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AVAILABILITY, UTILIZATION, AND DETERMINANTS OF PLAY-WAY AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TEACHING STRATEGY IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN OSOGBO LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OSUN STATE

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Abstract

Play has always been a major area of daily activities for pupils. Essentially what man does spontaneously, it acts as a dynamic learning tool in the early years. Play intervention is presented as a teaching aid at the pre-primary stage. Very crucial as long as important, the status of its availability and utilization in pre-primary classrooms in Osogbo is therefore considered in this paper. This study examined the availability, utilization, and determinants of play as a teaching method in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State. A descriptive research design was used in this study, which targeted a population of 968 teachers from 162 pre-primary schools. Head teachers and classroom teachers were sampled at 32 and 160, respectively, using the simple random sampling technique to make 192 as the total sample size for the study. The required data were obtained from a validated instrument, the Availability and Utilization of Play-Way Instructional Strategy Questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha method used for testing the instruments' reliability produced a coefficient of 0.72. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to measure the mean, standard deviation, and t-test. Results indicated that the available instructional materials to support the play method at the pre-primary level were very low and not frequently used by teachers. School location also emerged as one of the prime factors that added to difficulties in play being a teaching strategy. Also, there was no mean significant difference between the responses of head teachers and teachers about the availability and utilization of play materials. The findings have implications, pushing that there should be initiation of improvisation of play-based instructional materials by pre-primary teachers in public schools. This depicts the key findings-based recommendations under which, in the public schools, pre-service teachers should be responsible for improvising play-based instructional materials. Also, regular in-service professional development programs comprising workshops, seminars, and courses need to be organized to enhance the capacity of teachers to use play effectively.

Keywords: Play-based teaching, Early childhood education, Instructional materials, School Location, pre-primary education

Introduction

Education is the fundamental tool and base of individual, social, and national development. It is systematic training and teaching, general literacy, and acquiring skills and technology. Pre-primary education is the basic education; most formal education starts at the primary level, and the Government of Nigeria prescribes pre-primary education in its National Policy on Education (2013) as education received by children in institutions before they join primary school. According to this policy, the objective of pre-primary education is to instill care, protection, and the foundational learning of children up to the age of formal school entry. Pre-primary education includes day-care centers, nurseries, and kindergartens; the preschool provides care and at the same time readies a child for primary school, thus forming the main foundation for the development of literacy and other foundational skills (Kaur, 2024). Given the unique objectives of early childhood education and the inherent nature of young children, play-based activities become essential in fostering their whole development, irrespective of individual differences. Yogman (2018) describes play as the most natural activity, not only in children's development but also in their growth to attain their potential. Similarly, play was described by Hidi-Morffitt (2024) as an open learning task that encourages information seeking.

Play remains a powerful force in early childhood education, guaranteeing choice and voluntary participation in classroom learning activities. Play serves as a vital strategy for teachers. This has been confirmed by studies, which have found that play is a strategy that is crucial to the success of engagement, inclusion, and holistic skill development of students beyond preschool years and is also developmentally appropriate. Scholars also argue that play meets the curious needs of school-going children while bridging the often difficult gap between preschool and primary school. This is in agreement with Vygotsky's (1978) postulate that play is a teaching method where the teacher has to do very little, particularly when teachers actively engage in play and create play opportunities for children. Rebelo et al. (2024) argue that play is a culturally structured and socially situated practice with emergent and strong developmental dimensions, integrating cognitive, affective, and social elements into the ways children think and act. Play involves a range of voluntary inner activities, typically involving satisfaction and pleasure. Monsumi (2024) has recommended that teachers value use of play as a method of instruction to condition minds for effective cognitive development and to ready children for school learning.

