blatchford 2001).

2.6.1. Resourcing the environment

The environments in which play takes place are important. They are central to the way in which play is allowed to develop and flourish (Abbott and Nutbrown 2006). These environments include indoors and outdoors. Adults are responsible for choosing materials and resources, based on their knowledge of child development and individual children's interests and abilities.

Abbott & Nutbrown suggested that the outdoor environment should be an extension of the indoor environment in that anything that is offered indoors can reasonably be offered outdoors, and the outdoor environment can foster all aspects of the child's development. Esbensen (2007) recommends that the outdoor play space should be zoned to facilitate children's diverse interests. Some zones would facilitate climbing apparatus, others social interaction, yet others sensory or socio-dramatic play.

Paths, hills, patches used to grow flowers and vegetables, and wild areas all enlarge the potential for rich, imaginative and exploratory play.

They also meet children's evolutionary needs of associating with the past, developing creativity and mastery, and positively impacting on brain development (Gray, 2013).

In order to support children's exploration in play there should be a wide range of materials of different textures, colours, shapes and sizes. There should be materials that are familiar to the child and those that are novel in order to present challenge. (Gray, 2013).

Materials should be accessible to the children so that they can choose the resources that best suit their purposes.(Esbensen, 2007). The materials that best support children's creativity are open-ended. Their adaptability and lack of explicit function provokes children's imagination and creativity(Thomas & Smith, 2004). Resources chosen for children who are disabled should be developmentally appropriate and flexible in use – for example they should include things that can be held in the hand or by feet (Ouvry, 2003).

Furthermore, adults should ensure that children have time to become engaged in complex play and have some control over how and when this is terminated(Stephenson, 2003). Stephenson also revealed that repetition leads to a more complex combinations of materials, ideas and higher levels of learning. When adults are confident in their understanding of this they will not be concerned about repetitious behaviour and consequently avoid the temptation to move children on to gain experience in other areas of learning.

The manner in which resources are stored and available to children supports or hinders their play. These resources should be readily accessible to children and should reflect cultural diversity (Vygotsky, 1978)

2.7 Fostering healthy play in the Early Childhood Classroom

During the preschool years, children are developing a sense of independence and capacity for cooperation. As they become more verbal, self-aware, and able to think about another person's point of view, they become more able to interact with peers (Berk, 2002). Furthermore, children at this age move from parallel play to more advanced levels such as associative and cooperative play. It is through cooperative play that children experience play in groups in which

they must set aside their needs for the good of the group (Wardle, 2003). Thus, they are developing social skills.

Early social development is complex and closely intertwined with other areas of development: cognitive, physical, emotional, linguistic, and aesthetic (Bredekamp&Copple, 2007) Bredekamp&Copple (2007) emphasizes the need for socialization and the development of social skills as a vital part of early childhood education.

Prosocial behaviors are crucial to children's well being. Thus, it is the responsibility of early childhood educators to provide opportunities for the development of necessary social skills.

Play is a common form of interaction between and among children. "Children do not construct their own understanding of a concept in isolation but in the course of interaction with others" (Gray, 2013). Some of the social skills fostered through play are the ability to work towards a common goal, initiating and/or keeping a conversation going, and cooperating with peers (Gray, 2013). Attachments are formed with other children of similar interests and can lead to friendships. Friendship can be defined as "a mutual relationship involving companionship, sharing, understanding of thoughts and feelings, and caring for and comforting one another in times of need" (Gray, 2013). Many of the social skills children develop at this time are listed in this definition. As social skills become more developed, friendships and interactions can become more complex.

Prosocial Skills

Prosocial behaviors allow a child to interact with adults and children in a successful and appropriate manner. The interaction should be beneficial to one, the other, or both parties involved. An added component is the "individual's ability to perceive the situation and be aware when a particular set of behaviors will result in positive outcomes (Gray, 2013).

