

Preschool Teachers Perception and Practices about Children Learning through Socio-Dramatic Plays in Debre Berhan, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to investigate preschool teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of learning through socio-dramatic plays in government and private preschools in Deber Berhan, Ethiopia. In so doing, mixed research method was employed as an appropriate methodology. In this study 14 preschool centers (6 government and 8 private preschools) were randomly selected for the study participant, and 52 preschool teachers (21 teachers from government and 31 teachers from private) were selected. And also 7 teachers also purposively selected for qualitative data. Questionnaire for the quantitative data, interview and observation for qualitative data were the main tools of data collection. Quantitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics techniques of mean and standard deviation. Independent sample t test also employed to measure the existing differences in perception between government and private preschool teachers. Qualitative data analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that the majority of preschool teachers have better perception about the benefits of socio-dramatic plays for children socio emotional, language and literacy skills development. The independent sample t test result also revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of private and government preschool teachers on the benefits of socio-dramatic plays. Moreover, the study found out learning through socio-dramatic play rarely practiced. Most teachers did not employ some roles expected in implementing learning through socio-dramatic plays in their classrooms. Finally, pertinent recommendations were drawn from the findings of the study.

Keywords: perception, socio-dramatic plays, learning

Introduction

Early childhood education plays a significant role in the lives of young children and there is consistent evidence that high quality early education programs can contribute to children's short term and long-term gains in cognitive, language and social-emotional development (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEY], 2009; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). If we are to understand anything about the ways in which young children learn, we must understand first the central role of play (Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012). The term play is often used, but loosely defined. Play should be viewed as a valuable classroom activity that enables children to develop a wide variety of social and academic skills (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2011). There is a vital need for play to be kept in the early childhood classrooms. Early childhood educators need to carefully consider and question their pedagogy and corresponding practices. In implementing the early childhood learning framework, educators have discussed and described

their understandings of the practical principles. One of the practices most commonly used in the early childhood sector is „learning through play“. Learning through play is an essential and critical part of all children's 2 development. It is an enjoyable and motivating for children's education and it is how they spend much of their time (Hadley, 2002). According to Hyvonen & Kangas (2007) in their review of the work of many researchers on learning through play in different countries from a pedagogical perspective, it is agreed that play is valuable to children's learning. Not only learning through play is an important part of children's daily routine, it is also a window of opportunity into their developmental levels and a context where valuable teaching and learning can occur. There are different play types identified by different authors. For example, Piaget (as cited in Christie, 1990) broadly categorize children play into three types on the other hand, Miller and Almon (2009) identified twelve types of children play. These different types of play are characteristic of, and give

relevance to, the argument that children create learning experiences through different kinds of plays. Based on this assumption the present study focused on one developmentally important form of play that preschool age children highly engage is make-believe play, social pretend play, also known as advanced symbolic or socio-dramatic play Smilansky & Shefatya (as cited in Moyeles, 2012). In one way or another, one can remind his/her early childhood experience dominated with socio-dramatic plays especially in the preschool age (Bülent & İlknur, 2011). In Ethiopia, on any given day, children in preschools engage in socio-dramatic plays, story-time, singing and interactive games (Szente, Hoot & Selamawit, 2007). The practices of learning through play in preschools in Ethiopia acknowledged in policy framework for early childhood care but ill practiced or under threat (National policy framework for early childhood care, 2010). Study conducted in jigjiga by Yigzaw & Abdirahman (2017), teaching and learning process practice in both private and public was not as per National ECCE Quality standard. Ministry of Education, (2018) also suggested that teachers should provide children with different activities such as song, socio-dramatic play and storytelling that are vital aspects of children learning. MOE, (2018) also recommends that teachers can facilitate children learning by developing and organizing play corners that have benefits for different domains of children development. The corners enable to provide learning opportunities that are part of their day-to-day living (MOE, 2018). This reminds us that paying attention to play based learning is the cornerstone of early childhood care and education program in Ethiopia. Contrary to this as per National policy framework for early childhood care and education (2010) and the aforementioned domestic research reported the practices of play-based learning is under threat and the underlying problems may attributed to many factors. Domestic researches mainly focused on the challenges in implementing early childhood care and education program in relation to the physical environment. Whether socio-dramatic plays used to promote learning and development depends on teachers' perceptions, practices, and contexts (Hadley, 2002; McLane, 2003). Despite the fact that, the current study focused, little or no research conducted on teachers' perceptions and practices of learning through socio dramatic play. Therefore, so as to have a thorough investigation of teachers' perceptions towards the benefits and current practices of learning through socio dramatic plays for children's learning

and development, the current study has given due attention and answer the following basic research questions.

