
Challenges faced by Early Childhood Development Education Teachers during Outdoor Play Activities in enhancing Holistic Development of the Learners

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Abstract

Outdoor play is part and parcel of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) and outdoor play activities are important in the life of a child as they enhance holistic development and creativity which is useful in later life and career choice of the learner. It is the responsibility of teachers in ECDE to ensure that all children enjoy learning through play despite various challenges that are encountered during outdoor play time. This study sought to identify the challenges faced by ECDE teachers during outdoor play activities in Bomet East Sub County, Kenya. The study utilized the outdoor play inventory theory. Descriptive survey research design was used. The study employed stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques to select ECDE centers, head teachers and ECDE teachers respectively. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview guide. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data and results were presented using frequency distribution tables, bar graphs. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data that were presented using emerging themes. The analyzed data revealed that most ECDE centers had no safety and regulation guides, inadequacy of outdoor play materials, lack of outdoor play facilities as well as interference by other learners. Other challenges were lack of cooperation among ECDE children, difference in abilities and ages, large class sizes and dominance by other learners. The study concluded that most of the ECDE centers had no equipment and materials for outdoor play activities were unavailable and inadequate. Based on the findings, the study recommended that parents and the county government should purchase outdoor play facilities because they are expensive for the ECDE centers to purchase on their own. Additionally, improvisation was to be encouraged and ECDE teachers to take part in children's outdoor activities and be active participants in order to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: *Outdoor Play, Holistic Development, Challenges, Early Childhood Development, Education*

1.0 Introduction

Outdoor play is a fundamental right as well as a vehicle for learning for all children. Globally, researchers such as (Muthoni, 2016) found out that outdoor play have many benefits to children such as social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. Unfortunately, some preschools do not give outdoor play the attention it deserves, but rather keep emphasizing on

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classroom activities. This implies that opportunities for children to engage in high quality outdoor experiences are diminishing (Waller et al., 2017). Many researchers argue that outdoor play experiences, particularly those that offer the opportunity to engage with nature (Kahn & Weiss, 2017) and involve risk-taking (Brussoni et al., 2015) have an important role in children's learning and development and loss of these opportunities have been noted to have a negative impact on children's health, learning, and development.

Many schools for instance, host a large number of children in ECDE such that the play fields are overstretched aside the fact that the fields are open with no facilities that pupils can play with (Korb, 2016). Furthermore, teachers' professional development rarely focuses on learning through play. Many teachers are not adequately prepared to implement play-based learning in their classrooms. They might think of learning materials only as workbooks or charts on the wall rather than objects that children could explore and use in their learning. In addition, large class sizes that limit children's freedom to play can affect play in pre-primary setting. When more than 30 children are in a relatively small space, inside the class room or on the playground, it makes it difficult for caregivers to support children's play through active experiences, personal conversation and thought-provoking questions (Korb, 2016).

Based on Public playground safety handbook, (2015) playground supervisors should be aware that not all playground equipment is appropriate for children who might use the playground hence supervisors should look for posted signs indicating the appropriate age of the users and direct children to equipment appropriate to their age. However, one should not rely on supervision alone to prevent injuries but understand the basis of playground safety such as checking for broken equipment and making sure children don't play on it, checking for and removing unsafe modifications, especially ropes tied to equipment. Before letting children play, it's important to check for properly maintained protective surfacing and watching for and stopping children from wandering away from the play area.

Many educators believe that more time is required to prepare for indoor activities compared to outdoor play. This is related to the notion that, during outdoor activities, teachers have the opportunity to take a break with the children in their care (Hunter et al., 2020). Similarly, in a study by Okoruwa (2017), he indicated that many teachers had a lot of paperwork to do which inhibited them from bringing children out of the classroom for outdoor activities thus the researcher pointed out that children should participate in outdoor play as stipulated in the ECDE curriculum on a daily basis. Additionally, according to Korb (2016), teachers sometimes fail to accompany their children to play, instead, they get busy with academic work and lesson note writing in the class room. This is a challenge in that sometimes they can be compelled to replace or repair damaged play facilities by children and this can discourage them from guiding their children during guided outdoor play.

