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The benefits of play in child's creativity; case of Nursery Schools of Nyarugenge District

A Thesis submitted

By

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The undersigned have examined the thesis entitled 'The benefits of play in Child's creativity; Case of Nursery schools of Nyarugenge District' presented by Karenzi Ben, a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Education (Creativity and Education) and hereby certify that it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Rwanda's vision for Early Childhood Development is presented in its national ECD Policy as well as its integrated ECD Strategic Plan of 2011. Since then, the ECD development is notable with curriculum reform and school infrastructure development. With the target to accelerate ECD enrolment by 2018 (1 preschool per village), it requires enormous investments in infrastructures. The role of play in ECD has called a complexity of school facilities and the educators understanding in order to make a success. This study 'The Benefits of Play for Child's Creativity, Case of Nursery Schools of Nyarugenge District'; will investigate (a) the schools facilities important to games and play (b) ways to promote children's numeracy, literacy and life skills through play and games (c) the teachers' understanding on promoting creative education through play and games.The sample of 35 among 174 educators participated in this research. The research is mainly quantitative and used a survey research design. A questionnaire was used to collect data but also a non-participatory observation. The findings shows that teachers understand the way of promoting learning through play particularly creativity. Schools are facing some challenges of lack of space, big size of class, and the inappropriate buildings for teaching kids. Recommendations were drawn to the readers and policy makers that play should be focused for early childhood education and practitioners of early education should bear in mind that the environment is safe for learners to learn through play.

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ACRONYMS

9YBE : Nine Year Basic Education

12YBE :12 Year Basic Education

CDI: Child Development Institute

ACD : Early Childhood Development

ECE : Early Childhood Education

ESSP : Education Sector Strategic Plan

GER : Gross Enrolment Rate

MDGs : Millennium Development Goals

MINEDUC : Ministry of Education, Rwanda

NER : Net Enrolment Rate

SSA : Sub-Saharan Africa

UNESCO : United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF : United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER I: Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Early Childhood Development (ECD) has increasingly become the foundation for social and economic development in all regions. International and National Economists and finance ministers now rank ECD as the Number One national investment in terms of return on investment. At a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank held in Costa Rica in 2007, 40 economists and finance ministers ranked ECD first among a list of 29 highly effective social and economic investments. (Verdisco: 2008 quoted by MINEDUC: 2011)

Due to growing interest in investing in ECD, ministries of planning and finance in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are greatly expanding public sector social budgets for children's services, from pre-conception to early primary school.However, some policy makers in SSA countries still underestimate the importance of investing in Early Childhood Development and Education (MINEDUC, 2011).

In Rwanda, just over 12 % of children between the ages of 3-6 have access to any type of early learning and development services, and these tend to be in urban areas and too costly for poorer parents. The capacity of families to provide the best care to their young children needs to be improved and a holistic and integrated approach to support the development of young children, particularly those from poor and vulnerable families, established (UNICEF website).

Interventions in the early years provide young children with greater opportunities and better outcomes in education, quality of learning, physical growth and health, and, eventually, productivity. UNICEF believes that a focus on "ECD and the Family" will not only give young

children the best possible start in life but is also the best investment that Rwanda can make in order to achieve its national goals; including poverty reduction, reducing infant, child and maternal mortality, eliminating malnutrition and improving access to quality education.

Rwanda approved its ECD Policy and Strategic Plan in September 2011. The policy promotes the holistic development of all children in Rwanda through the provision of integrated health, nutritional, early learning and protection services to families and children between 0-6 years of age. The goal of the ECD policy is to ensure all Rwandan children achieve their potential, are healthy, well-nourished and safe, and their mothers, fathers and communities become nurturing caregivers through receiving integrated early childhood development services (UNICEF).

International research has demonstrated that access to quality ECD services improve children's performance in school and contribute substantially to improving internal efficiencies throughout the school cycle. And literature from around the world points to the importance of play in ECE (Johnson, Christie &Yawkey, 1999). As Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) observe, ―decades of research has documented that play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence (quoted by Imenda, 2012).De Witt (2009:129) contends that play lays a good foundation for young pre-school learners, as they find themselves spending most of their time playing between the rituals and routines of their daily life. In this regard, De Witt further avers that children's play contributes a lot to the child's physical, cognitive, and emotional, development (Imenda, 2012).

In Rwanda, the existing Early Care and Development Centres are often run without adherence to standards, without sufficient and uniform training of caregivers, and without supervision and monitoring oversight. By and large ECD centres are managed and run by civil society or private

sector groups and individuals though the exact number of such centres is unknown (MINEDUC). The Ministry of Education has set ambitious targets to scale-up pre-school provisions to 1 preschool per cell (2,148 total) by 2017 according to Save the Children Rwanda report (). It is in 2011 that ECD policy was adopted which defines why the development of ECD in Rwanda is still low. According to ECD policy Rwanda (2011:12), the preschool age is between 3-6 years. In addition to health and nutrition support as well as continued cognitive stimulation, children during this period benefit from experiences and programmes that provide increased opportunities for learning through play and exploration in groups and more opportunities to interact with other children and a variety of adults.The strong involvement of parents and primary caregivers is critical to the success of this.

This research discusses the development of early development education with particular reference to the role of play and games in creative learning. In this regard, the school environment and facilities are important to put the school at the center of creative games and play. This is followed by a list of games which children play and a discussion of how play may be promoted. One important issue within the context of this study is one related to how the teacher may provide for play in order to promote creativity and healthy development in children.

1.2. Statement of the problem

After 1994 genocide that divested everything in the country, the education has straggled back to back to its feet. School infrastructure (classrooms, books) and human capital (educational institutions and teachers) have been repaired. “The Rwandan education system has recovered remarkably well, at least quantitatively” (World Bank, 2003 quoted by Munderere, 2016). Rwanda has also achieved the highest primary school enrolment in Africa (UNICEF website) and marked the second the MDG’s goal, to achieve universal access to primary education by 2015. The net enrolment rate in primary increased to 97 per cent in 2012. The education has been well designed and become compulsory from primary to secondary three (9YBE) in 2006 and later to secondary six (12YBE) from 2012 (Munderere, 2016).