The successful implementation of a play-way strategy by teachers requires integrating appropriate instructional materials within the classroom. These materials facilitate teaching and learning since they help the instructor communicate ideas and appeal to multiple senses at the same time (Saleh et al., 2021). Thus, engaging more than one sense enables the learner to see, touch, smell, or even taste, making the learning experience more meaningful and activity-oriented. A vivid realization by Saleh et al. (2021) illustrates the wisdom of the Chinese proverb "I hear I forget, I see I remember, I do I understand." Play-oriented instructional materials such as toys, magazines, computer games, charts, role-playing props, tape-recorded materials, colorful pictures, costumes, and even textbooks and resource people (Helpler et al., 2023) tend to greatly involve the minds of children in learning as long as they are well and wisely used. Monsumi (2024) proved that children, when empowered by teachers to choose learning materials on their own and effectively use them for tasks and achieving goals, become inspired and accelerated in focus as well as attention, absorption, and retention levels. Other

studies have found that the use of the play strategy helps children give meaning to their worlds, enhances their ability to think, and acquires language (Vygotsky, 1978). This is also in line with Matazu's (2022) view which says that meaningful teaching and learning can be achieved to the proper availability and usage of human as well as material resources.

Though the benefits of play have been recognized as a teaching strategy, the implementation of play has raised several concerns. Ismail & Lukman (2022) found that instructional materials for effective teaching and learning were only fairly adequate in senior secondary schools in Talata Mafara Town, Gasau. According to Buldu (2022), the inefficient use of this teaching approach can be implanted with pre-scholars on the bases of school setting, including the location of the school, not having teaching aids for the play method, or even instructional expertise in applying the play method of teaching. According to Cabrera and Cabrera (2023), the school environment satisfies the children's intrinsic needs for inquisitiveness and the natural inclination to play according to Maria Montessoris philosophy that through playing, asking, and exploring, children are provided a prepared environment that enables them to discover and learn. The above literature has, however, indicated several issues that restrict the availability and use of play-based instructional materials in pre-primary classrooms (Monsumi, 2024). The major obstacles were the availability and quality of play materials, teacher-student ratio and also the shortage of pre-primary classroom resources. Although play is considered the work of a child in daily life and value of instructional materials to train teachers to teach through play cannot be overemphasized, there is a big research gap, that is, the availability, utilization and determinants of play as a teaching strategy in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government Area. There is little local evidence and no practical guide how to teach through play as an effective informal school-based strategy within this specific geographical area and the circumstances that work for its success

Problem Overview

Play is the most strategically vital approach toward ensuring developmentally appropriate growth in children, who are our future human resources. The effective utilization of play-enhancing instructional materials is a necessary tool for all pre-school educators and head teachers to make the classroom a productive place. Policy is often made and talk has been made about play in teacher education and school administration, but in most cases, these elements are not integrated effectively by teachers and school heads. As a result, children are deprived of their right to play-based learning. This underutilization may be attributed to teacher education not offering a package for resources, or head teachers lacking leadership capacity to enforce policy on play-based learning. Therefore, it does affect the quality of pre-school education. This study is set forth to examine the availability, utilization, and determinants of play as a teaching strategy in pre-primary schools within the Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State; for better learning of the factors, this research seeks to help make enhancements toward the quality of teaching and learning in the selected schools, in Osun state, and Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study tried to investigate the availability, use, and factors of play as a teaching method in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government. It sought the following:

- 1) Test the levels of availability of play-way materials and resources in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State.
- 2) To establish the extent to which play-way material usage is adopted by the pre-primary school teachers within the classroom instruction Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State.
- 3) To identify determinants that govern the use of the play-way method as a teaching strategy Pre-primary school teachers in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State.
- 4) Teachers' and Headteachers' Perceptions on the Availability of Instructional Material for Use with the Play-way Method in Pre-primary Schools
- 5) The extent to which teachers and head teachers agree in their perceptions concerning the use of instructional materials applied in the play-way method at the pre-primary level.
- 6) How the perceptions of teachers and head teachers differ regarding the skills of teachers' use of the play-way method of teaching in pre-primary schools.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What is the level of availability of play-way instructional materials in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government, as indicated by teachers and head teachers?
- 2) To what extent do pre-primary school teachers utilize available play-way materials in classroom instruction in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State?
- 3) To what extent do head teachers and teachers in pre-primary schools possess the skills required to utilize play-way instructional materials in the teaching and learning process
- 4) To what extent does school location determine the utilization of the play-way instructional strategy in pre-primary schools based in the Osogbo Local Government Area of Osun State?