1.1 Problem statement

Despite the known benefits of outdoor play to children's holistic development, evidence has suggested that opportunities for children to engage in outdoor play may continue to diminish in that the natural environment may continue to decrease in a constantly evolving socio-environmental world due to technological advancement and urbanization in the current era. Children are more likely to spend their time indoors with their gadgets as compared to their older counterparts (Zaid et al., 2021). Consequently, with the emergence of various electronic activities and games, the opportunity for outdoor and nature-based play has decreased (Burke et al., 2021). Based on a recent study by Raj et al. (2022), in Selangor, Malaysia, more than 90% of children under the age of five surpassed the WHO's recommended screen time for their age group. The majority (66%) of them watched television, followed by handheld gadgets and computers. This was a concerning issue that should be taken care of since it could affect their emotional and mental well-being. Hunter et al. (2020) argued that educators do not have sufficient time and adequate conversations regarding the preparation and planning of outdoor learning. There is a need to establish the challenges faced by ECDE teachers in outdoor play activities in enhancing holistic development of the child. ECDE centers are faced with many and varied challenges during outdoor play activities ranging from state of facilities, size of the class compared to available facilities, safety and participation.

1.2 Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to identify challenges faced by ECDE teachers in outdoor play activities in Bomet East Sub County, Kenya.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study utilized the outdoor play inventory theory which identifies types of social play, the general type of play, and the specific play objects that children are engaged with at any given time. The theory was designed for recording individual observations of children in a 30-minute time period where the ECDE teacher was the observer.

2.0 Literature review

Personal safety education for children is very important and needs to be introduced at an early age, so that the children have skills for their own safety when facing danger. Basic knowledge about safety needs to be given before the children start to play, in order to avoid the risk of accidents to the children (Sholihah et al, 2019).

The safety of each individual piece of playground equipment as well as the layout of the entire play area should be considered when designing or evaluating a playground for safety. Since falls are a very common playground hazard pattern, the installation and maintenance of protective surfacing under and around all equipment is crucial to protect children from severe head injuries.

All playgrounds present some challenge and because children can be expected to use equipment in unintended and unanticipated ways, adult supervision is highly recommended during children's play (Public playground safety handbook, 2015).

During outdoor play, children are exposed to challenges and risks as they navigate natural objects and materials. Harper (2017) argue that contemporary society is accustomed to ever-growing and ever-present risk perception, leading to significant restrictions on outdoor play. Risk can be defined as any exposure to danger that is likely to result in loss, harm or gain. During outdoor activities, children experience a mixture of excitement and fear and demonstrate self-monitoring behaviors as they engage in and avoid risk, creating pleasure and enjoyment. Some limitations in the use of outdoor activities in preschool education have been identified. Hunter et al. (2020) argues that educators do not have sufficient time and adequate conversations regarding the preparation and planning of outdoor learning. Many educators believe that more time is required to prepare for indoor activities compared to outdoor play. This is related to the notion that, during adventure activities, teachers have the opportunity to take a break while the children are in their care play (Hunter et al., 2020).

The lack of coordination and discussion concerning learning adventures demonstrates a lack of connection between the major stakeholders responsible for steering and supporting outdoor play. Therefore, common understanding is required among educators on their role on outdoor teaching methods in the development of creativity and learning among pre-school children. According to Korb (2016), some teachers fail to accompany their children to play on the playground and instead get busy with academic work and lesson note writing in the class room. This is a challenge in that sometimes they can be compelled to replace or repair damaged play facilities by children and this could discourage them from guiding the children during guided outdoor play.

Many schools host a large number of children such that the play fields are overstretched aside the fact that the fields are open with no facilities that pupils can play with (Korb, 2016). Furthermore, teachers' professional development rarely focuses on learning through play. Many teachers are not adequately prepared to implement play-based learning in their classrooms. They might think of learning materials only as workbooks or charts on the wall rather than objects that children could explore and use in their learning. In addition, large class sizes that limit children's freedom can affect play in pre-primary setting. When more than 30 children are in a relatively small space, inside the class room or on the playground, it makes it difficult for caregivers to support children's play through active experiences, personal conversation and thought-provoking questions (Korb, 2016).