Rwanda’s vision for Early Childhood Development is presented in its national ECD Policy as well as its integrated ECD Strategic Plan; both approved by the Cabinet in 2011 and provide for a holistic and integrated approach to early childhood development (Save the Children Report).

The ECD Policy highlights the preschool years (3-6 of age) as the period children benefit from experiences and programmes that provide increased opportunities for learning through play and exploration in groups and more opportunities to interact with other children and a variety of adults (MINEDUC, 2011).

Until 2009, the funding dedicated to ECD represented 0.005 % of the education budget. This has now increased to 0.4 % of the Ministry of Education budget for the fiscal year 2012-2013. However, in the draft ESSP costing of November 2012 ECD budget provision has increased from 0. 1% of GoR education budget, to between 2.6% (realistic estimate) 3.8% (ambitious estimate) over the next 5 years which demonstrates in practice the commitment of the Rwandan Government to ECD (Save the Children Report, 2013).

Data provided by the Ministry of Education shows that the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) and Enrolment Rate (GER) for pre-primary is still low, respectively 10.4% and 11.9% in 2011, compared to the target of 15% by 2012 set under the ESSP 2010– 2015. However, the intention described in the draft ESSP revision dating 13th November 2012 is to increase GER to around 33% by 2017/18. This target could imply full access to one-year pre-primary programmes or 33% access to three-year pre-primary programmes. The target of 33% for pre-primary GER by 2018 would require an investment of approximately RWF10bn in construction each year. The Ministry of Education has set ambitious targets to scale-up pre-school provisions to 1 preschool per cell (2,148 total) by 2017 (Save the Children Report, 2013).

Much progress has been made within the education elements of ECD. However, much is also needed to be done interms of infrastructure. In 2012 the Ministry of Education subsidized all 30 districts in Rwanda to support the infrastructure development of one model ECD centre per district and has started advocating for existing 'Basic Education' schools to each open a pre-primary section (Save the Children report, 2013). "With the vision of the government of Rwanda that every village should have a nursery school, many preprimary schools established are privately owned by individual or parent associations and they are newly founded" (Munderere, 2016). It is also in 2015 that ECD curriculum was revised. Both curriculum and infrastructure are important to expose children in workable environment for play and games.

Many authors and experts aver that play is of great value to learners; Imenda (2012) quoting a number of authors (Bredekamp&Copple, 1997; De Witt, 2009; Emslie. 2008; Gordon &Brown, 2004). It is regarded to be so, as play is taken to involve all the developmental areas of the child, namely: emotional, physical, social, personal and cognitive (Huizinga, 2003; Sturgess, 2003). McInnes (2011: 4) also sums up the benefits of play by stating as follows:

Cognitive-developmental theories of learning such as those of Piaget (1951) and Vygotsky (1976), emphasise the role of play for learning, and play is also seen to promote different aspects of development: social and emotional development (J. L. Singer, 2006; J. S. Singer & Singer, 1980; Smilansky&Shefatya, 1990); social development and language (Garvey, 1991; Sachs, 1980); creativity (Dansky, 1980; Lieberman, 1977); problem solving (Sylva, Bruner, &Genova, 1976) and attitude to learning.

However, from informal observations the researcher has noticed that in some schools, including those are in Nyarugenge District, most teachers did not use play as a medium of learning in their lessons. The teachers appeared not to be aware of the importance of incorporating play activities in their lessons on a regular basis. It became clear that in the minds of most teachers play was only numeracy, not much in literacy and life skills. It is important to mention that the New Competence Based Curriculum (2015) emphasizes games, songs and play as key to demonstrate basic mathematical skills.

Thus, the discrepancy between the apparent limited infrastructure and teachers'current practicemotivated the researcher to carry out this study.

1.3. Research Objectives

The general objective of the study was to studythe development of early childhood education, particularly benefits of play on child's creativity in early schools with emphasis on the way teachers promote learning through play.

Specifically, the study had the following objectives:

- To find out if the schools are equipped with facilities important to put the school at the center of creative games and play
- To determine ways to promote children's numeracy, literacy and life skills through play.

- To discuss with the teachers their understanding on promoting creative education through play and games.

1.4. Research questions and hypothesis

Thus, more specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- Does the school equipped with facilities that help learner's play and game?
- What are ways teacher uses to promote students' learning skills?
- Do teachers understand the importance of promoting creative learning through play and games?

1.5. Expected results and implication of the work results

Play is children's daily work as it helps them to build their knowledge and skills in theirinteractions with peers, friends, by themselves and with the environment (Piaget, 1962;Vygotsky, 1978; Ashiabi, 2007; de Witt 2009). Indeed, because children's play iscreative, imaginative, enjoyable, problem-solving, motivating and interactive(Vandenberg, 1983; Godwin, 2007), it allows children to think for themselves. This notonly underlines the importance of play in the development of children, but also requiresthat children participate in various play activities as a matter of course. In so-doing, theyshould be allowed as far as possible to choose the games they wish to play and how theywant to play them – including fantasy play. On their part, educators need to know theirrole during play. In the same vein, subject and phase advisers – as well as curriculumplaners, also need to know their role in ensuring that the facilities and other learningenvironments are made favourable to various play activities.

To the policy makers/advisors, the findings of the study will assist them to provide ECE and foundation phase learning environments with the requisite resources and equipment to enhance their capabilities for play activities that will maximise the learners' development. The research

will also serve for further research and policy making so that improvement can be made in terms ofimproving curriculum and the provision of guidelines on play activities in ECD.

To the educators and teachers, the research will empower them with the understanding of the role of plays and games in teaching particularly in the development of children. They will draw their attention to the various aspects of both indoor and outdoor play – and the importance thereof in ECE, generally, and the Foundation Phase in particular.

The parents will also see the importance of play in the development of their children, particularly with regard to the support necessary for play activities which are directed towards the development of specific competences and abilities.

This research will help the researcher to develop the knowledge and experience of his specialization and more importantly to know how play and games are so important in creative learning. The research is of great importance in that it is partial fulfillment of requirement for the award of master's degree in Mahatma Gandhi University, Rwanda.

1.6. Scope of the study

The research was restructured to the benefits of creative games and play in early schools.

