An Exploration of New Choices of Play and its' Relationship with the School Liking at Preschool Level

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Abstract- Play activities have a key role in the early development of a child. Planning of play activities demands consideration of the interest, choice, and needs of the child. This consideration stimulates the self-regulation and intentional participation of a child. The present study was an exploratory study to find the novel and innovative choices of play that can extend and promote school liking in children. The current study was qualitative and data was collected through semi-structured interviews and discussions with preschool teachers and management in Pakistan.The sample of the study was consist of 27 preschool specialists from public and private sector institutions of Bahawalpur. The tool for data collection was developed to cover three aspects of the study; the current state of ECE in Bahawalpur, new choices of play, and determinants of conducive environment for play. The purpose of the study was to explore the most effective and useful play activities for preschool classes which could enhance school liking in children. It was concluded in the study that both materials and effective use of available resources are important for all-round development of a child.The results of the study indicated that social and dramatic play are low cast and feasible in both public and private schools. International developments in ECE may be adapted keeping the national structures and traditions into consideration.

I. Introduction

Education has become the surest way of development of individuals and society. The school can only achieve its goals when the students feel love for the school and have positive perceptions related to the school program (Birch & Ladd, 1997). The academic progress of children has a link with school liking (Ladd &Dinella, 2009). Eggum-Wilkens (2014) established a positive correlation in his studies between school adjustment and a child's positive opinion about the school.

Elements of School Liking

The early education of a children has a long term effect on their personality. It plays a vital role in the social and emotional development of a child. The learning and academic achievement of a child profoundly depend upon the adjustment of the child in the school environment. There are many factors which negatively affect the adjustment of child in school and promote school avoidance in them. Between them, relationships at school, autonomy and choices in play, and overall school environment play an important role in school adjustment. Behavioral problems, like aggressiveness, exclusion from school activities, and negative feelings are the expression of a child's disliking of school (Gest, Welsh, &Domitrovich, 2005). It is also found that Gender, age, shyness, and family background also affect the liking of schools. According to Haapasalo, Välimaa, and Kannas (2010), girls show more liking for school as compared to the boys.The school environment has a key role in the development of feeling about school. Excessive homework results in school disliking (Honna, & Uchiyama, 2014), safe environment promotes liking for school (Sandal, Nutbeam, Wold,&Kannas, 1998) and safety stimulates belongingness towards school (Honma, & Uchiyama, 2016).

Play and Environment

Scholars have defined play in different ways. According to Pangrazi and Dauer (1981), "to a child, play is not wasting time or exhibiting unproductive behavior. Rather, it is a method used to research the world and to achieve a peaceful living arrangement with the universe." Montessori (1975) defined it in a different way than play is a child's work. According to Garvey (1977), "children's play is a kind of dialogue with their environment." Play is significant in development (Ginsburg, 2007), more effective if it is

spontaneous, and provide free time and choices (Bodrova and Leong, 1998). According to the study of Newton and Jenvey (2011) child learn sharing, cooperation, emotional stability, and peer acceptance through play activities.

Types of Play

Types of play can be explained based on the nature of the activity, the way we implement, and the way we manage it in a nursery or primary school. According to the nature of the activity, there are two types of play:

1.   *Free Play.*Free play is initiated and directed by a child itself. The direction, length, and outcome of this type cannot be pre-determined. Free play involves imagination and fantasy. This type of play involves the following areas: individuality and uniqueness, Insightfulness, Imagination, and task persistence(Gmitrova&Gmitrov, 2003).

2.   *Guided Play.*This type of play is initiated and guided by the teacher. The teacher sets some objectives and structures the situation according to these objectives. Outcomes or the solutions are predetermined and children are guided towards these intended ends. This type of play is helpful in the all-round development of a child, effective planning and administration of play in limited time. Anziano and others (1995) presented the types by the variety of play experiences in the pre-school setting. These various play experiences support different developmental stages. These four types play with motion, play with objects, dramatic play, and games.

i.   Play with motion.

ii.   Play with objects.

iii. Dramatic play.

iv. Games.

Foundation of Play Curriculum

Parten's Classification of Levels of Play definesthat Child development occurs in stages. Anziano and others (2005) stated that infants' play consists of repetitive motor behaviors, such as banging the hands on a table. As a child gains manual dexterity, play shifts to repetitive actions with objects such as shaking a rattle or dropping a spoon on the floor over and over again. Children's use of objects gradually becomes more complex and they combine objects in an increasingly complex sequence of actions. Keeping the social aspect of play in view, Anziano and others quoted Parten's classical example of categorization of play. He presented the developmental progress of a child in six stages, which are as follows:

1.   *Unoccupied behavior.*This stage refers to the behavior of a child who does not take part in the play.

2.   *Onlooker behavior.*At this stage, a child keeps on watching the other children playing.

3.   *Solitary play.*At this stage, a child plays on his own, with or without objects.

4.   *Parallel play.*At this level, a child plays independently but stays beside the other children.

5.   *Associative play.*At this level, a child plays with other children but this is a type of loose association. Normally, he does not abandon his interest.