Prosocial behaviors can be grouped into three distinct categories: sharing (dividing up or bestowing), helping (acts of kindness, rescuing, removing distress), and cooperation (working together to reach a goal) (Marion, 2003). Other experts include showing sympathy and kindness, helping, giving, sharing, showing positive verbal and physical contact, showing concern, taking the perspective of another person, and cooperating. Wason (1968) placed prosocial behavior in two categories: cooperation and helpfulness. The authors defined cooperation as the act of working together for a common goal. Helpfulness was defined as the act of removing distress from another person. Many experts have looked at the process of developing prosocial skills. A child must develop cognitive competencies, emotional competencies, and specific skills in order to develop pro-social behavior (Wason, 1968). For example, in order to share a child must have:

- The cognitive ability to recognize him/herself as able to make things happen.
- The emotional capacity to empathize with the other person.
- The ability to perform a specific skill. (Marion, 2003).

It is the combination of these three elements that result in the formation of a social skill such as sharing.

Another expert, Vygotsky, viewed socialization as two fold. First, cognition is related to social engagement, and secondly, language is a critical tool for communication within a social context .Vygotsky emphasized the importance of sociodramatic play. Play is a means by which children interact, but it is also through this social interaction that cognitive development occurs. Researchers have found that preschoolers who spend more time at pretend play are more advanced in intellectual development, have a higher capacity for empathy, and are seen by teachers as more socially competent (Wason, 1968).

The development of prosocial skills can be viewed as a three-part process. In the *recognition* step, a child must be able to determine if someone needs help. Secondly, the child must *decide* whether to help or not to act. Thirdly, a child must *act* by selecting and performing an appropriate behavior for that situation (Wason, 1968).

Crick and Dodge looked at the social problem solving aspect of social development (Berk, 2002). They developed an information-processing model that looked at 1) a child's ability to engage in several information-processing activities at a time, 2) a child's mental state, and 3) peer evaluation and response. They listed the activities a child must do in order to deal with the problem and come up with a solution. They are:

- Notice social cues
- Interpret social cues
- Formulate social goals
- Generate possible problem solving strategies
- Evaluate probable effectiveness of strategies
- Enact response

In addition, the child must have knowledge of social rules, memory of past experiences, and expectations for future experiences. Lastly, peer perspectives and responses to a child's problem solving techniques greatly impact future interactions between the children involved (Berk, 2002).

2.7.2. The Teacher's Role

Ancient Romans called the teacher who was responsible for inducing elements of knowledge to young children, "a magister ludi" or game master (Lima, 1986). Shefatya (1995) describes roles and various kinds of teachers' interventions in play as follows;

- i. Teachers as observers: Teachers must be good observers of children's play and help them to interpret issues which emanate in play processes.
- ii. Teachers as collaborators: Teachers can extend children's play by adding a new toy prop or by asking a question that elaborates the theme.
- iii. Teachers as planners: Teachers must also plan for children's play. They should plan for a conducive environment, time, space and variety of materials that encourage all forms of play.
- iv. Teachers as responders: When teachers verbally describe children's actions and words or ask questions about the role or theme, they provide feedback on what the children are doing and saying.
- v. Teachers as models: Sometimes teachers should actively join the play and model a particular behavior or role relevant to the ongoing play theme. In this way, they can teach individuals or groups of children a needed play skill or behavior.
- vi. Teachers as mediators: Teacher's role as mediator is critical in helping children construct meaning from their play experiences. The teacher serves as a bridge between children's initial understanding of a concept or event and their deeper understanding as a result of direct experience with that concept or event. It is the teacher's role to facilitate and encourage pro-social behaviors, provide activities that foster appropriate skills, provide necessary assistance, and develop a social network that supports children in their efforts. Teachers must provide activities that help children identify various social skills and help them understand why the skill is needed (Willingham, 2009).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2005) pointed out that "preschoolers are capable of engaging in truly cooperative play with their peers and forming real friendships. However, development of these important social skills is not automatic for children. They

need coaching and supervision to learn and maintain appropriate behaviors with others” ((Willingham, 2009).

How can teachers help children develop the skills and behaviors needed to act in a prosocial manner? According to NAEYC the classroom is a place to learn about human relationships. Children should have the opportunity to:

- Play and work with others
- Make choices and encounter the consequences of those choices
- Figure out how to enter play situations with others
- Negotiate social conflicts with language
- Develop other skills that characterize socially competent human beings (Willingham, 2009).