Emphasis was put on the schools facilities important to creative games and play, play activities most valued to promote children's numeracy, literacy and life skills and the teachers' understanding on promoting creative education through play and games.The research was conducted Nyarugenge District, Kigali City; Rwanda.Due to the limitations, the researcher didn't go to all pre-primary schools, but some of them which were chosen randomly. The sampled population was from teacher-educators of those schools.

1.7. Key Concepts

This part is dealing with definitions of terms that are technical, that appear and again throughout this research work. Concepts used in this study are defined so that readers can understand researcher's interpretation of these key terms.

1.7.1. Early Childhood Development /Education

The Department of Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education (2001, section 1.3.2) as written by Imenda (2012), defines Early Childhood Development (ECD), or Early Childhood Education (ECE), as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to about nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. In this study, the writer has made use of a number of quotations where the authors have used the term ECD. These have been left as such, since one cannot alter quotations, although the current writer prefers the term ECE. By way of elaboration, the following concepts give further effect to various aspects of ECE – commonly referred to as SPICE:

Social Development - the ability to form attachments, play with others in ways that optimise co-operation and sharing, and being able to create lasting relationships with others.

Physical Development – related to the refinement of *fine* (small) and *gross* (large) motor skills.

Intellectual Development - the ability and process of making cognitive sense of the world.

Creative Development - special abilities that demonstrate the individual's inventiveness, innovativeness and resourcefulness, usually expressed in terms of writing, reading, and various art forms – such as singing, playing musical instruments, performing, dancing, and others.

Emotional Development – Enhancement of self-awareness, self-confidence, and coping with feelings as well as understanding them.

Rwanda in ECD Policy defines the ECD. It first refer to UNESCO (2011) definition that“Early Childhood Development (ECD) is defined as a comprehensive approach topolicies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents and caregivers, aimed at protecting the child’s rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential”. And then Rwanda definition as highlited in ECD Policy (2011) is “Each child develops in a holistic manner. He or she requires nurturing and support from parents, legal guardians and caregivers, who should provide opportunities for stimulating play, early learning, good health care, nutritious balanced diet, clean water, hygienic environment, love, safety and security so as to grow up healthy, socially well-adapted and emotionally balanced. Services for infants, young children, their parents, legal guardians and other caregivers must address their needs in a holistic manner. It is impossible for one sector alone to meet all of their requirements. Thus, it is essential that all sectors work together to serve young children, parents and legal guardians”.

1.7.2. Play

Everyone can recognise play when it takes place, but it appears not easy to find a common definition.

Imenda quoted some of them: Tannock, MT (2008: 357) said that play is a multidimensional, developmental activity expressed through a variety of forms and actions. Scales, Almy, Nicolopulou and Ervin-Tripp (1991: 15) see play as "that absorbing activity in which healthy young children participate with enthusiasm". Csikszentmihalyi (1981: 14) describes play as "an arrangement in which one can practice behaviour without dreading its consequences". Brown (1995:9) sees play as a spontaneous, nonstereotyped, intrinsically pleasurable activity, free of anxiety or other overpowering emotion, without a visible, clear-cut goal other than its own

activity. Fox (2002: 19) refers to *Webster's Desk Dictionary of the English Language*, which defines *play* as having 34 different meanings, including being light, brisk, or changing movement, such as when a child pretends to be a butterfly; to act or imitate the part of a person or character – for example when children play house; to employ a piece of equipment – for example when children play with blocks; to exercise or take part in an activity for amusement or recreation, like when children play tag; fun or jest, as opposed to seriousness (e.g. to play peek-a-boo or sing a silly song); and the action of a game (e.g., to play duck-duck-goose).

One the other hand, **Peter Gray, Ph.D.**, research professor at Boston College and author of *Free to Learn* (Basic Books, 2013), sees Play in species that serves many valuable purposes. It is a means by which children develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral capacities. It is a means of creating and preserving friendships. It also provides a state of mind that, in adults as well as children, is uniquely suited for high-level reasoning, insightful problem solving, and all sorts of creative endeavors.

This study embraces mostly Gray's definition the perspective in its understanding and discussion of play.

1.8. Organisation of the study

This study is organized in four chapters.

Chapter one is introduction. It involves the statement of the problem, objective, questions and hypothesis significance and organization of the study.

Chapter two presents the review of literature. It provides others' view about play in early years and creative learning. It served the researcher to know more about the study, what other scholars say, and what gaps may require further research. The literature review helped the researcher to develop his critical thinking and knowledge advancement in the area.

Chapter three is about methodology. It is used to carry out the study and attain the predetermined objectives. It involves the research design, the area of study, the population and sample size, and data collection tools.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study, which include the analysis and interpretation of data.

And the last chapter five provides conclusion about the topic and recommendations.

CHAPTER II: Background and Literature Review

2.1.Introduction

The literature review puts the current study in the context of what others have written or studied. This chapter is a review of related literature on benefits of play on child creativity. It includes overview of theories of play, types and importance of play, creative play and how to promote creativity among children.

2.2.Brief overview of theories of play

Historically, as Imenda (2012) quoted various writers in her dissertation:

play has been seen as the only mode of education for young children, and this view ―has underpinned early childhood programmes since the initial kindergarten developed by Froebel (McInnes, 2011: 4). McInnes goes further that this tradition has continued, albeit in different guises, through the work of pioneers in early childhood education such as Montessori (p. 3). To this end, McInnes (2011: 4) avers that within the realm of early childhood education play is viewed as essential for learning and development.

Within the horizons of living memory, McInnes (2011) traces the theories of play back to the surplus energy theory which was credited to H. Spencer in 1873. According to this theory, play was seen as a product of superfluous energy left over after all other basic needs have been met (McInnes, 2011: 3). Verenikina, et al (2003) expand on this by stating as follows:

Surplus energy theory contends that humans have a finite amount of energy that is used mainly for work and survival. Children tend to play more than adults, as children are not so involved in work and survival activity, and therefore have greater amounts of energy to expend. By discharging excess energy in play, balance is restored to the human body.

Thus, the purpose of play was merely to exhaust the excess energy which the children had, aplenty. This theory is credited for the introduction of break time and recess on the school timetable and school year, respectively, on the basis that children needed timeout to reduce their surplus energy. Children‘s restlessness and inattentiveness were taken asevidence for the need for break time and recess.

