

PLAY TYPE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN PUBLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS IN RIVERS EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between play type and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Two purpose and two hypotheses guided the study. The study employed the correlational research design. The population of the study was 10,965 preschoolers and caregivers, out of which 1095 were sampled using simple random sampling technique. The researcher- designed questionnaire and observation inventory were used for data collection. Data was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public early childhood centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State; there is a significant relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public early childhood centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, conclusion and recommendations were made which include that the government through the Ministry of Education needs to effectively enforce the policy guidelines regarding play in pre-school centers so as to ensure that caregivers are deploying various forms of play in the early childhood education classrooms.

Key words: Play, writing skills, manipulative play, creative play, preschoolers.

Introduction

The most crucial time for a child's reading and writing development is from birth to age eight. Children often learn quickly and eagerly during this time, and with the help of others, they are laying the foundation for their future education and success in life. It has been determined that writing is a crucial component of literacy development. Writing and reading both grow at the same time, forming a parallel relationship.

Children who practice writing gain a grasp of sound-letter relationships and how orthographic letters represent speech as a result of their writing experiments (Foulin, 2005). Writing requires a variety of abilities, including a grasp of print, the development of motor skills, the capacity for creative thought, and the desire to write (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2009). It has been determined that teaching children pencil grip, letter formation, letter-sound correspondence, and print norms is essential to

the development of their writing skills (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2009). According to Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, and Wold (2004), encouraging kids to write is a good strategy to help them develop their phonological awareness.

Usually, children start the writing process by experimenting with the physical forms of writing without giving the finished output any significance (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2009). children make methodical progress from copying print patterns to coming up with their own print arrangements (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Drawing as writing, scribble writing, letter-like units, non-phonetic letter strings, copying from environmental print, invented spelling, and conventional writing are some of the seven forms of early writing that Sulzby (1985) identified (Vukelich & Christie, 2005).

Emergent writing, according to Ehri and Roberts

(2006), comprises sketching and pretend writing and takes place during the pre-alphabetic stage of literacy development. At this stage of their writing development, kids retain words based on their context and visual qualities. Scribbling, fake letters, and arbitrary letter strings are a few examples of emergent writing.

Preschoolers as young as two and three enjoy pretend writing by scribbling on paper, demonstrating their understanding of the meaning of print. At this age, children usually employ drawings or scribble-like markings that are solely meaningful to them. They do not yet connect the letter sounds in their writing. Children who are writing in the pre-alphabetic stage may also incorporate details about the object they are writing about into the symbols. For instance, since a bear is larger than a duck, the pictogram for bear would be larger than the symbol for the duck (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Children start to observe print and learn to recognize and write well-known words while they use their present forms of emergent writing (such as scribbles, letter strings, and words).

According to Miller (2002), young toddlers educate themselves in writing through self-motivation and guided trial and error. Children start to create their own writing styles as a result of this inspiration. Throughout the early childhood years, from birth to age 8, literacy events (such as reading, writing tools to explore writing and literacy play centers) have an impact on literacy development. To determine the level of literacy a kid eventually reaches, these experiences constantly interact with the features of particular children. Lack of literacy exposure before children enter school can significantly lower the reading and writing skills they eventually achieve (Butler, Liss, & Sterner, 1999). Children learn to write by regularly practicing the act of writing and experimenting with print, according to Tolchinsky (2014).

Children do not distinguish between writing and drawing, according to Fields, Groth, and Spangler (2004). But, once they are able to distinguish the differences, they start to create what are known as linear-repetitive shapes. This style resembles cursive lettering. Children gradually start to notice the letters in their surroundings. Children's knowledge of print awareness develops as they make an effort to use

these letters in their writing.

Children learn that there is a clear connection between letters and sounds as they advance in the development of writing. A lot of children learn to read by first identifying and then writing their own name (Treiman & Broderick, 1998). Name writing is a skill that requires youngsters to recognize the labels of their name rather than letter-sound knowledge (Treiman and Broderick, 2004). Children as young as three years old may start to recognize their printed names by initially focusing on the first letter, then the remaining letters in their name, according to Treiman and Broderick's (1998) theory.

Children advance from writing their name to representing ideas through creative writing as they move up the developmental hierarchy. Children's emerging writing has been discovered to follow the same rules as the oldest writing systems used by the Chinese, Egyptians, and Greeks (Fields, Groth, & Spangler, 2004). For instance, they assert that before youngsters accept the alphabetic writing system, they use drawings and symbols to communicate stories. Children, however, require frequent exposure to print in order to comprehend that letters stand in for the sounds we produce when we talk before they can embrace the alphabetic writing system.

Children's writing develops through the ongoing invention and reinvention of written language forms, according to Dyson (1989) and Graves (1994). Children, for instance, make their own words and letters when they write. They transition from simple forms to more complex ones. Children just invent writing in the earliest forms of writing, for instance, based on their observations of surrounding print and how literate adults and children interact with print (Miller, 2002). They shift toward traditional writing, which adheres to writing mechanics, as their writing develops.