Inadequate maintenance of equipment results in injuries on playgrounds. Because the safety of playground equipment and its suitability for use depends on good inspection and maintenance. The manufacturer's maintenance instructions and recommended inspection schedules should be strictly followed. If manufacturer's recommendations are not available, a maintenance schedule should be developed based on actual or anticipated playground use. Frequently used playgrounds would require more frequent inspections and maintenance (Public playground safety handbook, 2015). It

was not known the exact challenges that ECDE teachers faced during outdoor play activities in Bomet East Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya thus the need for this study.

3.0 Materials and methods

This study used Mixed Methods research approach and descriptive survey design which means that the researcher gathered in depth quantitative and qualitative information about the challenges ECDE teachers faced during outdoor play activities. The study targeted 64 participants from which a sample of 32 head teachers and 32 ECDE teachers were selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques respectively. Questionnaire and interview guides were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was administered to the selected head teachers while the interview guides were used to record responses from the ECDE teachers about the challenges they faced during outdoor play activities.

The clarity of these two data collection tools was improved via face validity. For further validation, the researcher designed the tools under consultation of experts in ECDE. To ensure reliability of the instruments, the researcher employed test-retest procedure in which the results of the tests were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula and a reliability coefficient of 0.7 was obtained. Data was collected within three months in 32 ECDE centers. They were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The results were presented in form of frequency distribution tables, bar graphs, pie charts and narration of emerging themes. In the entire process of this study, ethical considerations were strictly followed. These include confidentiality and voluntary participation.

4.0 Results and Discussion

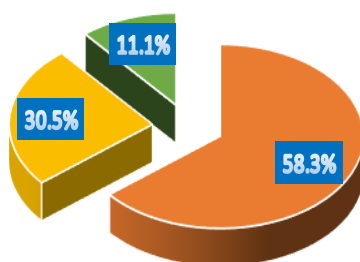
A total of 36 head teachers responded to questionnaires and 36 ECDE teachers were interviewed giving a total of 72 respondents. The questionnaire and interview response rate had 64 respondents (88.8%) of which comprised of 32 head teachers and 32 ECDE teachers.

4.1 Biographic information of the respondents

4.1.1 Type of ECDE Center of the respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate the type of ECDE they were based in, whether it was a public or private ECDE. As indicated in Figure 1, the data represented showed 21 (58.3%) of ECDE teachers were teaching in public ECDE centers and 11(30.5%) of the ECDE teachers were teaching in private ECDE centers. This implied that there were more public ECDE centers in Bomet East Sub County than the private ECDE centers.

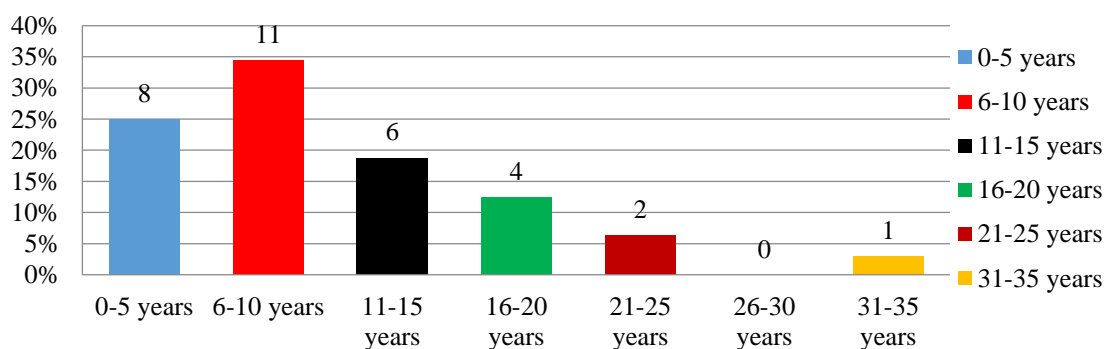
Figure 1: Type of ECDE Center of the respondents



4.1.2 Teaching experience of the respondents

The teachers were also asked to indicate their teaching experience and as shown in Figure 2. Majority of ECDE teachers had a teaching experience of between 6-10 years with 11 respondents (34.3%); followed by ECDE teachers with 0-5 years teaching experience, 8 respondents (25%). About 6 teachers (18.8%) had a teaching experience of 11-15 years and 4 (12.5%) had a teaching experience of 16-20 years while those with 21-25 years of teaching experience were 2 (6.2%). None of the teachers had 26-30 years of teaching experience while one teacher had 31-35 years of teaching experience (3.1%). Through these findings, it was revealed that a larger population of sampled ECDE teachers in Bomet East Sub County had teaching experience of 6-10 years.