Then came the**renewal of energy theory**in terms of which play was meant to alleviate boredom while the natural motor functions of the body are restored (Verenikina, *et al*,

2003: 6-7). This was followed by **the recreation / relaxation theory**which took the view that play was an activity which occurs after work in order to relax and build up further energy (McInnes , 2011: 3). Another way to look at this was that play was there to restore energy that is expended at work (Verenikina, et al., 2003: 7).

The practice for **adulthood / recapitulation theory**of play was one which saw the function of play as cathartic and posited that through playing children acted out evolutionary stages, against the pre-exercise theory of Groos which explained play as an opportunity to practice adult activities and prepare for adult life. (McInnes, 2011: 3).

Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 7) see this theory of play as focusing on the importance of affording children opportunities to develop skills necessary for functioning as adults.

According to McInnes, although the above theories are generally referred to as classical theories may be seen as old theories, she avers that the types of play activities which undergirded these theoretical perspectives can still be seen in children’s play today and many early years practitioners will justify play in the curriculum in this way (McInnes, 2011: 3).

Subsequently, the **psychoanalytic theories**of Freud and Erikson have defined play as providing a cathartic function enabling children to explore socially unacceptable and aggressive impulses

in a safe context thereby gaining mastery over traumatic events (McInnes, 2011: 3). As Verenikina (2003: 7) point out, from the psychoanalytic theoretical point of view, play reduces anxiety by giving children a sense of control over their world and an acceptable way to express forbidden impulses.

On his part, Piaget's **theory of play**, derived from his concepts of assimilation and adaptation, was an extension of his work on intellectual development thereby reflecting levels of play in relation to corresponding levels of intellectual development (Verenikina, *et al*., 2003; McInnes, 2011). Thus, Piaget's characterization of play places his theory under cognitive theory. To this end, Verenikina, *et al*., posit that from Piaget's cognitive point of view, play consolidates learning that has already taken place while allowing for the possibility of new learning in a relaxed atmosphere (p.7).

According to McInnes (2011: 3), Berlyne's**arousal theory of play**… attempted to explain the relationship between internal motivation, exploration and play and significant work. McInnes goes further and explains that other researchers advanced Berlyne'sthinking and focused on the process of play enabling behavioural flexibility or combinatorial flexibility (p.3). Thus, McInnes (2011: 3) explains that: Within the safe context that play provides, children are able to explore new combinations of behaviours and ideas without worrying about the consequences.

Through this they may develop new behaviours which may be used in other, less safe, contexts.

According to Verenikina, *et al*., (2003: 7) the **arousal modulation theory**saw play as serving the purpose of keeping the body at an optimal state of arousal, relieving boredom and reducing uncertainty.They further explain that Bateson's **communication**and **meta-communication theories**, expounded in 1976, saw play as promoting the ability to comprehend multiple layers of meaning, while Mead's **theory of self**which was presented earlier, in 1934, envisioned play as

centered on promoting the sense of self in terms of personal identity and social relations with others (Verenikina, *et al.*,2003: 4).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky also saw play in relation to intellectual development however, heemphasised pretend play and the importance of language and social interaction in play(McInnes, 2011: 3). Indeed, as Verenikina, *et al*., aver, Vygorsky's**socio-culturaltheory**views play as promoting abstract thought by separating meaning from objects and actions. Further, this theoretical perspective contends that, through play, abstract thought is further enhanced by using actions and objects in symbolic ways thereby providing for children to reach beyond their actual development in their cognition and self-regulation. Further, it is envisaged that, through play, children achieve a mental representation of social roles and the rules of society (Verenikina, *et al*., 2003: 7).

2.3.Developmental theory on Childhood Development

The field of early childhood education has been greatly influenced by the theorists who have helped us understand how children develop (Jensen, 2010). Specifically, the last 30 years has seen many changes to education as a result of the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner. Their theories of child development have helped educators understand more about how childrenlearn (Jansen, 2010).

For early childhood educators, these theories have introduced new levels of knowledge about how learning is different for younger children (NAEYC, 1996; Wadsworth, 1996).

The following are the theories summarized by Jensen (2010) in his dissertation:

Cognitive Theory: Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory has altered education, child care, and many other fields focusing on child development. Piaget emphasized that development occurs across four stages that exist on a continuum (Wadsworth, 1996). The stages of cognitive

development are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992; Wadsworth 1996). Each of these stages focus on different cognitive functions and abilities that build on one another as the child moves into the next stage of development (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). According to Wadsworth (1996), Piaget thought development flowed "… along in a cumulative manner, each new step in development built on and becoming integrated with previous steps" (p. 27).

Children in preschool are in the preoperational stage of Piaget's theory which begins around age two and ends at approximately age seven (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992;Wadsworth, 1996). This stage is characterized by large developmental increases in language and representation (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth 1996). Preoperational children are learning to represent the world in many ways including "deferred imitation, symbolic play, drawing, mental imagery, and spoken language" (Wadsworth, 1996, p. 57).

According to Piaget's theory, children learn through the direct interaction they have with the environment around them (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Using the different senses to explore objects helps children to construct meaning (Crain, 1992; Kostelnik, Soderman, &Whiren, 1999). Piaget expounds "…the objects themselves 'tell' the child what the characteristics of the object are. The feedback or reinforcement is provided by the objectsthemselves" (Wadsworth, 1996, p. 22). Piaget believes that learning is an active process which includes an interest to explore, experimenting with objects, cooperation, and play (Chaille&Silvern, 1996).

A child stores the information or concepts they have gained through exploration in schemas, or organized files of information (Wadsworth, 1996). For example, a child may have a schema for cats that contains information such as a cat has four legs, long whiskers, meows, etc.

Children compile their schemas by exploring the environment through the process of assimilation and accommodation (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Assimilation refers to adding additional knowledge to an existing idea or schema of an object, and accommodation is the process of adjusting or creating a new category to fit new information in appropriately (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). This process helps children organize the information they have gained and allows for further development.

Many new skills and abilities appear during the preoperational stage, but some limitations in understanding still exist (Beilin, 1992; Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Children in the preoperational stage can have difficulty seeing more than one perspective; they focus on their immediate environment instead of past experiences or abstract ideas (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). The foundation for preoperational thought is hands-on understanding that takes place in the present making it difficult for children to deal with concepts or objects that are not in their direct surroundings (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996).