Facilitating Positive Interactions

Teachers can facilitate positive play interactions for children through the use of a variety of strategies. These strategies include: 1) emphasizing cooperation rather than competition, 2) teaching games that emphasize cooperation and conflict resolution, 3) setting up classroom spaces and materials to facilitate cooperative play, 4) using literature to enhance empathy and caring, and 5) encouraging social interactions between children of different abilities whether it is social, emotional, or physical (Honig&Wittmer, 2006). Research has shown children benefit greatly from effective, positive play situations. Klein, Wirth, and Linas (2003) listed several approaches for facilitating quality play situations. These approaches include:

- Focusing on the process by asking exploratory questions.
- Building on children’s interests and elaborate on their play

- Labeling emotions and feelings that children are expressing through their play.
- Providing materials that encourage and extend exploration.
- Providing open-ended materials such as blocks or pretend props.

Howes and Stewart (cited in Honig&Wittmer, 2006) found that children who are involved in high-quality care and have supportive parents learn how to recognize and regulate emotional signals when playing with peers.

2.7.3 Helping Children Make Choices

Teachers should help children make choices and deal with the consequences of their decisions. The teacher's role is to plan activities that help children think through a problem. It is also necessary to repeat the learning activity or similar activity several times (Annevirta&Vauras, 2006).

. Through this repeated step-by-step process children can learn how to identify the different path choices, apply reasoning to the process, and formulate a decision.

2.7.4 Promoting Entry into Play Groups

Young children frequently need encouragement to enter playgroups, whether it is to enter an ongoing group, initiate a contact with a friend or being approached by others. Children enter playgroups in a variety of ways, some more successfully than others. Preschoolers tend to enter groups in one or a combination of ways: 1) approaching and watching with no verbal or non-verbal attempt to participate, 2) starting the same activity as another child and blending into the ongoing activity, 3) making social greetings or invitations, 4) offering informational statements or questions, 5) making overt requests to join, or 6) approaching and trying to control group or get attention (Annevirta&Vauras, 2006).

Preschool playgroups can be fluid, with children entering and leaving quite frequently. Teachers can respond to these already formed groups to “insure the

equal participation of all children, help the group work towards a desired goal, and enrich the activity so that all the children can have a meaningful role” (Annevirta&Vauras, 2006).

In some instances teachers may prefer arranging playgroups. This helps reduce children’s anxiety and widens their range of contacts. Again, equal and active participation by all members and a common goal are important (Annevirta&Vauras, 2006).

2.7.2 Helping To Negotiate Conflict

Teachers need to help children develop negotiating skills to handle conflict situations. Children must use social problem solving skills to resolve issues in a matter that benefits them and is acceptable to others. Carpendale& Lewis (2004).suggested six steps for teaching conflict resolution:

- Identify and define the conflict.
- Invite children to participate in solving the problem.
- Work together to generate possible solutions.
- Examine each idea for how well it might work.
- Help children with plans to implement the solution.
- Follow up to evaluate how well the solution worked.

Peer mediation is another strategy used by teachers to negotiate conflicts. Peer leaders are seen by other children as being credible and serve as role models (Chatzipanteli&Digelidis, 2011). This method is used most effectively in elementary schools because of the skills required to implement the process. The “friendship table, or talk-it-over table,” is suggested for preschoolers. The teacher’s role is to remove the children to a neutral site, and facilitate the conflict resolution process (Denckla, 2003).

2.7.9. Promoting Self-Control

Teachers should provide as many opportunities for young children to develop other necessary skills needed to achieve social competency. Self-control is one of the skills. Harter and Shaffer cited in (Salmon, 2008a) said, “Self-control is an essential part of how children learn, is important in a child’s growth and development, and is fundamental in preserving social and moral order.” Self-control or self-discipline refers to the ability to internally regulate one’s own behavior rather than depending on others to enforce it (Salmon, 2008a). Children demonstrate self-control when they 1) control their impulses, wait, and suspend action, 2) tolerate frustration, 3) postpone immediate gratification, and 4) initiate a plan and carry it out over time (Salmon, 2008a).

Kendrick & McKay (2002) suggested four strategies through which teachers can help foster the development of self-control:

- Use direct instruction to let children know what are appropriate behaviors, inappropriate behaviors, and alternative behaviors.
- Model right from wrong so children can learn by example. Modeling can be non-verbal or verbal
- Introduce logical consequences to influence future behavior
- Integrate emotions, development, and experience to help children make an internal map. A child can use this chart to categorize past events, interpret cues, envision various responses, and then respond
- Self-control evolves over time. Teachers should provide repeated experiences for children to practice self-control and refine their behavior.