Spelling development starts the first moment a youngster picks up a writing instrument and creates a mark on paper, according to Griffith and Leavell (1995). The time spent doodling, drawing, and writing mock letters (i.e., forms that resemble actual letters) has reportedly been referred to as prephonemic, preliterate, precommunicative, and deviant stages, according to these authors. According to Ruddell (2002), emergence is possibly a better term

because it refers to the realization that objects can be represented on paper by symbols that are not pictures.

Children between the ages of three and four start to experiment with creative spelling by making individual marks and scribbles that resemble letters without having a solid grasp of how letters are made. When writing fake letters, children frequently reuse and rearrange the letter-like symbols to convey various thoughts.

According to McDonald and Burris (1995), research on writing development suggests that young infants learn to write by a method that is completely at odds with what proponents of phonics claim. It seems that children focus on the whole and only much later attend to the parts when learning to write, as opposed to first mastering the parts (letters) and then building up to the entire (written lines) (McDonald & Burris, 1995).

Giving children the chance to write at their own pace enables them to experiment with their own written language and gives them a sense of pride in their own creations. Early learners who have had the chance to autonomously express themselves on paper have demonstrated a superior knowledge of writing's purpose (Sulzby, 1985).

The ability to distinguish print from visuals and the comprehension that print has significance, as well as the development of motor abilities and the capacity for idea generation, are all talents required for writing. Writing exercises with preschoolers have become commonplace in early childhood settings. In these contexts, writing-related activities for kids are also prevalent (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Children's writing activities frequently focus on exploration opportunities rather than providing explicit and deliberate modeling of the writing process.

Studies into the writing process has revealed that the earlier adults can help and encourage young children, the more successful their reading and writing abilities will be throughout the primary years (Beaty & Pratt, 2003). Furthermore, according to Cambourne (1988), educators should base their decisions on how to teach reading and writing on the parallels between learning to talk and learning to read and write. Yet, the early years are the most crucial time for literacy

development, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998). Reading and writing skills continue to grow throughout a person's life.

The writing process does not develop on its own. Instead, they grow through a variety of interconnected processes (Wohlwend, 2008). Since play impacts children's learning, it is crucial for children. Children can explore their world through multi-modal play while playing, distancing them from the real world. During multi-modal play, children are given numerous opportunities to deepen the meanings of the messages they make. Children's writing skills, classroom identities, and social positions are developed through play. Play and literacy can support and strengthen one another when they are combined. Play is an essential component of a child's overall development and is a natural aspect of their evolution (Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011).

Play is essential for every child's language development and growth as a whole (Ginsburg, 2006). It is essential to the creation of early childhood curricula and pedagogy. Play is described as a place in which children can display their own learning and help scaffold the learning of others, in addition to being recognized as a vehicle for learning (Woolkopf, 2004). Play is crucial for a child's development, according to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR 2006).

A developmentally appropriate, high-quality early education program must include play (NAEYC, 2003). Children from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and esthetic backgrounds can benefit from play's benefits for their moral, social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development (Josef, 2006). Play must be purposefully encouraged by knowledgeable caregivers who are trained to observe children and comprehend how play contributes to the children's mastery of concepts and abilities in order to provide these advantages. The major means through which young children acquire ideas and an understanding of the world is through inquisitive and creative activities that they initiate themselves.

Yelland (2011) described the value of young children learning in their environment by referring to it as playful explorations. Yelland concurred with

Vygotsky that play may be instructive and aid kids in growing in a number of different ways. According to Yelland, a teacher can scaffold this information so that the students can express and depict it in a variety of ways. Yelland suggests textual, visual, gestural, audible, linguistic, and tactile exercises as examples of multi-modal play for literacy. Preschoolers' ability to read and write is aided by their literacy knowledge and skills (Roskos & Christie, 2011). In order to enhance the developmental change in their brain processes, children discover significance in their play (Myck-Wayne, 2010).

Manstura (2008) reaffirmed that learning via play is the most appropriate method in early childhood curriculum since it emphasizes children's natural qualities. Activities like theatrical play and social games help children learn more quickly and retain information. Teachers should encourage children to develop via play by engaging them in different kinds of play on a daily basis. Play-based learning has consistently been seen as the most flexible approach for children to learn. In light of this, the study examined the relationship between play type and the development of writing skills in preschoolers at public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Statement of the problem

Using activities including drawing as writing, scribbling writing, letter-like units, nonphonetic letter strings, copying from environmental print, and role-plays, preschool writing skills exercises play a crucial role in the development of a child's vocabulary and communication abilities. During the early years of childhood, children should engage in vigorous physical activities that support healthy brain development. Teachers, however, push for an increasing number of academic programs in early childhood education that are developmentally inappropriate due to expectations from parents regarding academic attainment.

Researchers claim that social connections and the types of playthings children use have an impact on how well they learn to write. Children should be allowed to explore in a setting that is rich in language and literacy exchanges, full of opportunity to continually listen and use language. Outdoor play activities that effectively teach through play help to improve writing skills. Also, there is a lot of rote

learning at this very delicate stage, with a strong emphasis on the child's cognitive growth.