In order to create new schemas and adjust old ones children need hands-on manipulation to be able to shape their knowledge (Kostelnik et al., 1999; Wadsworth, 1996). A preoperational child also has a hard time understanding that another person's perspective can be different from their own. This inability to see more than one perspective or dimension of a situation is called egocentrism (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). Children in this stage can sometimes believe that everything around them is living because they believe that everything is like them, which isreferred to as animism (Crain, 1992). For example, a child who believes their stuffed animals areafraid of the dark, because the dark frightens them. Another way a young child may exhibit egocentrism is by giving their own comfort item to another friend if they think the friend is sad.

An egocentric child wouldn't understand the friend wants their own comfort item. Egocentrism is a key component of children's thinking in the preoperational stage.

The different stages of development in Piaget's theory do not mean that development occurs at the exact same time for every child. Instead Wadsworth (1996) tells us that Piaget's theory emphasized that development seems to occur in a somewhat consistent order. Children develop at different rates and move through the stages at their own pace, they are not all uniform in their growth (Wadsworth, 1996).

Sociocultural Theory:The Sociocultural theory of Vygotsky has helped educators better realize their own role in supporting learning and development in the classroom. Vygotskybelieved that the social world of a child plays an important part in cognitive development (Berk&Winsler, 1995; Crain, 1992; Zigler& Bishop-Josef, 2006). Berk&Winsler, 1995, expounded "Social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world available to individuals"(p.13). Interactions with adults, peers, teachers, and other individuals directly influence a child's learning.

Vygotsky stressed that assessing a child's current abilities and also those abilities that are almost developed, better represents that child's potential (Zigler& Bishop-Josef, 2006). Crain (1992) explains that the zone of proximal development "…illuminates not only those functions that have already matured, but those that are in the process of maturing" (p. 214). A child's zone of proximal development is always being adjusted for abilities that have been achieved and thosenew skills that will soon develop.

Tasks that are just out of reach for a child can be learned with the help of someone who is more advanced such as a parent, teacher, or peer (Zigler& Bishop-Josef, 2006; Crain, 1992). The process of encouraging and helping a child be able to accomplish increasingly difficult tasks is

called scaffolding (Crain, 1992). In order to successfully encourage development through scaffolding, adults or peers should focus on those skills that are within a child's zone of proximal development (Berk&Winsler, 1995). Scaffolding may include providing lots of opportunities to practice those skills that are developing or modeling how to accomplish a particular task.

Ecological Theory*:*The basis for UrieBronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is the idea that development is a result of the individual and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al., 1999). It is also important to keep in mind that the environment does not just influence the child, the child also influences the environment, it is a bi-directional (Kostelniket al.). This theory appreciates all of the different contexts which directly and indirectly influence children.

The Ecological Systems Theory divides the environment into levels to help us better recognize how broad an impact it has on development. The levels include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The levels of this theory depend on the type of interaction they have with the child. For example, the microsystem is made up of the relationships, events, and places that directly interact with the child. The relationships between the different Microsystems make up another system, the mesosystem. For example, how parents and the child's teachers interact will affect the child. The exosystemcontains the environments which don't directly involve the individual but still influence them, like a parent's job environment or the local school board. The macrosystem is formed by the greater society and includes the government structure, culture, and laws of the land. It also includes components of society such as racism, discrimination, and economic distress (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al., 1999). Later, Bronfenbrenner and other scholars came to realize that current events also change a developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kostelnik et al.). The element of time

and cohort that have created obvious changes, are all apartof the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)

Not only does this theory help us realize the importance of the environment to a child's development, but by using these systems we can better understand how the child is feeling, how we should educated them, and what may be causing difficulties in a child's learning (Kostelnik et al., 1999). When a child seems to be struggling we can use knowledge of the different contexts to figure out the source of the problem. This information can help educators better individualize their curriculum to meet the needs of the children in their classes (Jensen, 2010).

2.4.Types of Play and Their Importance

As quoted by Sebastianelli (2010) in his dissertation, a vast body of literature asserts that children need play in order to learn (Erickson, 2001; Bodrova& Leong, 2005). Play has been viewed as an essential component to the development of higher intellectual functions (Erickson, 2001). In particular, Erickson (2001) suggests that play activities contribute to children's psychological growth because through these activities children are "forced to evaluate, fantasize, consider alternatives, solve problems, and make decisions." When young children engage in play, they begin to make connections between their own personal world and behaviors and activities that are important in the larger social world of family and community (McLane & McNamee, 1991). Additional literature that supports that importance of play indicates that when a child has access to play materials that they can explore, manipulate, and talk about, they begin to naturally learn the basic principles and concepts of the physical world (Elkind, 1986).

2.4.1. Types of play, categorization, ECD activity

Going back in history, Foster (1930: 248 quoted by Imenda, 2012:24) came up with a number of categories for play activities, as follows: **catching, throwing, kicking** e.g. baseball, basketball, marbles; **chasing, fleeing** e.g. king of the hill, pom-pom pull away; **hiding, seeking** e.g. hide and seek; **jumping, hopping** e.g. leap frog, jump rope; **folk dances** e.g. singing ring games, **London bridge**; **informal dramatisation**e.g. playing house, store, office, dolls; **following directions** – e.g. do this do that, follow the leader; **table games** e.g. old maid, snap: **very active play** which may be individual e.g. skating, swimming; **sliding**; **rather inactive** play which may be individual; e.g. painting, sewing; and **groupgames** of the guessing type; e.g. buzz, telephone, lead man.

Down in time, Caillois (1958) quoted by Imenda (2012:25) came up with four categories of play activities, namely: (a) *Agôn*(Competitive), (b) *Alea*(Chance), (c) *Mimicry* (Simulative) and (d) *Ilinx*(Vertigo).

Caillois (1958: 131) explains that ***Agôn***refers to a whole group of competitive games, usually hinging on a single quality such as speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc. According to Coillois, ***Alea***signifies and reveals the favor of destinywhereby a player is entirely passive and does not deploy his resources, skill, muscles, or intelligence (p. 133).

With regard to ***mimicry***, Caillois explains that players involved in it presuppose the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion … then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe (p. 135). Caillois(1958: 135) further expatiates regarding what happens during mimicry: Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one‘s fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the

subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another.