2.8. Availability of play materials

Educational facilities and instructional material are essential because they make teaching

more effective and meaningful, increases learner's motivation and concentration span and simplifies concept taught. Lack of instructional materials could negatively affect the

learning process. This could be highly detrimental especially to children in pre-schools who need a variety of materials to reinforce or capture new experiences.

Jones (1972) cited in Waithaka (2009), defines play resources in a pre-primary school setting as anything natural or artificial, real or imaginative, visual or invisible, big or small, structured or unstructured, props or loose parts, which a child or a teacher or groups can use for teaching, fantasy, recreation, encourage creativity or can be used to enrich their play.

Ndani (1994) studying factors that influence teachers' attitudes towards teaching social science and ethics, argued that without the necessary tools even the best and most experienced teacher is handicapped. In general government and society have to support the programmes in offering appropriate materials for teaching and learning. Children in the nursery schools have limited experience and less developed abilities to cope with abstract ideas. Saunders (1974) when stressing the importance of using variety of instructional materials observed that: "People receive experience through all the five senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight). If you can appeal to more than one sense at a time your message is likely to be understood and accepted more permanently.

Different materials appeal to different people. When you plan your work, don't concentrate on memory work alone, but on hearing, seeing, touching,

doing and making" Applied to early childhood learning, this argument is relevant because much of the children's knowledge is attained by coming into contacts with objects and situations which always give them a new experience. Teachers have to allow children to participate freely in activities of their own choice and also have to organize instructional materials at free choice activity corners. Omwondho (1984) observes that educational materials provide teachers and pupils with psychological and physical comfort. Similarly, Sifuna (1974) pointed out that instructional materials in a teaching environment were a major determinant of failure or success in the teaching or learning process. It is therefore important to enrich children experience with numerous objects in order to give them opportunities to manipulate them. The following play materials have found to be useful in teaching in early childhood class; scoops, tins, Ropes, box, funnel, playcards, bottle tops, seeds, funnel, Blocks etc.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the design employed by the study, variables and location of the study. It also gives a description of the target population and sampling techniques. This section also focuses on the procedures used to be used to ascertain validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter describes data collection and analysis techniques. This will be done under the following headings;

1. Research Method
2. Population
3. Sample and Sampling Technique
4. Research Instrument
5. Validity of Research Instrument
6. Procedure for Data Collection
7. Procedure for Data Analysis

3.1 . Research Design

The study will employ a survey design in assessing the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education. A survey research design involves the use of questionnaires and/or interviews in generating empirical data from research participants.

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of some selected creche and kindergarten teachers and caregivers in some selected school in Ijebu-ode Local Government, Ogun state.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study consists of hundred (100) early childhood teachers and caregiver from selected 10 schools in Ijebu-ode Local Government, Ogun state. These consist of five (5) public and private schools using simple random sampling technique will be used to select the teachers for this research.

3.4. Research Instrument

A self developed and structured questionnaire will be used to elicit the information required for this study. The questionnaire will be divided into two sections : section A will be for the collection of information on personal data of respondents while section B will contain twenty (20) statement items that deal with the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education under response options strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly disagreed (SD) and Disagreed (D).

3.5. Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, it will be submitted to the project supervisor and some expert in early childhood education for vetting, correction and approval before distributing it to the respondents.

3.6. Procedure for data collection

The researcher visits each of the selected schools and meets with the teachers. She explains the purpose of the research to them. She craves their

indulgence, and implores them to respond to the questionnaire which she distributes to them. The researcher collects the filled questionnaire a week after. The following private schools will be used from Ijebu-ode local government area selected randomly. These schools selected will be used to determine how well play-way method is used as learning strategy during teaching and learning among private schools in Ijebu-ode.

Reason for selecting the following the below schools for this study, its however, noted that Physical and recess are being eliminated, new schools are built without playground, they trivialized and undermine children natural capacities for meaningful and focused life lessons which could be gained through play-way method. Also, seeing play-way method as an obsolete teaching methodology.

Table. 3.6.1.