- What is the perception of preschool teachers towards the benefits of socio-dramatic plays for Children's learning?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of perception between government and private preschools?
- What is the extent of socio-dramatic plays practice in government and private preschool classrooms?

Methods

Research Design: According to Creswell (2014), mixed research design is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. Mixed research design both qualitative (observation and interview) and quantitative (questionnaire for teachers) methods employed for this study.

Participants: The study was conducted in Debrebrhan city, Ethiopia. The target populations for the current study were teachers of government and private preschool centers serving children age 4-6. Since the present study were selected preschool teachers" to investigate their perceptions and its practices of socio-dramatic plays, quantitatively the target populations for this study were 117 teachers (50 government and 67 private) preschool teachers were participated.

Data Collection Instruments: As has been mentioned so far, in order to achieve the objectives of the study, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Therefore, it employed questionnaire, interview and observation as data gathering tools.

Questioner: This study basically employed self-developed questionnaire as an instrument. In the design of this instrument the literature review used as a base. A questionnaire was proposed to collect data from preschool teachers specifically to answer research questions one and research question two. Five-point Likert type questions developed based on the literature ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree in a way that participants respond their level of agreement and disagreement. The questionnaire has three dimensions being measured, namely socio emotional skills focused measuring of nine items, language skills focused measuring of six items and literacy skills focused measuring of two items. The rationale for selecting these dimensions was that ample

empirical evidence arguing socio-dramatic play as the best tool for children socio emotional, language and literacy related skills acquisition (Christie, 1990; Dau, 1999; Ashabi, 2007; Bluiett, 2009; NAEYC, 2009).

The cut point for the mean score for socio emotional skills is 27 because the highest score is 45 and the lowest is 9, for language skills is 18 because the highest score is 30 and the lowest one is 6 and for literacy skills is 6 as the highest score 10 and the lowest is 2.

Interview guide questions: Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to have a deep understanding of one's beliefs, feelings, and behaviors on important issues. Accordingly, an in-depth interview used to investigate perception and the current practice of socio-dramatic play-based learning in preschool classrooms with the preschool teachers. Based on the pilot results, the interview guide was revised to improve the sequencing, phrasing and deletion of some questions. The interview was conducted to gather each teacher's view on the

benefits of socio-dramatic play for children social, emotional, language and literacy skill development, teacher preparation of the sociodramatic plays as well as roles that the teacher assumed during socio-dramatic plays. Statements common among the participants were considered meaningful.

Reliability and validity: To ensure the content validity of the instrument, both the English and the translated version (own translation) of the instruments were evaluated by two MA holder social science experts. Pilot study also conducted on fifteen preschool teachers because one of the most commonly used indicators of internal consistency is Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. When Cronbach's Alpha is 0.7 or higher value indicates the scale is reliable (Pallant, 2011). A reliability test of this study of the survey instrument was also checked using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for both the pilot and main study to see the internal consistency of the instrument as mentioned in table 2 below.

Table 1: reliability Statistics of the instrument.

Dimension/variables assessed	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Socio emotional skills focused	9	.917
Language skills focused	6	.831
Literacy skills focused	2	.732

Pilot study also conducted for both the interview and observation guide in two preschool teachers and their classrooms (one private and one government preschools).

Procedures

The selected preschool principals have received a cooperation letter written by debrebrehan University College of Education and Behavioral Studies, department Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and then signed a permission note outlining of the study objective.

Data Analysis

As the study was used qualitative and quantitative type of data, the data analysis method that would utilize here was also being of two types- quantitative and qualitative. For quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentage employed. To determine the existing differences in perception of the benefits of socio-dramatic plays across government and private preschools independent t-test employed. Verbatim transcriptions used to refine the result of research question one and thematic analysis technique used

for research question three which is purely qualitative question. The research questions, the close-ended, observation and the interview guide questions served as bases to identify the major topics or themes across which the data organized. Tabular presentation also used for data presentation. And the analysis and interpretation mainly emphasized the current practices and the perception of socio-dramatic play of government and private preschool teachers.