The last game-type, ***Ilinx***, includes games and/or play activities which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mindCoillois(1958: 138). Thus, in all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness (Coillois, 1958:138). Common examples of these play activities for foundation phase learners include swings, Mary-go-round, racing or sliding downhill.

Emslie (2008: 4) quoed by Imenda (2012:26) describes five characteristics of play as follows:

Process Orientation wherein the focus of play is on the process of playing;

Intrinsically Motivated whereby play is child-initiated and / or is chosen by the child; children play because the play itself is rewarding, and there is no extrinsic reward expected;

Nonliteral Quality where children constantly oscillate back and forth between reality and imagination experimenting with new ideas.

Experimentation with Rules where children create, and experiment with, their own rules when they are playing; and

Active Engagement where children become intensely involved in the process of playing.

Mildred Parten presents the following categories of play (Fox, 2002: 22) as quoted by Imenda (2012:26):

Onlooker behaviourwhen a child plays passively by watching or conversing with other children engaged in play activities.

Solitary independentwhen a child plays by him/herself.

Parallelwhereby a child engages in play, even in the middle of a group, while remaining engrossed in his/her own activity. Children playing parallel to each other sometimes use each other's toys, but always maintain their independence.

Associativewhen children share materials and talk to each other, but do not coordinate play objectives or interests.

Cooperativewhen children organize themselves into roles with specific goals in mind (e.g., to assign the roles of doctor, nurse, and patient and play hospital).

On her part, Cass (1971: 33, 39) quoted by Imenda (2012:26-27) describes similar types of children's social play, but transposes a developmental angle to them, and proposes a classification comprising five main categories: **solitary play, spectator play** (when children are concerned about watching each other), **parallel play** (when they like to be near each other), **associativeplay** (when they often appear to be playing together), and **genuine cooperative play**. She goes further and states that as children grow older, at around 5-7years old, they begin to play cooperatively together; they become aware of each other's needs and wishes; other children are fun to play with, useful and helpful because children now feel more secure within themselves. She points out, however, that real cooperation has its ups and down and six-year-olds sometimes go through a quarrelsome stage; and though happily playing together at some times, but others can resort to be aggressive. In spite of these antisocial feelings which they express, they often get on well together particularly in a rich and challenging environment, with knowledgeable adults at hand to care and help them. They understand each other's needs and really need each other's company; they comfort each other and even say sorry if they have hurt another child; they will admire each other's efforts in a very generous way.

The above two characterisations of play – by Mildred Parten and Emslie, respectively, are based on the nature of the play activities, and how the children engage with them.

Rogers & Sawyers (quoted by Jensen, 2010), stated that there are three types of play including practice play, symbolic play, and games with rules. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 256) describe these types of play based on the works of Piaget, as follows as quoted byImenda (2012):

Practice playwhich is seen during a child‘s sensorimotor stage of development. At this stage the child performs and practises newly acquired motor skills with pleasure.

Symbolic play, which develops into dramatic play – whereby the child uses objects in his/her play to represent reality.

Games with rules where play becomes more adequately adapted to the realenvironment and is subjected to rules and order of the real world. Thus, the child reaches a stage where s/he is better able to accommodate and align his/her thinking to the real world.

Each of these types of play has different functions, and benefits. Children engage in practice play to practice their skills and improve on those abilities that they have already accomplished (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). New skills are founded on those abilities that have been previously developed and refined through practice play (Crain, 1992; Wadsworth, 1996). During the ages of two and seven, children engage more frequently in play that involves mental representations (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Symbolic or pretend play is founded on representations, where children use one object to symbolize another (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Like when a child plays with a bundle of fabric like it was a baby. This type of play becomes more complex as children move towards abstract thinking. Around age seven children become more interested in games that are structured, and are learning how to follow directions and rules. This type of play is not seen very much during the preschool years (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988).

Sebastianelli on the other hand, from several different types of play that have been identified in the literature on early childhood, she described the following as most frequent: sensorimotor, motor/physical, constructive, parallel, social, and pretend play.

Sensorimotor*:* Sensorimotor, or practice play, develops and occurs during infancy andtoddlerhood, making this the earliest type of play (Piaget, 1962). During this time,children experiment with movement, sound, bodily sensation, objects and people. Aroundsix months of age, infants begin to develop "action schemes" through practice and trialand error. Infants use pushing, pulling, and grasping to make things happen. Forexample, an infant will push a ball and make it roll in order to experience the sensationand pleasure of movement (Piaget, 1962; Child Development Institute, 2010).

Motor/Physical Play*:* Motor, or physical play, provides opportunities for children to develop their grossand fine motor skills through activities that support coordination, muscle training, andendurance, i.e. running, jumping, climbing. This form of play increases fromtoddlerhood to preschool age, and peaks at approximately 5-6 years old (Smith &Pellegrini, 2008; CDI, 2010).

Constructive/Object Play*:* Constructive play, also referred to as object play, occurs when childrenmanipulate their environment, experiment with objects, and find out what combinationsof action work and don't work. Examples of this type of play are when children buildtowers and castles with blocks, play with puzzles, play in the sand, and draw with chalkon the sidewalk. This type of play is seen in babies when they pick up, drop, or putobjects in their mouth. Toddlers demonstrate constructive/object play when theymanipulate objects, for example, building with blocks. This type of play can also occurduring pretend play when children pretend to feed a doll or build a house. Thoughconstructive play, children develop a

sense of accomplishment and begin to learn how tocontrol their environment (Smith &Pellegrini, 2008; CDI, 2010).

Social Play: From birth to the age of two, social play primarily consists of playful interactionsbetween children and their caregivers. From approximately 2-6 years of age, social playincreases in complexity as children begin to interact with peers. Parallel play is theearliest type of social play in Piaget's schema, a type of social play most commonly seenamong children who are 2-3 years of age, and occurs when children play alongside peersor adults without much social interaction, but generally enjoying being in the presence ofanother (Smith &Pellegrini, 2008; CDI, 2010). By approximately 3-4 years old, childrenengage in social play with others that is more interactive. This type of social play caninclude the use of objects, language and imagination, and can also incorporate physicaland pretend play (Smith &Pellegrini, 2008). Through these playful interactions withothers, children learn social rules, like cooperation, sharing, and turn taking (CDI, 2010).