Research Hypotheses

These null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H01: A significant difference does not exist between the mean responses of teachers and head teachers on the availability of instructional materials for the play-way method in pre-primary schools.

H02: The mean responses of teachers and head teachers do not differ significantly regarding the utilization of instructional materials for the play-way method in pre-primary schools.

H03: The mean responses of teachers and head teachers do not differ significantly regarding the level of skills of teachers in using the play-way method for teaching.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive survey research design to explore the use of the play method in teaching at pre-primary schools. According to Brasel (2020), a descriptive survey is a research method through which data is gathered from a subset of a population to learn about the characteristics,

opinions, or behaviors of the whole group. This design was considered suitable for the study as it permitted the systematic collection and analysis of data on the extent to which the play method is practiced effectively in pre-primary schools.

Population

The study was conducted on the population of head teachers and teachers working in government-approved pre-primary schools at Osogbo Local Government Area in Osun State. As indicated by records of the Osun State Universal Basic Education Board (ANSUBEB, 2011), there are about 162 state government pre-primary schools in Osogbo LGA, with a total staff count of 968 personnel, which includes 162 head teachers and 806 teachers.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Adequate representative samples were drawn using a simple random sampling technique that ensured all members of the population had an equal opportunity to be considered. The sample involved 32 head teachers and 160 teachers, giving a sum of 192 respondents, which was considered adequate and representative of the target population.

Instrumentation

A researcher-designed instrument referred to as the Availability and Utilization of Play-Way Instructional Strategy Questionnaire (AUPWISQ) was used to collect data for this study. It comprised 21 items organized into two main sections. Section A captured information on the demographics of the respondents, indicating their roles and teaching experience. The 21 items in section B addressed the core areas of the study and, therefore, the three research questions that the items in three clusters were aligned with. This format was structured to elicit information on availability, utilization, and teacher preparedness when using play-way instructional strategies. Responses in Part B were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale, designed to suit the different parameters of the study. For the items on availability, the scale was written as follows: 4 Very Highly Available, 3 Highly Available, 2 Available, and 1 Not Available. The options were: 4 Very Great Extent, 3 Great Extent, 2 Little Extent, and 1 Very Little Extent. The scale for agreement comprised: 4 Strongly Agree, 3 Agree, 2 Disagree, and 1 Strongly Disagree with statements. Such dualistic front ensured accurate and nuanced data collection in line with the focus of the study.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

For content validity, the questionnaire was checked by three professionals: one in Educational Psychology, another in Childhood Education, and the third in Measurement and Evaluation. Their responses were used to edit the clarity, relevance, and structure of the items as well as the rating scales' appropriateness. A pilot test was executed by giving 21 copies of the questionnaire to pre-primary school teachers and head teachers outside the study area but within Osogbo LGA. Data received from the pilot test were analyzed to see the internal consistency of the instrument; it returned a reliability coefficient of 0.72, hence considered acceptable reliability.

Procedure for Data Administration

The research instrument was administered over a period of two weeks. In the first week, the researcher visited all the sampled pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government Area to inform them about the exercise and to gain the support of the school principals. It is during this visit that the head teacher was informed in clear terms of the purpose and significance of the study, and the areas of concern, namely the availability and utilization of play-way instructional strategies. This also helped to build respondents' trust and goodwill, which later facilitated the smooth collection of data. A question was given to him for easy circulation and collection of responses- an NCE holder, thus sufficiently knowledgeable in early childhood education, and also briefed thoroughly on the purpose and objectives of the study.