Ethical consideration

The researcher followed American Psychologist Association (APA) (2007) research ethical code. APA states that protect respondents' privacy are first codes of ethics in human researches. The researcher was being informed for respondents about the objectives of the study, purpose of the study, type of data collected, and the producers of data collection processes also explain to preschool principals, concerned professional, main and assistant teachers and parents in order to clarify expectations and reduce misconceptions.

Results

Preschool teachers' perception towards the benefits of sociodramatic plays for children's learning:

In order to examine and compare teachers' perceptions of the benefits of socio-dramatic play for children's

learning in the private and government owned preschools, the same type of survey questionnaire on the benefits of socio-dramatic play (i.e., social emotional, language and literacy related skills) were administered to both groups.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of teachers' perception of the benefits of socio-dramatic play for children's socio emotional, language and literacy skills development. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Socio emotional skills focused	52	37.87	3.515
Language skills focused	52	27.21	2.645
Literacy skills focused	52	7.60	1.390

The above table shows that the mean score of preschool teachers on the benefits of sociodramatic plays for children's socio emotional skills focused measures is $M=37.87$, $SD=3.515$, for language skills focused measures $M=27.21$, $SD=2.645$ and for literacy skills focused measures $M=7.60$, $SD=1.39$. The mean score for the three variables measured are above the cut of points, i.e., $37.87 > 27$, for socio emotional skills focused measures, $27.21 > 18$ for language skills focused measures and $7.60 > 6$, for literacy skills focused measures. From this one can argue that preschool teachers have positive perceptions towards the benefits of socio-dramatic plays or preschool teachers highly value this type of play for its contribution for children socio-emotional, language and literacy skills development. To refine the above quantitative result semi structured interview conducted for seven preschool teachers who did not administer the questionnaire. Preschool teachers interviewed whether they agree or not on the benefits of socio-dramatic play for children learning and the result revealed that most preschool teachers agree on the benefits of socio-dramatic plays for children learning and development. In addition, if they agree further questions asked what benefits these types of play contribute to children learning and development.

For this question teachers said:

"In socio-dramatic play children enact the role, negotiate each other to be the owner of the shop/boutique, to be a customer, or in the clinic corner children said I am a doctor, I am a patient. All couldn't be the owner of the shop, customer or doctors at a time, so children learn to wait their turn

for the second round. When children engaged in plays, they wait their turn until the first buyers finished their exchange of available commodities as per his/her interest. In this way children learn turn taking skills" The above source revealed that preschool teachers interviewed perceived that socio-dramatic plays contribute for children turn taking skills. It has not only turn taking skills children learn as evidenced from the interview, but also cooperation, role taking and communicative skills. Some of the preschool teachers interviewed said "A child who assumed being patient talking about symptoms of his/her illness with his/her assumed doctor, and a child assumed being a doctor diagnose a patient in this case children learn what the role of the doctor is at their early age. It also builds friendship, they tend to have good relationships and also in their learning, it creates the spirit of cooperation and children who didn't talk much in the other activities tended to talk in this play".

Generally, it is evident that preschool teachers perceived socio-dramatic plays enhance children social and language skills. But none of them mentioned the importance of these types of plays for literacy skills development, pre reading and pre writing skills. This finding agrees with (Bredenkamp & Copple 1997; Pellegrini & Galda 1993) that early childhood teachers have long valued socio-dramatic play for the development of socio emotional skills and increase the children ability to communicate and interact with their peers; the children ability to communicate peers. Differences in perceptions towards the benefits of socio-dramatic plays between private and government preschool teachers.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test result of private and government owned preschool teachers' perceptions on socio emotional skills focused measure

Group Statistics

Variable	Types of school	N	Mena	SD
			37.13	2.986
Socio emotional skills focused	Private preschool	31		
	Government preschool	21	38.29	2.667

Table 4: This table depicts that the socio emotional skills mean score of the private preschool teachers (M=37.13, SD=2.986) was less than that of the government preschool teachers (M=38.29, SD= 2.667).