Pretend Play: While all types of play contribute to the healthy development of young children,pretend play is widely recognized as the most advanced form of social play in earlychildhood (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978; Scarlett, 2004). As such, pretend play servesmany important functions. For example, pretend play helps children understand realitythough reconstructing and repeating every day events like sleeping, eating, cooking, anddriving a car (Scarlett, 2004). It also helps children "digest", or process, recentlyacquired information (Piaget, 1951; Scarlett, 2004). Pretend play has been identified as atool for children to learn to cope with anxiety and frustration on their own. Instead ofacting out their impulses, children use pretend play as a way to express their emotionssymbolically. Piaget referred to this function as "liquidating" conflict to reduce or get ridof anxiety (Piaget, 1951; Scarlett, 2004). For

example, a child who is anxious about goingto the doctor can use pretend play to manage or reduce anxiety by playing with medicaltoys to pretend to give shots, etc. (Scarlett, 2004).

Pretend play has been defined as the examination and interpretation of the world through the use of images and symbols that are representative of real-life experiences

(e.g., using a block for a phone or serving "tea" to a teddy bear) (Vygotsky& Cole,

1978). Sociodramatic play is considered a more advanced form of pretend play. During sociodramatic play, children can experiment with possible situations, language, and emotions as they take on roles and stretch their imaginations through creating story lines with other children. In this process sociodramatic helps children understand others' intent while simultaneously advancing both language and social skills development (Smith &Pellegrini, 2008).

Imenda (2012:28) describes Smilansky's (as quoted by De Witt &Booysen, 1994: 130) four types of play, which imply a cognitive hierarchy, and are sees as a basis for the child's cognitive development: (a) **functional play**, (b) **constructive play**, (c) **fantasy play**, and (d) **competitive play, with rules**. With regard to these four levels of play activities, Bergen

(asquoted by Gordon & Browne, 2004: 261) is also of the view that children's play progresses through a series of stages. Gordon and Browne further contend that the idea of progressing in stages bears its roots in the Piagetian theory – in terms of which play is divided into stages according to the way children use materials. Thus, play begins at the functional level, for example, simple, repetitive, exploratory activity, as simple as a baby playing with his/her toes. The next stage is constructive play, i.e. an activity that has some purpose or goal such as pouring water to fill a bucket. This stage develops into dramatic play, which involves pretence circumstances. The final stage proceeds to the stage of games with rules. These levels are the most interesting to both preschool and the Foundation phase.

2.4.2. The benefits of play

Research has found that play is a very important part of early childhood, but this is not always recognized by early childhood educators or parents (Jensen, 2010). They do not grasp the significance of play. By quoting other writers, Jensen (2010) continue that teachers do not recognize that learning is taking place when young children play (Elkind, 2005; Kostelnik et al., 1999). This is in opposition with the research that shows that play has a relationship to "…memory, distancing and decontextualization, oral language abilities, symbolic generalization, successful school adjustment, and better social skills" (Bodrova& Leong, 2003).

The importance, or value, of play in the development of children is acknowledged from a number of sources, and from varied experts - as Imenda (2012:29) quoting Isenberg and Quisenberry's (2002: 33) observation: Theorists, regardless of their orientation, concur that play occupies a central role in children's lives. They also suggest that the absence of play is an obstacle to the development of healthy and creative individuals. Psychoanalysts believe that play is necessary for mastering emotional traumas or disturbances; psychosocialistsbelieve it is necessary for ego mastery and learning to live with everyday experiences; constructivists believe it is necessary for cognitive growth; maturationists believe it is necessary for competence building and for socializing functions in all cultures of the world; and neuroscientists believe it is necessary for emotional and physical health, motivation, and love of learning.

In concurrence, Bredekamp and Copple (1997: 14) also opine that play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development. Referring to a number of sources, Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) quoted by Imenda (2012:29) further explain how, in particular, play contributes to the overall mental development of the child: Moreover, findings from the recent explosion of research on the brain

and learning also delineate the importance of play ... We know that active brains make permanent neurological connections critical to learning; inactive brains do not make the necessary permanent neurological connections. Research on the brain demonstrates that play is a scaffold for development, a vehicle for increasing neural structures, and a means by which all children practice skills they will need in later life.

In this regard, Isenberg and Quisenberry caution those who view play as a trivial, simple, frivolous, unimportant, and purposeless behaviour and challenge them torecognize play for what it is a serious behavior that has a powerful influence on learning (Imenda, 2012). Accordingly, they call for an 'attitude shift' to result in an increased level of respect accorded to currently undervalued activities such as recess, physical education, the arts, and rich personal adult/child interactions (Isenberg &Quisenberry, 2002: 33 quoted by Imenda 2012).

Tsaoquoted by Imenda (2012:30) sees the value of play as manifest in children's development of language and literacy skills which are the core of children's experience and, apparently, children's literacy skills build from their knowledge of spoken language. In this regard, Tsao goes further and avers as follows: Competency in language allows young children to communicate with others, enables them to learn and grow, and enriches their lives …young children engage in language and literacy learning without any direct instruction. While children play and communicate, they are learning intuitively how language works, practicing its nuances, and gaining insights into the meaning of written language (Tsao, 2008: 515).

Play and language help children to have the ability to learn to read, speak, and communicate with others so that they exchange and share thoughts, ideas and experiences (Imenda, 2012). Spodek,*et al* (1991) concurs and posit that dramatic play, like language, is a symbolic activity (Imenda, 2012). In play, children use objects and people to stand for things other than themselves

just as they use sounds to stand for objects or ideas, and later use written symbols to stand for sounds. Through this symbolic learning, children enhance their ability to function in language and literacy. As they gain proficiency in the language, they (children) learn to play with language as they play with objects (Imenda, 2012). Children further develop their language proficiency through reading and telling stories. Puro (2010 quoted by Imenda, 2012:30) contends that play helps children grow in terms of (a) problem solving and social development; (b) language; and (c) mathematics and science.Gordon and Browne (2004: 165 quoted by Imenda, 2012) also contend that play is intrinsically motivating and naturally satisfying to children. They further posit that play promotes learning for thewhole child, and that a wide range of learning opportunities is inherent in any single play activity. In these authors' opinion, all play activity holds the potential for growth and learning, for the child (Imenda, 2012).