Figure 2 Teaching Experience of respondents

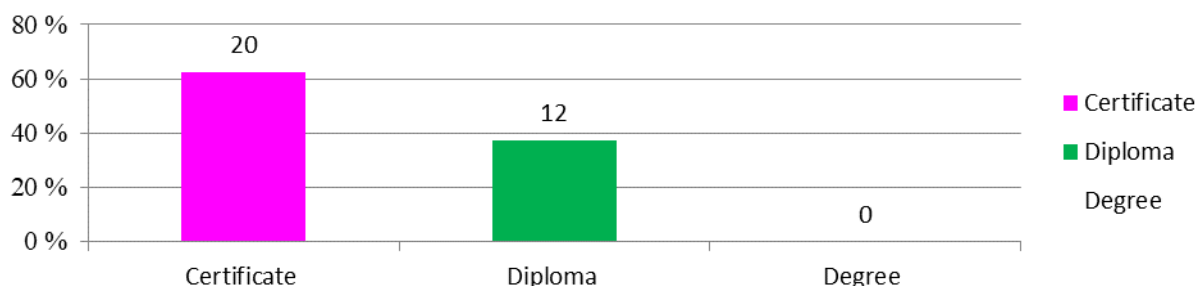


4.1.3 ECDE teacher’s professional qualifications

As shown in Figure 3, the study findings revealed that the largest number of ECDE teachers 20 (62.5%) had Kenya Certificate of Early Childhood Development and Education, followed by 12 (37.5%) with Diploma in Early Childhood Development and Education. None of the sampled ECDE teachers had Bachelor’s Degree in Early childhood Development Education. These findings concur with findings of Ntondwe (2017) who established that the most significant proportion of

preschool teachers had a certificate in Early Childhood Education. This similarity is because the national government in collaboration with County governments in Kenya has been supporting tertiary institutions to train ECD teachers. It can therefore be concluded that all ECDE teachers in the sampled ECDE centers were trained and hence they are all qualified to handle ECDE learners. They must therefore be in possession of required knowledge and skills on the outdoor play activities and enhancement of holistic development of the ECDE learners.

Figure 3: ECDE teacher’s professional qualifications

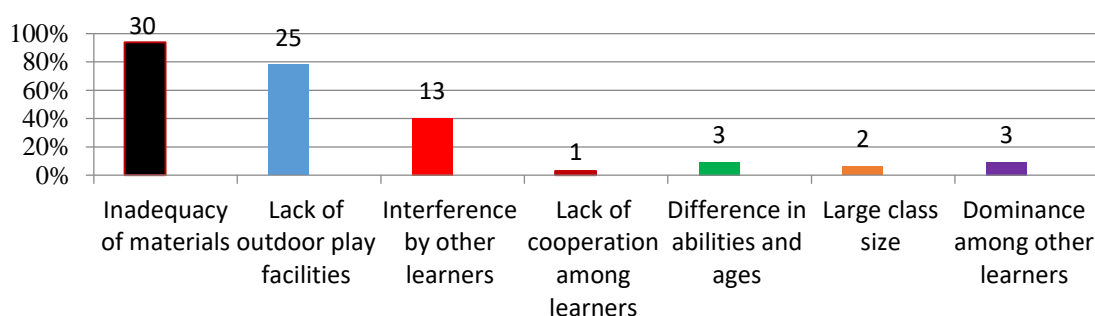


4.2 Challenges faced by ECDE teachers during outdoor play activities

The respondents were coded and ECDE teachers were represented by T. The respondents were asked to state the challenges they faced during outdoor play activities and the analysis of their responses are shown in Figure 4. It was evident that most of the ECDE centers lacked enough facilities and materials with a frequency of 30 (93.8%). This implied that even though outdoor play materials were available, they were inadequate compared to the number of children for example one ball, one rope and a tyre in a centre.