6.   *Cooperative play.*This level of play involves such an activity that has some goals at the end, such as drama, construction, or building something, or just a game. At this level, children take their turns and co-operate with each other.

Piaget's Stages of Play

The work of Piaget (1962) helps understand another aspect of child development, which is cognitive development. He presented the stages of play based on a child's cognitive developmental stages.

Practice Play or Sensory-Motor Play

Piaget's first stage of play is 'Practice play or Sensory-Motor play'. This play consists of simple and repetitive movements. For example, a toddler repeats the same action over and over again, such as throwing a ball, beating a chair by spoon, etc. At this level, pleasure is in the action itself. Through this play, a child gains competency and control over his body parts.

Symbolic Play or Construction Play

The second stage of play is called 'Symbolic play or Construction play'. At this stage, a child uses objects to construct something or represent something. For example, he may construct something with wooden blocks or use a stick as a horse and ride.

Game- with- Rules

Piaget's third and final stage of play is 'Game- with- Rules'. At this stage, children take part in such activities that have specific meanings and specific ends. They remain involved in them and follow the rules already chosen to complete them. These can include coloring a picture, playing outdoor with the ball, etc.

Play and Pre-School Curriculum

Educational experts generally agree on the influence of play on different aspects of development. Piaget's work shows that play has a vital role in the early cognitive development of a child. Erikson emphasized the importance of play in emotional development. Vygotsky's work highlights the role of play in social development. Therefore, a variety of play activities can be helpful in all-round development. However, due to the differences in culture, environment, and background, it is important to ensure variety and innovation in the play activities to meet the demands of every child.

Planning and Implementing Play Curriculum

Play curriculum at a pre-school level requires at least three major functions: how to organize the play environment? How to encourage play? And how to guide play? The answer of these questions help to develop a suitable learning environment for the play curriculum. Play is known to be the 'business of a child' and ECE programs more child-centered. It is a thoughtful rationale for the entire policy and the program at preschool level. It is believed that play activities should intellectually be challenging and motivating. Play may be designed to stimulate exploration and imitation which could arouseemotional, social and moral charms. Preschool environment produce liking and adjustment when it is more response-oriented and accommodative (Elkind, 2001).

Problem Statement

Keeping in view the importance of play in the development of the child, it is worth studying the current state of play activities and their effectiveness. The variety and quality of play activities have an essential role in the full participation and liking of children. Therefore the following study was an endeavor to explore more effective and feasible play activities.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study were:
1.   To explore novel and interesting play activities for individuals and group.
2.   To identify favorable and supportive settings to provide an effective learning environment

Research Questions

1.   What type of play and environment is suitable for the adjustment of children in schools?
2.   How teachers can encourage and guide children to participate in full at the preschool level?

Delimitation

The study was qualitative and exploratory, so a deep insight into the phenomenon was required. The current study was limited to the district Bahawalpur.

II.   METHOD

Research Design

The basic objective of the research was to explore the more interesting and loveable play activities and settings. The qualitative design was adopted. A semi-structured one-on-one interview protocol was adopted. A sample of 27 well-known professions of ECE was selected through a purposive sampling technique. The interviewee was a probe to get more details on the study to fulfill the research paradigm. All the participants were interviewed after getting prior permission.

Research Tool

A semi-structured interview was developed to obtain the perspective of the participants. A list of the general question was developed followed by subsidiary questions to get additional details on the phenomenon. The tool was validated by expert opinion and finalized. Mock interviews were conducted before the actual survey, to ascertain the functional issues of the tool.

III.   DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A list of experts was prepared and each of the participants was allocated a code name. This protocol was adopted to assure the confidentiality of the data and the participants. Prior permission for the interview was obtained. The schedule of the interview was finalized as per the convenience of the participants of the study. The whole interview was recorded on an electronic device and the consent was acquired as per research ethics.The obtained data were analyzed through a systematic and careful process. Electronic recordings were transcribed and interpreted. The comments, replies, feelings and expressions, and body language of the interviewees were divided into emerging categories. These categories were further classified into major themes. The obtained themes were reviewed with the interviewee's feelings and expressions. Analysis of each question was done separately at the beginning and the end, similar themes were merged to conclude the research.

<center>IV.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</center>

The basic objective of the study was to explore such type of play activities and environment which may help increase the level of interest of children for schools. The findings of the study regarding play types, settings, rules for implementation and usefulness were as follows.

Play Environment

Many of the respondents supported the idea that a physically suitable environment is required that it must be both physically and psychologically safe and secure, having ideal equipment and materials and enough space to move around freely. The first challenge in organizing the play environment is to organize an indoor nursery environment and outdoor play area.

Indoor Nursery Environment

Many were in the favor that organizing the indoor environment of the nursery requires sufficient space for storage as well as opportunities for children to play freely. A well-planned indoor learning environment should also include child-sized tables and chairs where children can sit and work comfortably. Children should have open access to materials and equipment, without any fear of hurting themselves. According to Sebastian (1986) "to be able to withdraw and be alone and to experience a sense of privacy intimacy and solitude is essential for one's identity. A home like a corner can also be a useful addition for imagination play. A separate block corner can allow children to leave their constructed work safe for overnight".