SCHOOLS	NAMES OF SELECTED SCHOOLS	NUMBER
1.Private	Sunfem group of school, Ijebu-ode	10
2.Private	Bright Star Nursery and and primary School, Ijebu-ode	10
3.Private	Christ Apostle Nursery and primary school,Ijebu-ode	10
4.Private	Morning Star Nursery and Primary school,Ijebu-ode	10
5.Public	St.John Nursery and primary, Ijebu-ode	10
6.Public	Araromi primary school Ijagun Ijebu-ode.	10
7.Public	Anglican Primary school,ijebu-ode	10
8.Public	Methodist Primary school,Ijebu-ode	10

9.Public	Araromi Primary School, Ijebu-Ode	10
10. Private	Best grade Academy, Ijebu-Ode	10

Total ;100

3.7. Procedure for data Analysis

Responses from the questionnaire will be analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. While the hypotheses will be tested using the inferential statistics of Chi-square (X^2).

The following procedures will be adopted in administering the questionnaires as directed by the project supervisor. The sum total of ten (10) questionnaires will be distributed to each school.

Table.3.6.2

Preparatory Class	2
Kindergarten(K.G) I	2
Kindergarten(K.G) II	2
Nursery I	2
Nursery II	2

Total: 10

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the results and discussions from this study under the following subheadings:

1. Presentation of Demographic Data
2. Analysis of Research Questions
3. Analysis of Data and Testing of Hypotheses
4. Discussion of Findings

Presentation of Demographic Data (Section a)

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Age

Age	Number of Participants	Percentage
21-30 years	55	55%
31 – 40 years	30	30%
Above 40 years	15	15%
Total	100	100%

Table 1 shows that 55 (55%) of the participants were between 21-30 years old, 30 (30%) were between the ages of 31 and 40 years, while 15 (15%) were above 40 years of age.

Table 2: Distribution of Participants by Highest Qualification

Highest Qualification	Number of Participants	Percentage
NCE/OND	60	60%
HND/B.A/B.Ed/B.Sc	35	35%
M.Ed/M.A/M.Sc	5	5%
Other degrees	-	-
Total	100	100%

Table 2 shows that 60(60%) of the participants were holders of NCE/OND, 35 (35%) had HND/B.A/B.Ed/B.Sc while the remaining 5 (5%) were holders of M.Ed/M.A/M.Sc.

Analysis of Research question

Research Question 1

Research question 1 states that: Will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children?

Table 3

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1.	Play promotes verbal skills among children	22	8.8%	22	8.8%	6	2.4%	-	-%
2.	Play activities enriches the vocabulary of children	22	8.8%	25	10%	3	1.2%	-	%
3.	Play stimulates curiosity among children	31	12.4%	10	4%	4	1.6%	5	2%
4.	Play improves problem-solving skills among children	33	13.2%	16	6.4%	1	0.4%	-	%
5.	Play raises language comprehension among kids	28	11.2%	15	6%	6	2.4%	1	0.4%
	Total	135	54%	88	35.2%	20	8%	6	2.4%

From table 3 above, it shows that 135 (54%) of the participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes verbal skills among children, Play activities enriches the vocabulary of children, Play stimulates curiosity among children, Play improves problem-solving skills among children and Play raises language comprehension among kids. 88 (35.2%) also agreed with the research questionnaire statements, 20 (8%) disagreed with the questionnaire statements while 6 (2.4%) strongly disagreed with the questionnaire statements in research question 1.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 states that: Will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have a significant influence on the social skills of children?

Table 4

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
6.	The activities of play helps children to better control impulsive actions	22	8.8%	23	9.2%	1	0.4%	4	1.6%
7.	Play promotes the character of empathy among children	19	7.6%	15	6%	13	5.2%	3	1.2%
8.	The use of play as learning strategy helps emotional and social adjustment among children.	12	4.8%	19	7.6%	10	4%	9	3.6%
9.	Use of play promotes peer cooperation among children	32	12.8%	17	6.8%	1	0.4%	-	-%
10.	Play improves children's ability to take on the perspective of another	18	7.2%	11	4.4%	15	6%	6	2.4%
	Total	103	41.2%	85	34%	40	16%	22	8.8%

From table 4 above, it shows that 103 (41.2%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that The activities of play helps children

to better control impulsive actions, Play-way method promotes the character of empathy among children, The use of play as primary teaching tool helps emotional and social adjustment among children, Assignment of play promotes peer cooperation among children and Play improves children's ability to take on the perspective of another. 85 (34%) also agreed with the research questionnaire statement, 40 (16%) disagreed with the questionnaire statements while 22 (8.8%) strongly disagreed with the questionnaire statements in research question 2.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 states that: Will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have a significant influence on the motor skills of children?