Independent samples test

Variable	Assumption	T-test for Equality of Means		
Socioemotional skills focused		T	df	Sig.
	Equal variances assumed	-1.430	50	.159
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.461	46.183	

The above table depicts that the mean score difference between the private and government preschool teachers in socio emotional skills focused measure was not statistically significant at ($t=-1.430$, $df=50$, $p>.05$). This indicated that teachers in government preschools scored almost same result in a socio

emotional skills measure score as compared to teachers in private preschool. This means the socio emotional mean score of teachers from the government preschools (M=38.29, SD= 2.667), was somewhat similar to that of teachers from the private preschools (M=37.13, SD=2.986).

Table 5: Independent sample t-test result of private and government owned preschool teachers' perceptions on the language skills focused measure

Group Statistics

Variable	Types of school	N	Mena	SD
	Private preschools	31	26.68	2.135
Language skills focused	Government preschool	21	25.62	2.617

Table 6: This table depicts that the language skills mean score of the private preschool teachers (M=26.68, SD=2.135) was little greater than that of the government preschool teachers (M=25.62, SD= 2.617).

Independent samples test

Variable	Assumption	T-test for Equality of Means		
Language skills focused		T	df	Sig.
	Equal variances assumed	1.600	50	.116
	Equal variances not assumed	1.539	37.081	

The above table shows that the mean score difference between the private and government preschool teachers in language skills focused measures was not statistically significant at ($t=1.600$, $df=50$, $p>.05$). This indicated that teachers in government preschools scored same result in the language skills measure score

as compared to teachers in private preschool. This means the mean score of teachers from the government preschools (M=25.62, SD=2.617), was somewhat similar to that of teachers from the private preschools (M=26.68, SD=2.135) in language skills focused measures.

Table 7: Independent sample t-test result of private and government owned preschool teachers' perceptions of literacy skills focused measure

Group Statistics

variable	Types of school	N	Mena	SD
	Private preschools	31	7.16	1.241
Literacy skills focused	Government preschool	21	6.81	1.504

This table depicts that the mean score of the private preschool teachers (M=7.16, SD=1.241) was little greater than that of the government preschool teachers (M=6.81, SD=.1.504) in the literacy skills focused measure.

Independent samples test

Variable	Assumption	T-test for Equality of Means		
		T	df	Sig.
Literacy skills focused	Equal variances assumed	.920	50	.362
	Equal variances not assumed	.887	37.397	

As it is vividly shown in the above table the mean score difference between the private and government preschool teachers in literacy skills focused measures was not statistically significant at ($t=.920$, $df=50$, $p>.05$). This indicated that teachers in government preschools scored same result in the literacy skills measure score as compared to teachers in private preschools. This means the mean score of teachers from the government preschools ($M=6.81$, $SD=.1.504$), was somewhat similar to that of teachers from the private preschools ($M=7.16$, $SD=1.241$) in literacy skills focused measure.

Discussion

From the finding of the study, it would appear that the sample of preschool teachers surveyed endorse the importance of socio-dramatic play for children socio emotional language and literacy development in preschool education. Both private and government preschool teachers positively perceive the benefits of socio-dramatic play for preschoolers' acquisition of socio emotional, language and literacy skills. It could be argued that the positive response towards the benefits of learning through socio-dramatic play suggest that teachers accept socio-dramatic plays beneficial to the development of children's socio emotional, language and literacy skills and that this play will ensure effective learning. Bredekamp & Copple (1997) and Pellegrini & Galda (1993) the same result also reported in their finding that early childhood educator's perceived play in general as developmentally appropriate and socio-dramatic play in particular as to its paramount benefits for socio emotional and language development. There was also evidence that socio-dramatic plays are the leading activity for young children's socio emotional and language development (Christie 1990; Bülent & İlknur, 2011). This shows that participants of the present study had understanding of the contribution of socio-dramatic plays for children learning and development.

What skills children acquire by engaging in socio-dramatic play, findings from the qualitative data revealed that children learn turn taking, cooperation,

role taking and communicative skills. But none of the preschool teachers interviewed mentioned the benefits of this type of play in literacy related skills development (like pre writing and pre reading). On the other hand, preschool teachers surveyed highly perceived this type of play for all variables assessed. From this, one could argue that there is some variation between quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to perception of the benefits of socio-dramatic plays for literacy related skills development. Johnson, et al. (2005) also reminds us even if children who engage in frequent socio-dramatic play, literacy behaviors are often absent unless classroom play areas are properly equipped. In the visited preschools literacy materials like pen, pencils, list of names for materials stocked were not evident in socio-dramatic plays area. However, it could be argued that the positive response towards the benefits of socio-dramatic plays of the quantitative result suggested that teachers theoretically accept socio-dramatic play as a significant medium to children classroom learning experience.