The actual distribution of the questionnaires was done in the second week. In some schools, the researcher dropped the instrument and came back at an agreed time to pick the filled copies, while in other schools, the questionnaires were filled and collected on the spot. In all cases, either the researcher or the research assistant would take time to explain to the respondents the purpose of the study and the structure of the questionnaire, to make sure they understood how to respond to each item especially the use of the four-point Likert scales. Respondents were also informed that the data collected would be used only for academic purposes. This, in turn, led to a high rate of return, and for the sake of all filled questionnaires being checked on-site for completeness and clarity, before the final collection.

Method of Data Analysis

Collected data were averaged to derive mean scores and standard deviation in addressing the research questions. In testing the null hypotheses, comparisons between the means were carried out using independent sample t-tests and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The mean benchmark of 2.50 served as the decision rule for interpreting the results.

Research Question One

1. What is the level of availability of play-way instructional materials in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government, as indicated by teachers and head teachers?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Head Teachers' and Teachers on the Availability of Play-way Instructional materials in Pre-Primary Schools

S/N	Items	Headteacher			Teachers		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Extent of availability of toys	3.00	0.64	High	3.00	0.64	High
2	Extent of availability of computer games	2.22	0.74	Low	1.00	0.77	Very Low
3	Extent of availability of charts	3.40	0.47	High	4.99	0.77	High
4	Materials that encourage role playing are made	2.40	0.94	Low	2.40	0.67	Low
5	Tape record materials	1.00	0.76	Very Low	1.00	0.84	Very Low

6	Availability of colourful pictures	3.00	0.46	High	3.00	0.64	High
7	Costumes	1.00	0.46	Very Low	2.00	0.00	Low
8	Resource persons	1.00	0.49	Very Low	2.00	0.64	Low
9	Availability of magazines	2.00	0.57	Low	2.40	0.57	Low
Average of ΣX		2.22	0.64		2.44	0.64	

The table presents the mean responses of head teachers and teachers about the availability of play-way instructional materials in pre-primary schools in Osogbo. The mean responses 2.22 for head teachers and 2.44 for teachers, across all nine items, suggest that computer games, resource persons, tape recording materials, costumes, and magazines are some of the instructional material with limited availability. Charts, toys, and colorful pictures were reported to be available. Since both scores are below 2.50, it can be assumed that the essential instructional materials required to implement the play-way method effectively in pre-primary education are inadequate. This may cripple the effective delivery of learning experiences in the pre-primary schools studied.

Research Question Two

To what extent do pre-primary school teachers and head teachers utilize available play-way materials in classroom instruction in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Head Teachers' and Teachers on the Utilization of Availability of Play-way Instructional materials in Pre-Primary School Classrooms

S/N	Items	Headteacher			Teachers		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Extent of utilization of toys	3.00	0.64	High	4.00	0.64	Very High
2	Extent of utilization of computer games	2.00	0.96	Low	1.00	0.79	Very Low
3	Extent of utilization of charts	3.50	0.76	Very High	2.50	0.37	Very High
4	Extent of Utilization of materials and role playing	2.40	0.58	Low	3.50	0.37	Very High
5	Extent of Utilization of Tape record materials	1.00	0.39	Low	2.00	0.48	Low
6	Extent of Utilization of Availability of colourful Pictures, magazines and Costumes	2.50	0.64	High	3.50	0.47	Very High
7	Extent of Utilization of Resource persons	1.00	0.47	Very Low	1.00	0.39	Very Low
Average of ΣX		2.07	0.48		2.50	0.47	

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of head teachers and teachers on the use of instructional materials in implementing the play-way method of teaching. The cumulative mean score of 2.07 for head teachers presages a low level of utilization, while the mean score of 2.50 for teachers indicates that the mode of instruction is used by them. Findings indicate that toys, charts, pictures, and resources for role-playing are mostly used most commonly utilized. The usage of computer games, resources recorded on tape, resource people, and magazines is not common. The little usage may be issues of availability, accessibility, or lack of competence on the part of teachers to use such computer-based instructional tools.

Research Question Three

To what extent do head teachers and teachers in pre-primary schools possess the skills required to utilize play-way instructional materials in the teaching and learning process?