Outdoor play area

A nursery or pre-school is incomplete without an outdoor play area. The outdoor play area provides an opportunity to play outdoor games. A majority of the participants of the survey suggested that the outdoor area also helps in the development of children's gross motor skills. Observation of the outdoor natural environment enhances children's knowledge of the world and experiences of life. According to Allen (1968), "children seek access to a place where they can dig in the earth, build huts and dens with timber, use real tools, experiment with fire and water, take great risks and learn to overcome them. They have an irresistible urge to build houses and dens, dig holes, make gardens, trot after pets, make bonfires, and cook meals out-of-door. These are all delightfully messy occupations and they make the planners, who are mostly tidy-minded people, unhappy." Above all, there should be a relaxed and calm atmosphere so that children can develop fully the skills and competencies appropriate to their age range."

Time Management for Play

The experts of the ECE endorsed the free and spontaneous play, and stress that time is very important in play activities. An appropriate length of time for play is required for children to fully explore their ideas, put them into practice, and to reach a satisfying end.

Setting the Stage for a Play

Creating an interesting and stimulating environment can also be helpful in the active participation of children in play activities. The participants further described that the color scheme, decoration of the room, comfortable room environment, and a variety of toys and props can act as potential re-enforcers. A child's hunger, fatigue, and conflicts should also be resolved quickly because it leads to the disliking.

Encourage Anti-Bias Play

Children of a preschool class may have different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. It is also a challenge for a teacher to deal with gender biases which can adversely affect the environment. Almost all of the respondents established the idea that these biases can cause a feeling of insecurity in the children of a specific background. Ensuring equal rights and equal representation of all groups in games and activities, the participation of children can be increased.

Rotate Materials

A useful scheme was given by a respondent that over the time, children get familiar with the environment and toys and after a certain period, they lose their interest in playing with them. So a useful strategy regarding this situation is rotation. Another technique in the rotation is keeping away a few of the toys for a certain period and then replacing the old ones with the new.

Guiding Play

The main purpose of guiding a play is to keep the children safe, secure, busy, and avoid conflicts and confusion. Guiding children during play may be in the form of direct intervention or indirect guidance.

Indirect Guidance

In the case of indirect guidance, a teacher mostly provides opportunities for play through a carefully structured play environment and keeps an eye from a distance to ensure that the children are busy, secure, and comfortable. He merely acts as a facilitator for a continuous, spontaneous, and child-centered process of play.

Direct Intervention

Few of the respondents suggested that sometimes direct intervention is also required. When children are involved in a purposeful and guided play, only indirect guidance is needed. But when a child is reluctant to participate, maybe due to the new material, new play situation, or a difficult target to be achieved, the teacher must intervene directly to ensure that the desired ends are achieved.

Proposed Curriculum

It was the sum of the similar ideas that the play curriculum may be designed around weekly ideas which must include various type of target skills and learnings. Curriculum must ensures the balance between free play and teacher supervised play. The intended program must consider the interests, choices, tractability, and individual goals while implementation in the school. The circle time, informal session, imitating activities, and drama may improve the worth of the program of school and accelerate anintentional participation of the children. Informal social chat ofstudents may be allowed during break or lunchtime. This would help them to develop social relationships and socialization. Children show enthusiasm for such opportunities and get confidence.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of more frequent, active, and regular play hours on kindergarten student satisfaction, school avoidance, and teacher relationships. The results showed that outdoor activities and playing with rules in the classroom can have positive effects on school preferences for kindergarten students and relationships with teachers. The availability and intelligent use of play equipment can increase the interest and production of activities. The study also found that the variety of games and activities correlated with children's growing interest.Early childhood researchers suggest that the most appropriate developmental activity for young children is play education (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).Children participating in the play program had more social connections and exhibited less disruptive behavior. These results are consistent with the results of contemporary studies around the world. The free and active play had a positive effect on the recognition of preschoolers in school and on their relationships with teachers.Incorporating more playful education into early childhood education can have a positive impact on children's development and their love for the school and their teachers. Parental pressure on teachers to impart academic skills leads to less playful activities in early childhood education. In this study, it was found that the increase in play activities in kindergartens increased the preference of children in school and plays activities in kindergarten, which gives more weight to teaching academic skills and will lead to better results.

The following recommendations can be presented under the results of this study.

- Further studies on the quality, topics, and types of early childhood education should be carried out in developing countries such as Pakistan

- Parents can be asked to encourage positive attitudes towards school in their children and to help them adjust to school. It is possible to develop educational programs for children who have difficulty adjusting to school or a low level of sympathy for school.

- Play education should be part of the teacher training curriculum. Teachers can also take these refresher courses to meet EEC requirements.

- Teachers should assist with play activities and apply safety protocol. Although students want autonomy and prefer free play, few are interested in teacher-guided play. These include role-playing, theater, dancing, singing, and outdoor tours. These should strike a balance between free play and guided activities.

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