Lack of outdoor play facilities was a major challenge in most ECDE centers as observed by 25 respondents (78.1%). It was also observed that many outdoor play facilities that were not available in all the sampled ECDE centres such as climbing ladders, climbing frames, tunnels, see saws and beam balances whereby respondents indicated that they were expensive to buy or improvise. Interference by older learners in the primary school section was another challenge experienced by a number of ECDE teachers. Despite the fields being spacious, children love playing and older children interfered with younger children’s play without their knowledge mainly because of lack of teachers’ guidance. Inadequate time was a challenge whereby after outdoor play activities the children were observed yearning for more time to play at the end of the allocated timings. These findings concur with Okoruwa (2017) who established that preschool children spend more time in classrooms and their outdoor play time is limited.

Figure 4: Challenges faced by ECDE Teachers during outdoor play activities

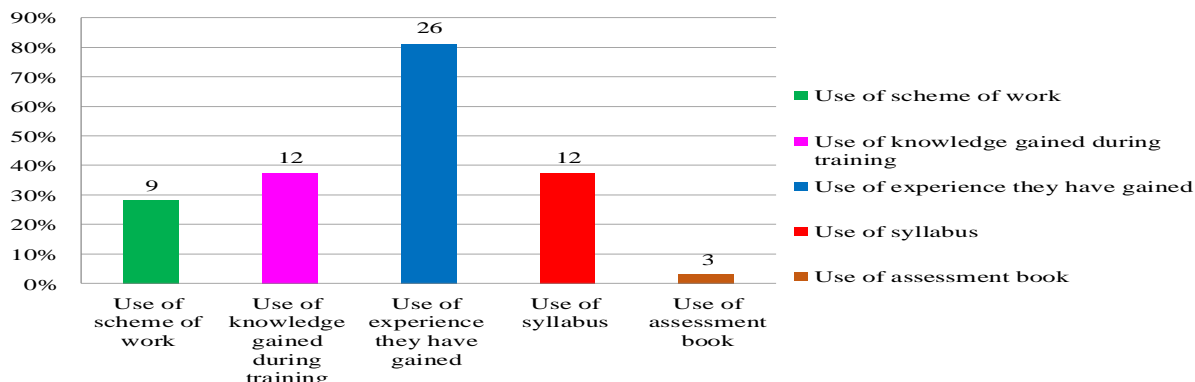


4.3 How teachers guided learners during outdoor play activities

Based on the identified challenges, the respondents were asked how they overcame these challenges to ensure that ECDE children engaged themselves fully during their outdoor play activities for holistic development. The responses were as shown in Figure 5 and a larger percentage 26 (81.3%) indicated that they guided the learners based on their working experience as majority of them had a working experience of 6-10 years. 12 respondents (37.5%) were using knowledge gained during training and those who used the syllabus. This was supported by their professional qualification where all the ECDE teachers from the sampled centers were qualified as they were trained. Syllabus were available in all the ECDE centers and it was a guide to ECDE teachers. The smallest percentage of 1 (9.45%) indicated that there was lack of cooperation among learners and this implies that each child had his or her own interest during outdoor play activities.

9 respondents (28.1%) used scheme of work to guide the learners. The smaller percentage of 3 (9.4%) indicated that they used assessment book to guide children during outdoor play activities. T-6, T-14 and T-22 indicated that they use the assessment book to guide their children during outdoor play activities further explain that;