Table 3: Mean Rating of Head Teachers on the Extent of Teachers Expertise on the Use of Play-way Instructional materials in Pre-Primary School Classrooms

S/N	Items	Headteacher			Teachers		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1	Most pre-school teachers are secondary school	3.00	0.50	Agree	3.40	0.49	Agree
2	Most Pre-school teachers do not attend seminars, workshops on innovation in teaching methodologies	3.60	0.81	Agree	3.80	0.40	Agree
3	Most Pre-schools do not engage university graduates in their schools	4.00	0.00	Agree	3.40	0.81	Agree
4	Play method of teaching has not been in teachers education curriculum	2.40	0.50	Disagree	2.00	0.50	Disagree
5	Most pre-school teachers have no teachers' training certificate	3.00	0.91	Agree	3.00	0.64	Agree
Average of ΣX		3.20	0.59		3.33	0.53	

Table 3 gives information about the degree to which head teachers and teachers at the pre-primary school have the skills to use play-way teaching and learning materials. The mean scores for both head teachers and teachers is 3.20 and 3.33, showing general agreement, which means they have a high level of competence in applying the play method in classroom instruction.

While appreciating these strengths, both factions brought out a number of weaknesses within the existing teaching workforce. It was agreed by all that the majority of pre-primary school teachers are those who have passed through secondary school and that most of them do not go for seminars or professional development programs related to teaching methodologies. It was also brought to my attention that the majority of schools do not take in their teachers from universities, and many of their

teachers do not have the formal teacher training certification. It is interesting to note that both groups disagreed with the statement that the play method has not been part of the teacher education curriculum. This perhaps suggests that while the method may be inculcated in training programs, its actual practice may be constrained by other systemic factors.

On the whole, there is a general agreement that teachers do have essential skills in the use of the play method. The findings also point out gaps in qualification and professional development that may affect the effective implementation of play-way instructional practices in pre-primary education.

Research Question Four

To what extent does school location determine the utilization of play-way instructional strategy in pre-primary schools in Osogbo Local Government Area, Osun State?

Table 4: Mean Rating of Head Teachers and Teachers on the Extent to Which Location Determines Utilization of Play-way as Instructional Strategy

	Head teacher			Teacher		
Location	N 32	\bar{x}	SD	N 160	\bar{x}	SD
Urban	21	3.58	0.67	105	4.00	0.64
Rural	11	2.41	0.32	55	2.33	0.44
Gross Mean		3.00			3.11	

Results indicated that there was variation in the use of play-way instructional materials and school location significantly determined it. Head teachers in urban areas were able to score a mean of 3.58 (SD = 0.67) while teachers under the same setting scored even higher with a mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.64). This shows that the effective utilization of play-way instructional methods is a strong determinant of school location in urban pre-primary schools. Responses from rural setups reflected lower levels of utilization. While head teachers scored a mean of 2.41 (SD = 0.32) teachers scored 2.33 (SD = 0.44). Lower ratings for these show a weakly influential nature of school location when it comes to the adoption of play-way instructional materials in rural schools.

The overall average mean scores 3.00 for head teachers and 3.11 for teachers indicate that, on the whole, both groups consider school location to be a moderate determining factor in the utilization of the play method in pre-primary education. This pattern suggests that teachers in urban areas are more likely to utilize play-way instructional materials effectively, possibly due to better access to resources, improved infrastructure, and more opportunities for professional development. In contrast, rural schools may encounter barriers such as limited availability of materials, lack of trained personnel, and inadequate funding, all of which may restrict the effective implementation of the play method.

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of teachers and head teachers regarding the availability of instructional materials for the play-way strategy in pre-primary schools.