Table 5

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
11.	Play promotes more creative movement among children	22	8.8%	11	4.4%	11	4.4%	9	3.6%
12.	Play enhances experimentation skills among children	24	9.6%	10	4%	8	3.2%	8	3.2%
13.	Through play, children develop walking ability more quickly	21	8.4%	18	7.2%	6	2.4%	5	2%

14.	Play enhances children's health by building healthy and active bodies	17	6.8%	13	5.2%	6	2.4%	14	5.6%
15.	Play makes the use of the limbs more effective among children	39	15.6%	10	4%	1	0.4%	-	-%
	Total	122	48.8%	62	24.8%	32	12.8%	36	14.4%

From table 5 above, it showed that 122 (48.8%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes more creative movement among children, Play enhances experimentation skills among children, Through play, children develop walking ability more quickly, Play enhances children's health by building healthy and active bodies and Play makes the use of the limbs more effective among children. 62 (24.8%) also agreed with the research questionnaire statement, 32 (12.8%) disagreed while 36 (14.4%) strongly disagreed with the questionnaire statements in research question 3.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 states that: Will the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children?

Table 6

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
16.	Play promotes longer attention span among children	12	4.8%	24	9.6%	12	4.8%	2	0.8%
17.	Play helps children to adjust to the school setting more easily	23	9.2%	11	4.4%	9	3.6%	7	2.8%
18.	Play promotes learning readiness among children	18	7.2%	18	7.2%	11	4.4%	3	1.2%
19.	Play enhances understanding ability among children	9	3.6%	25	10%	8	3.2%	8	3.2%
20.	Play enhances children's ability to concentrate	22	8.8%	5	2%	5	2%	18	7.2%
	Total	85	34%	83	33.2%	45	18%	38	15.2%

From table 6 above, it showed that 127 (25.4%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes longer attention span among children, Play helps children to adjust to the school

setting more easily, Play promotes learning readiness among children, Play enhances understanding ability among children and Play enhances children's ability to concentrate . 127 (25.4%) also agreed with the research questionnaire statement, 144 (28.8%) and 102 (20.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the questionnaire statements in research question 4.

Analysis of Data and Testing of Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis One

Research hypothesis one states that: Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children.

Table 7: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis on Play on Children's cognitive skills

N	Df	L.S	Calc value	X^2	Crit value	X^2	Remarks
100	12	0.05	23.55		21.03		*S*

(Calc. $X^2 = 23.55 > \text{Crit. } X^2 = 21.03, df = 12, P > 0.05$)

The table above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square (x^2) value of 23.35 is greater than Critical Chi-Square (x^2) values of 21.03, with degree of freedom 12 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis one which states that Use of play-way method as learning strategy in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children is hereby rejected, the implication of this is that the use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children

Research Hypothesis Two

Research hypothesis two states that: Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the social skills of children.

Table 8: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis on Play on Social Skills

N	Df	L.S	Calc X^2 value	Crit X^2 value	Remarks
100	12	0.05	41.01	21.03	*S*

(Calc. $X^2 = 41.01 > \text{Crit. } X^2 = 21.03, df = 12, P > 0.05$)

The table above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square (x^2) value of 41.01 is greater than Critical Chi-Square (x^2) values of 21.03, with degree of freedom 12 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis two which states that Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the social skills of children is hereby rejected, the implication of this is that use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the social skills of children .

Research Hypothesis Three

Research hypothesis three states that: Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the motor skills of children.

Table 9: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis On Play on Motor Skills of Children

N	Df	L.S	Calc X^2 value	Crit X^2 value	Remarks
100	12	0.05	55.40	21.03	*S*

(Calc. $X^2 = 55.40 > \text{Crit. } X^2 = 21.03, df = 12, P > 0.05$)

The table above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square (x^2) value of 55.40 is greater than Critical Chi-Square (x^2) values of 21.03, with degree of freedom 12 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis three which states that the Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the motor skills of children is hereby rejected, the implication of this is that use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the motor skills of children

Research Hypothesis Four

Research hypothesis four states that: Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children.