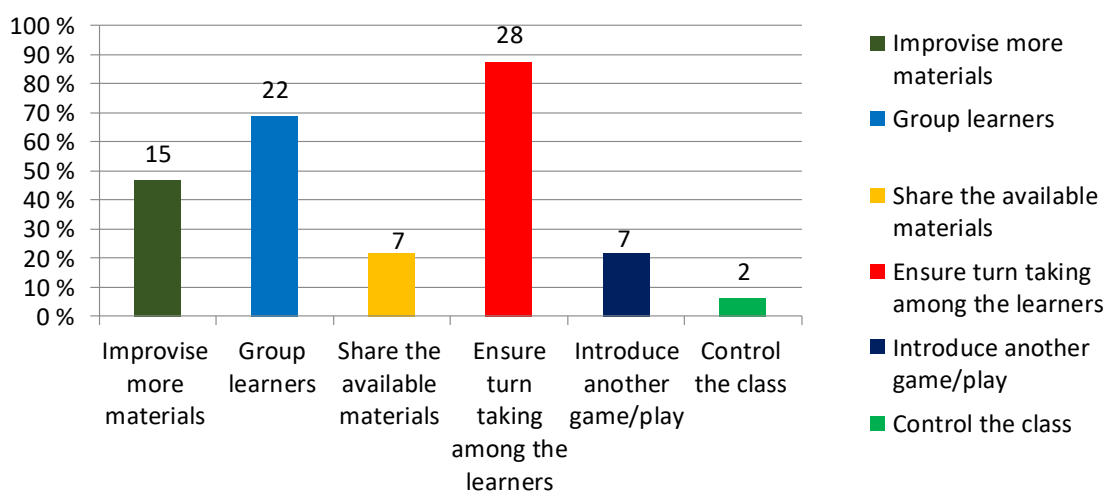
Figure 5: How teachers guided learners during outdoor play activities



4.4 How teachers overcame inadequacy of outdoor play facilities and materials

The respondents were asked what they normally do in case there were shortages of outdoor play facilities and materials during outdoor play and their responses were summarized in Figure 6. All the schools improvised the outdoor play materials for example, ball and ropes were the most improvised in all the sampled ECDE centers. Despite the shortages of outdoor play materials, the researcher did not observe any ECDE teacher introducing another play due to inadequacy of outdoor play materials and 2 ECDE teachers were seen grouping learners and not the 22 as indicated in the findings. The findings in Figure 6 concurred with the researcher’s observation on ensuring turn taking and sharing the available materials whereby the same number of ECDE centers tallied with the results from the interview.

Figure 6: How teachers overcame inadequacy of outdoor play facilities and materials



4.5 How teachers ensured safety of the play area and play materials/equipment

Majority of the sampled ECDE centres did not have the safety and regulation guide to be used for their outdoor of play activities whereby 1 (3.1%) had it and responded that it enhanced full participation as children were guided well during their outdoor play activities while those who did not have were represented by 31 (96.9%) and they responded that they used their experiences and knowledge gained during training which concur with the results in Figure 5.

The respondents were asked to state how they ensured safety of the play area and play materials/equipment and their responses were analyzed as shown in Table 2. It was revealed that majority of the ECDE teachers had various ways in ensuring safety of the play area and materials whereby storing the materials safely after use had a higher percentage 28 (87.5%). 21 respondents (65.6%) removed unwanted materials from the field. This was because the playground was used by the entire school hence they might have left unwanted materials after use. 16 (50%) of the respondents inspected the field first before engaging children with outdoor play activities.

15 respondents (46.9%) filled the existing holes citing that some of the plays which boys engaged in during free choice activities included drilling of holes and leaving them without filling them hence the ECDE teacher should consider filling them before the actual outdoor play activities. 4 respondents (12.5%) collected the materials after use and stored them safely. This implied that collection of the materials after use was not considered a major way of ensuring safety of the play as indicated. 3 respondents (9.4%) indicated that they controlled the class and fenced the field. This implied that by controlling the class, teachers ensured that children did not tamper with the materials before or after use and fencing the field was to ensure that children understood the

boundary of the field and not to extend their plays outside the field which included roads as it posed danger to their lives.

Additionally, T-27 claimed that:

Controlling the class was my major role during outdoor play activities because the materials that were available were inadequate despite the population of children being low. The space also was inadequate hence children were not able to participate in their free choice activities and competition was not enhanced. I ensured that i controlled the class in order for each and every child to participate without any one dominating the activity, material or play.