Table 5: Showing T-Test analysis of the Mean Scores of Head Teachers and Teachers on the Availability of Instructional Materials for Play-way strategy

Variable	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Sig	Remark
Head teachers	32	2.22	0.64	190	0.262	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Teachers	160	2.44	0.67					

The table shows a difference between the mean ratings of availability of instructional materials by head teachers (N = 32) and teachers (N = 160) who were informed through the play-way method. Head teachers have a mean score of 2.22, with a deviation from the mean of 0.64. The teachers also have a mean score, which is 2.44, with a standard deviation from the mean of 0.67. The calculated t-value is 0.262. For a 0.05 level of significance with 190 degrees of freedom, the critical t-value is 1.960, therefore 0.262 is calculated to be less than 1.960 and hence this result is stated not to be statistically significant at 0.05 for a one-tailed test of significance at 0.05 applicable. This means there is no big difference in how principals and teachers answer the question of if there are things to use to teach the play-way method. So, the zero idea is accepted. It shows that both groups think about the need for teaching aids in the same way. Any difference in their average marks is most likely due to pure chance and not a real experiential or viewpoint difference.

H02: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of teachers and head teachers on the extent of utilization of instructional materials for the play-way method in pre-primary schools.

Table 6: Showing T-Test analysis of the Mean Scores of Head Teachers and Teachers on the Utilization of Instructional Materials for Play-way strategy

Variable	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Sig	Remark
Head teachers	32	2.07	0.48	190	1.741	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Teachers	160	2.20	0.47					

This table shows the comparison of responses between head teachers (N = 32) and teachers (N = 160) on the use of instructional materials for the play-way teaching strategy in pre-primary education. Since the computed t-value (1.741) is less than the tabulated t-value (1.960), the difference between the two means does not exist at 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis will stand. There is equal perception between head teachers and teachers on the utilization of instructional materials for the play-way strategy since it is not significantly different. Their mean rating was a little more than that of the head teachers, at 2.20 and 2.07, but the difference is not statistically meaningful.

This proves that both head teachers and teachers view the degree of use of instructional materials for the play-way method in the same way, showing a common understanding or shared experience of how often or effectively such materials are used in the class.

H03: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of head teachers and teachers on the level of teachers' skills/expertise in using the play-way method for teaching

Table 7: Shows T-Test Analysis of the Mean Scores of Head Teachers and Teachers Skills/Expertise on the use of Play-way as a Teaching Strategy

Variable	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Sig	Remark
Head teachers	32	3.20	0.59	190	1.571	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Teachers	160	3.33	0.53					

The table reveals that the calculated t-value (1.571) is less than the critical t-value (1.960) at the 0.05 level of significance with 190 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean responses of head teachers and teachers regarding teachers' expertise in using the play-way method at the pre-primary level of education in Osogbo Local Government.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the availability of instructional materials to implement the play-way method is quite low. While the chart, toy, and colorful picture are tools that are provided to many schools, more advanced and diversified resources including computer games, recorded audio materials, costumes, magazines, and etc. are not usually available. This finding is consistent with the results of Monsumi (2024) unavailability and quality of play materials as one of the most important constraints in pre-primary classroom. According to Helper et al. (2023), diverse play-oriented materials for learning independence and strategy are equally important. In a parallel argument, according to Saleh et al. (2021), effective instruction depends on multisensory tools to create activities of learning and retention by a learner.

In spite of the widespread policy acknowledgment of the importance of pre-primary education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013), real implementation appears to be bound by poor resource allocation. Isma'il & Lukman (2022) also found that instructional materials provided to Nigerian schools were only fairly adequate, a situation reflected in the setting of this study. This lack of material does not only not give effective classroom instruction, but also does not give children a chance to learn through exploration—a method that is central to Montessori's philosophy, as cited in Cabrera and Cabrera (2023).

Regarding the extent of utilization, there was some divergence between the teachers and head teachers. While the former rated it as moderate, the latter perceived it to be lower. This may be attributed to different levels of classroom involvement or information gaps in actual instructional practices. The frequent use of common materials such as toys and charts clearly indicates that easily accessible tools are available; very few advanced materials are used, indicating a scarcity or unavailability but also a lack of confidence by the teacher. This is in line with the findings of Buldu's (2022) who observed that school type, location, and teacher expertise are determinant factors of how

well the play-way method is used. Also, Saleh et al. (2021) stressed that there should be not only availability of instructional materials but active use in ways that engage children through doing, seeing, and experiencing. The limited use of certain materials in this study may reflect both practical constraints and perhaps an explicit need for more targeted professional development.