Table 10: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis on Play on attentiveness of Children

N	Df	L.S	Calc X^2 value	Crit X^2 value	Remarks
100	12	0.05	48.11	21.03	*S*

(Calc. $X^2 = 48.11 > \text{Crit. } X^2 = 21.03, df = 12, P > 0.05$)

The table above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square (x^2) value of 48.11 is greater than Critical Chi-Square (x^2) values of 21.03, with degree of freedom 12 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis four which states that Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will not have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children is hereby rejected, the implication of this is that the use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion and recommendations on the use of play-way method as a learning strategy for skills development in Early Childhood Education.

5.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine use of play-way method as a learning strategy for skills development in Early Childhood Education. The researcher made use of the descriptive survey research method in carrying out the study. The population for this study consists of creche and kindergarten teachers in Ijebu-Ode Local Government, Ogun state.

The sample consisted of fifty (100) early childhood teachers selected from 10 schools which includes public and private schools Ijebu-Ode local Government. A self-structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents. Section A consisted of demographic data of respondents while Section B consisted of items drawn from the variables of the study. The four point Rennis-Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree was adopted as options to the items.

The self-developed and structured questionnaire was submitted to the project supervisor for vetting, correction and approval before distributing it to the respondents to ensure its validity. Reliability of the instrument was ensured through a pilot study. Results from the reliability test shows that the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.83 indicated that the instrument was reliable and hence, it was adopted for data collection. In analyzing the data, descriptive

statistics of frequency counts and percentages was used to analyze the demographic data while inferential statistics of Chi-square (X^2) was used to test all hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

5.2 Conclusion

1. The use of play-way method as a learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children
2. Use of play-way method as a learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the social skills of children.
3. Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the motor skills of children
4. Use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the results obtained in this study. They include:

1. Pre-school children should be given free room to play by their teachers because of its influence on their cognitive skills
2. Play-way activities that make children into groups should be organized for the benefit of children's social skills
3. Children should be helped to engage in a lot of movement activities for the purpose of improving their motor skills

4. Play-way method should be widely recognized as a learning strategy in all schools because of its strategic importance in the development of children.

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APPENDICE A:QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire “**The use of play-way method as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood education**” is for the collection of important information necessary in carrying out a research in this regard. Please kindly respond to the items as objectively and sincerely as you can. Your responses would be used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

Section A: Bio-Data of Respondents

1. Age :
(a) 21 – 30 years [] (b) 31 – 40 years [] (c) Above 41 years []
2. Highest Educational Qualification: (a) NCE/OND [] (b)
HND/B.A/B.Ed/B.Sc []
(c) M.Ed/M.A/M.Sc [] (d) Other degrees (specify)

Section B

Tick (✓) to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the options presented in this column.

- Key:** Strongly Agree (SA)
Agree (A)
Disagree (D)
Strongly Disagree (SD)

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD
	Play and Cognitive Skills				
1.	Play promotes verbal skills among children				
2.	Play activities enriches the vocabulary of children				
3.	Play stimulates curiosity among children				
4.	Play improves problem-solving skills among children				
5.	Play raises language comprehension among kids				
	Play and Social Skills				
6.	The activities of play helps children to better control impulsive actions				
7.	Play promotes the character of empathy among children				
8.	The use of play as learning strategy helps emotional and social adjustment among children				
9.	The use of play promotes peer cooperation among children				
10.	Play improves children's ability to take on the perspective of another				
	Play and Motor Skills				
11.	Play promotes more creative movement among children				

12.	Play enhances experimentation skills among children				
13.	Through play, children develop walking ability more quickly				
14.	Play enhances children's health by building healthy and active bodies				
15.	Play makes the use of the limbs more effective among children				
	Play and Attentiveness				
16	Play promotes longer attention span among children				
17	Play helps children to adjust to the school setting more easily				
18	Play promotes learning readiness among children				
19	Play enhances understanding ability among children				
20	Play enhances children's ability to concentrate				