These findings concurred with the findings from observation where the researcher observed that no teacher inspected the field first before play and filled existing holes as indicated in the findings from some respondents. Observation also was made where only 4 (12.5%) ECDE centers collected their materials after use and stored them safely in their lockable cupboard unlike the results from interview where 28 respondents indicated that they stored them safe after use. Only in 3 (9.4%) ECDE centers did the researcher observe class control. 3 respondents of (9.4%) indicated that they controlled the class and fenced the also field.

Table 1: How teachers ensured safety of the play area

Safety of the play area and materials	Frequency	%
Inspect the field first	16	50
Remove unwanted materials from the field	21	65.6
Fill existing holes in the field	15	46.9
Fence the field	3	9.4
Collect the materials after play/use	4	12.5
Store the materials safely after use	28	87.5
Control the class	3	9.4

4.6 Qualitative data from interviews by the respondents

Some qualitative data from respondents is as indicated:

T-18 indicated that;

Parents should donate the outdoor play facilities and materials to overcome the challenges faced. Teachers should improvise more materials and encourage older children to improvise. County Government should consider purchasing the outdoor play facilities since they were expensive for the school to purchase.

T-31 asserted that;

To overcome the challenges faced, outdoor play facilities and materials should be donated by well-wishers either in the county or entire country. Nongovernmental organizations are encouraged to donate since most of the ECDE centers lack majority of these outdoor play equipment and materials for outdoor play activities.

T-27 further indicated that;

Children were not cooperative during outdoor play because of different interests and lack of outdoor play facilities and materials. Children played their own individual plays as inadequate materials made them bored waiting for the only one material which was a ball to play with. As a teacher, I am not able to control the class as children were all in different corners of the field usually playing freely.

T-6 asserted that

When each and every child was being enrolled, their teacher in charge developed an assessment book for everyone. In that book, i marked it as a register in the morning and around noon hours. Also, as children participated in outdoor play activities, i used it to guide and i am able to determine their development.

T-14, indicated that,

With the help of the assessment book, i am in a position to guide my children during outdoor play activities because if children did not do well in the previous lesson, then i will repeat the same activities until they have acquired what i intended them to acquire since i am in control of the class and the free choice activities were minimal since i wanted them to learn a certain concept.

T-22 claimed that,

After each and every outdoor activity, I assessed the learners and recorded their progress as it helped me especially when distributing the available facilities and materials for the next outdoor play time. Again, slow learners were catered for especially during distribution whereby i ensured that they were involved in participation. With the assessment, it helped in ensuring that all the activities that I had planned for were all practiced and supervision was one of my roles during children's outdoor activities.

In addition, T-5 indicated that;

Since our field was not fully fenced, we ensured that it was fenced to ensure children's safety in order not to astray during their outdoor activities hence controlling the class was a major role in order to avoid children tampering with the materials and any risk among children since the school was along the highway.

5.0 Conclusions

From the study findings, it can be concluded that ECDE teachers are faced with various challenges during outdoor play activities. A higher number of ECDE teachers were faced with inadequacy of materials and lack of outdoor play facilities such as climbing ladders, climbing frames, tunnels, see saws, beam balances. Interference among other learners also was another great challenge because most of the ECDE centers shared the field with older children in primary school sections. Lack of cooperation among children was not a major challenge as ECDE teachers were in control

of the class and most children enjoyed playing during outdoor play time. Teachers would engage learners to play in groups or to take turns in an attempt to curb the challenge of inadequate outdoor play materials and facilities. To ensure safety in the play area, teachers would mainly store the materials safely after use and remove unwanted materials from the field after play. The fields in most schools were not well fenced.

6.0 Recommendations

Learners need to participate fully during their outdoor play activities for holistic development. Schools should acquire relevant and adequate play materials and facilities, share the available materials and facilities through grouping of learners and ensuring turn taking and supervise learners during outdoor play. The government and other ECDE stakeholders should support the acquisition of the materials and facilities by the schools through donations. ECDE teachers should accompany their children during outdoor play time and not to leave children to play on their own in order to encourage each and every child to participate during outdoor play activities. Through participation children will compete among themselves, develop their communication and problem-solving skills hence their holistic development.

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