The results of the study revealed that the teachers were perceived to possess basic skills in support of the implementation of the play-way method. Nevertheless, such competence is impeded because of not having enough in-service professional training specifically for early childhood education, among other factors. These results appear to validate the findings of Matazu (2022) that optimal early childhood education depends not only on the availability of materials but, most important, on the competence of the teacher in using the resources. While the teacher and head teacher respondents agreed that play-based methodologies were included in the curricula of teachers' colleges, evidence of the misinterpretation of theory and practice by such content existed and, in this case, would be due to some institutional shortcoming in follow-up action that is insufficient among the whole respondent group. An additional reason for the lack of such facilitative teacher roles would be related to inadequate training in all aspects of applying guided play.

School location significantly influenced the implementation of the play-way strategy as is reported by the study. In addition, urban more than rural schools have better infrastructure, more and varied teaching aids, and are more professional teacher training. Such resources make play-way method more effective and meaningful in imparting instruction. Those rural schools are resource-stricken, do not have qualified staff, and their infrastructure has little to be desired for, cannot in any way ensure meaningful play-based instruction. The findings are in agreement with Buldu and Monsumi in their studies on location-based disparities as persistent issues noted in the implementation of play strategies. This, therefore, calls for interventions promoting equity and focusing on resource provision, infrastructure, and staff support to rural areas; otherwise, systematic disparities will lock the benefits of the play-way strategy to the urban areas.

Statistical analysis confirmed that there were not significant differences between the responses of teachers and head teachers to availability, utilization, and associated skill level for the play-way method. This means that there is a shared understanding of the systemic problems faced by the two categories, i.e., teachers and heads. Therefore, the need for policy intervention informed by systemic challenges on both the instructional and administrative fronts, as opposed to role-specific strategies, is reemphasized. It is for this marked agreement that the challenges of implementing a play-way strategy are being viewed not as isolated incidents but as systemic, thereby having a structural solution. As Parker et al. (2022) argued, effective play-based learning is not an idiosyncratic task of an individual teacher but of institutional and community support.

Conclusion

The study exposed a number of critical issues on the implementation of the play-way method in pre-primary schools. It turned out that the necessary instructional materials that make the approach lively and are to be applied effectively are either insufficient or completely absent. This majorly precipitates a negative implementation of the play method. In addition, inadequate infrastructural resources have

negatively affected both the utilization and the general effectiveness of play-based instructional strategies.

Both the basic skills and knowledge required for the implementation of the play method are possessed by teachers, and it may be observed that the efforts of teachers are plagued by the lack of suitable teaching materials. It is odd that, while better resources are found in urban schools in general, school location does not play a significant role in how much of the play method is applied—a degree to which the play method is applied suggesting that material and support challenges are similar, finding resonance in different settings of the school.

These findings will inevitably hasten the dire requisite of teaching and learning materials by the educational authorities and school administrators, prompt the improvements in infrastructure, and foster an enabling environment for the teachers to exploit their expertise to the maximum, so that the play-way method can be introduced effectively to enrich the learning experiences of pre-primary pupils while promoting holistic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Initiate and motivate pre-primary school teachers to acquire the skill of improvising teaching aids from the available resources around them. This will bridge the gap which has been created by the acute shortage of the materials and will also supplement the effective play-based instruction.
- 2) Schools should assure availability of fundamental teaching aids needed for the play way of teaching, comprising toys, charts, costumes, computer games, and role-playing props.
- 3) The government and concerned stakeholders should initiate and organize workshops, seminars, and refresher courses for pre-primary teachers. The TPs should dwell on and prioritize the effective use of integration of instructional material in play-based teaching.
- 4) Both the government and private school owners should bear the onus of providing adequate teaching learning materials which include computers, toys, and access to qualified resource persons as support toward enhancing the quality of early childhood education and effective teaching and learning processes in pre-primary schools.

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