The present study also found out that no significant difference in perception on sociodramatic plays as its benefits for children socio emotional, language and literacy skill development in both private and government preschool teachers. The independent sample t test result indicated that the mean score difference between private and government preschool teachers in the variables assessed almost the same. From this result, it could conclude that type of preschool was not determined factor for preschool teachers' perceptions towards learning through socio-dramatic plays. Puteh & Ali (2013) also examined that no differences in perception between private and government preschool teachers about the benefit of play for children learning and development as a function of school type. Bennett, et al. (2009) also found 47 out in British private and public preschools teachers' perceptions about the value of play even if they employed qualitative study, the teachers' responses indicated that both private and public preschools believed play was important even though there were differences in their classroom practices. It could be argued learning through play in general

socio-dramatic play in particular was perceived as a valuable learning medium in both types of preschool setting. The socio-dramatic play area is an ideal learning area where some forms of learning related to, for example, shopping, medical and family themes, or scenario could be natural occurrences that could foster children's learning and development. Based on the interview and observation result, it might be possible to deduce that teachers in the studied preschools were designed sociodramatic play corners using different materials and equipment from locally available resources and materials besides, there was inadequacy.

Despite, little start in designing socio-dramatic play corners with limited types such as shopping, medical and family the utilization as a learning medium was very limited in most observed preschool classrooms. Effective utilization of locally produced instructional materials is very vital in creating different mental maps and conceptual understandings (Chowdhury & Choudhury, 2002). But the present study found out that preschool teachers in the studied area fail to equip their socio-dramatic play corners from diverse locally available appropriate play materials. For all types of play corners with regard to indoor or classroom materials of the preschools Sisay (2016) also concluded that most of the preschool lacks appropriate play corners. Most preschool teachers in the studied area were aware of the benefits of socio-dramatic plays for children socio emotional, language and literacy development in general. However, not as many of them are aware of how socio-dramatic plays can support learning and what their roles practically can be in using children's socio-dramatic plays as a learning medium. In the present study both private and government preschools visited apparently do not adopt elaborated socio-dramatic play themes into their socio-dramatic play corners. If the sociodramatic play area equipped well and updated regularly, it may contribute to children's acquisition of language skills such as vocabularies and oral communication because children get opportunities to experience to the diverse names and functions of each material. Children's interactions also enhanced through negotiation and role enactment within the framework of well-designed and child sized socio-dramatic play corners. Hence, teachers in the visited preschools did not integrate socio-dramatic plays into their activities to support teaching and learning in a way that enhances children socio emotional language and literacy related skills development. The multiple roles teachers may have in implementing learning through play in

general socio-dramatic play in particular (Dau, 1999; Jones and Reynolds, 1992) the role of preschool teachers in the present study restricted to at some like set ground rules, concern about classroom discipline, providing time and materials for children to engage in play. Kemple (1996) also reported in her finding about the limited roles teachers play in children socio-dramatic plays in their classroom. Generally, the extent of sociodramatic play practice was very limited in both studied preschools. This indicates that perception about the benefits of socio-dramatic play may not guarantee for classroom practices. Because the perception of preschool teachers in the present study was positive about the benefits of sociodramatic plays but in the actual classroom practice it was not as they value this type of play for children learning and development. This finding agrees with other researchers (Kemple, 1996; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006) argue that there were discrepancies between perception and actual classroom practices. 49 But contradict with (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Nelson, 2000) that teacher's perceptions and classroom practices were consistent. This inconsistency attributed to different factors. Previous researchers argue that it is because of misperception of what learning through play truly means and personal views of teachers on its developmental significance (Cheung, 2012; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007). Others argue that without receiving the adequate experience and knowledge during training programs, many teachers are unable to provide the necessary time and means to support this type of play Kemple (1996) and teachers lack of confidence (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006) contribute to change perception in practice.

Declarations

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Availability of data and materials

Please contact the first author for data requests.

Authors' contributions

GA contributed to study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation and drafting and revising the manuscript. YB participated to the study design, data interpretation, and review of the

manuscript. Both authors participated in giving final approval of the version to be published.

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