Children who are under pressure to learn scholastic abilities are denied playtime. When children should be outside having fun during playtime, they might be in class working on assignments. Additional factors could be a dearth of playthings, poor playgrounds, a lack of play-related expertise among teachers, or insufficient playtime.

The issue is that, despite the National Policy on Education's recommendation that play be used during instruction in the preschool education, play has sadly fallen short of expectations. Play is not only infrequently used in public preschools, but the quality of play activities is sometimes hampered by a number of factors including inadequate playgrounds and the absence of various forms of play such as manipulative, creative, dramatic, and physical play. Play is not being used effectively in preschools as a tool for the development of writing skills, which is the premise of this study. In light of the foregoing, the study determined the relationship between play type and the development of preschoolers' writing skills in public Early Childhood Education Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between play type and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of this study will be to:

1. Examine the relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Research hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public

Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

2. There is no significant relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the correlational research design. 10,965 respondents comprising 9,846 preschoolers and 1,119 care givers in the 521 Early Childhood Care Centre in East Senatorial District of Rivers State constitute the population of the study. 1095 respondents comprising of 984 preschoolers and 111 Caregivers formed the sample for the study that were chosen using simple random sampling technique. The instruments for data collection in the study were a researcher prepared questionnaire titled “Play and Development of Writing Skills Questionnaire (PDWSQ); and an observation inventory. The instruments were validated by two experts in the

department of Early Childhood/Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using a test-retest method, using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient the reliability index of the instruments were 0.76 and 6.82. The administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher with the help of two trained research assistants. The researcher first obtained permission from the head teachers of the sampled schools, the researcher then proceeded to the classrooms where the respondents were given time to respond to the questionnaires. Cooperation from respondents enabled the researcher to administer and collect the questionnaires within stipulated time for the field study. The observation inventory was filled by the caregivers as they observed the children carry out writing activities as they play. All retrieved copies of the questionnaire and observation inventory were used for data analysis. The data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Result and findings

Null hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Table 1: Summary of PPMC Significant Relationship Test between manipulative play and development of writing skill

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r_{cal}	Df	r_{crit}	Decision
Manipulative play	3003	8843	14488	0.427	1093	0.062	Reject Null Hypothesis
Development of writing skill	5275	25827					

Significant @ .05 alpha level

The result from Table 1 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and with a df of 1093 the calculated value of r (0.427) is greater than the table value of r (0.062), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Meaning that there is a significant relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Null hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Table 2: Summary of PPMC Significant Relationship Test between creative play and development of writing skill

	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r_{cal}	Df	r_{crit}	Decision
Creative play	2686	6972	12712	0.66	1093	0.06	Reject
Development of writing	5171	24873					Null Hypothesis

Significant @ .05 alpha level

The result from Table 2 shows that with a df 1093 and at 0.05 level of significance, the critical table of r (0.062) is less than the calculated value of r (0.66), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschool children in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Discussion of findings

Result in Table 1 shows that the null hypothesis is rejected since the critical r value is less than the computed r value at 1093 degrees of freedom and .05 alpha level. As a result, there is a significant relationship between manipulative play and the development of writing skills in preschoolers in public Early Childhood Centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The study's findings are consistent with those of Lillard et al. (2013), who recognize a potential causal link between manipulative play and the development of writing, language, narrative, and emotion control skills. The results also support the assertions made by Neuman et al. (2000) that it is now commonplace for preschool programs to set up writing centers and promote writing through manipulative play, care giver modeling, and positive reinforcement of children's writing attempts.

The result in table 2 reveals that the null hypothesis is rejected since r_{cal} is greater than the r_{crit} . Hence, there is a significant relationship between creative play and the development of writing skills of preschoolers in public early childhood centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. This finding is consistent with the opinions of Moore and Cosco (2006), who claim that all children require time and a place to play, as well as the uncritical acceptance of their make-believe world in the capacity for making representation, which lies behind all formal skills like writing and planning. Only through creative play are

children able to acquire social representation. Also, the findings are in line with those of Paciga et al. (2011), who contend that teaching phonological memory principles or asking children to quickly name and print letters are not the best ways to teach children writing skills as literacy concepts.

Conclusion

The utilization of various play activities and the provision of playthings allow the kids the chance to experiment and manipulate their way to learning. They enable them to learn all aspects of language learning, including writing. Preschoolers have the chance to write in the sand for free while participating in play activities. Playing with manipulatives, acting out scenarios, being physically active, and engaging in imaginative or dramatic play all help preschoolers develop their writing skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. In order to ensure that care givers are utilizing a variety of play activities in the early childhood education classes, the government, through the Ministry of Education, needs to properly implement the policy requirements governing play in preschool centers.
2. The oversight of public early childhood education facilities needs to be strengthened to ensure that care givers provide enough time, play options, and play materials to support children's language development and overall growth.
3. In order to promote the preschool child's holistic development, care givers should be encouraged to attend workshops and seminars where they will receive sufficient training in the use of various forms of play in interactions with preschool children.

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