Imenda (2012,31-39) quoted and commentedseveral authors who contributed on importance of play for the development of children with the following:

Rudolph and Cohen (1984: 197) also aver that play is at the heart of any programme for young children. They contend that play makes a major contribution to the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of young children. In this regard, through play children explore, discover, and learn. They also believe that teachers who observe children as they play can gain important insights into what children are thinking and feeling – and that children need teachers who value children's play. Fox (2002: 19) reports on research that indicates that children learn best in an environment which allows them to explore, discover, and play ... It is also closely tied to the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical behaviors. Arnaud (as quoted by De Witt &Booysen, 2007:125) contends that child's play develops, just as the child develops on other levels, and that this takes place gradually as the neonate's energy exceeds his biological

needs, centring round oral activities as described by Piaget. As De Witt and Booysen (2007: 125) point out, these oral activities represent the baby's active expansion of the satisfaction feeding offers him. They give two examples – one of a baby starting to play with her/his toes, or a two year old child starting to squeeze dough with his/her fists; and secondly, the baby vibrating his/her tongue against the mother's nipple in order to expand his/her experience in the oral activities. Ginsburg (2007: 182) posits that play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth.

According to Rudolph and Cohen (1984) emotions are an integral part of learning, whether the learning takes place through play or through formal lessons or whether feelings are positive or negative. Referring to the work of M. Lowefeld and S. Isaacs, who addressed themselves to the emotional aspects of play on the basis of their observations of children, Rudolph and Cohen (1984) posit that once teachers recognize that no one grows or learns without some kind of emotional involvement they'll be able to recognize when emotional factors impede or support learning. In line with this argument, de Witt and Booysen (2007:123) also aver that through play the preschool child learns to express and understand his/her emotions; that play teaches the child to control his/her environment, which has great emotional value for him/her in the sense that the child uses his/her imagination and makes his/her own choices and decisions.

On their part, Gordon and Browne (2004: 419), see play as the cornerstone of learning, for the reasons that it (a) develops the child's self-confidence and self-esteem, (b) makes the child to learn to take or appreciate different viewpoints on a matter, (c) helps the child to resolve inner fears and conflicts, (d) allows the child to build trust in self and others, (e) helps reveal the child's real personality, (f) encourages autonomy, (g) makes the child learn to take risks, (h) helps the child act out anger, hostility, frustration and joy, (i) helps the child gain self-control, (j)

helps the child to become competent in a number of ways, and (K) teaches the child to take initiative. According to Gordon and Browne (1989: 329) the value of play in the physical development of the child lies in that: It provides challenges, it requires active use of the body, it builds the child‘s fine and gross motor skills, the child learns to gain control of his//her body, it allowsfor repetition and practice of skills, it refines eye- hand co-ordination, it developsthe child’s self-awareness, it is an outlet for energy.

Fromberg and Gullo (1992) contend that play enhances language development, social competence, creativity, imagination, and thinking skills. Frost (1992: 48) concurred, stating that "play is the chief vehicle for the development of imagination and intelligence, language, social skills, and perceptual-motor abilities in infants and young children". For his part, Garvey (1977) is of the view that play is most common during childhood when children's knowledge of self, comprehension of verbal and non-verbal communication, and understanding of the physical and social worlds are expanding dramatically. Fromberg (1990: 223) claims that play is the "ultimate integrator of human experience". This means that when children play, they draw upon their past experiences things they have done, seen others do, read about, or seen on television, and that they use these experiences to build games, play scenarios, and engage in activities. Children use fine and gross motor skills in their play. They react to each other socially. They think about what they are doing, or are going to do. They use language to talk to each other or to themselves and they very often respond emotionally to the play activity. The integration of all these different types of behaviours is key to the cognitive development of young children.

Vygotsky sees play as a medium through which cognitive development is facilitated in the sense that, not only do children practise what they already know, and through which they also learn new things (Vandenberg, 1986). In concurrence, Hymes (1981) contends that carefully planned

play could encourage the development of motor and social skills, as well as help children refine existing cognitive structures and construct new ones. As Alan Simpson (as quoted by BabyClassroom, n.d.: 1): Playing with blocks is how young children learn about shapes and measurements … Playing with other children is an important part of social and emotional development and learning to negotiate and to share. Playing in a sand table or playing in the sand at the beach, children learn about math and balance and structure. There are so many conceptsthat young children are just beginning to grasp, they're learning how to explore, and play is such an integral part of that.

One other benefit of play is that regular observations of children playing holds great potential for providing teachers with assessment information, identify children with special needs, plan future play experiences, evaluate play materials, determine areas of strength and weakness for individual children, plan curricula for individual children, report to parents, and check on a child's on-going progress (Frost, 1992). To Garvey (1977), play allows children to use **their creativity** while developing their imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. In this regard,therefore, Garvey sees play as being important to healthy brain development and that, through play; children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.

Furthermore, Garvey sees play as allowing children **to create and explore** a world they can master in the process conquering their fears while practising adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As the children master their world, play helps them develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resilience they will need to face future challenges.

Furthermore, undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. Garvey (1977) further contends that when play is allowed to be child driven, children practise decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue. Ideally, much of play involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills. In contrast to passive entertainment, play builds active, healthy bodies. In fact, it has been suggested that encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increased physical activity levels in children, which is one important strategy in the resolution of the obesity epidemic. Perhaps above all, play is a simple joy that is a cherished part of childhood.

At school, teachers should help make play an integral part of the academic environment. Through carefully structured play, the teacher can ensure that the school setting is properly attuned to the social and emotional development of children, as well as their cognitive development. Furthermore, play has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children's learning readiness, learning behaviours, and problem-solving skills. In addition, social-emotional learning is best integrated with academic learning. As such, it is concerning if some of the forces that enhance children's ability to learn are elevated at the expense of others. Play and unscheduled time that allow for peer interactions are important components of social-emotional learning. As Spodek, *et al* (1991: 190) observe: Through play, young children learn to get along with one another. They discover that other children have points of view that are different from their own. They learn to revise their views ofthe world and

negotiate differences. They also learn to share and cooperate. Play also helps to extend children‘s physical skills.

Through play, children learn to manipulate a variety of toys and use their bodies in novel situations, becoming skilful as they engage in play activities.

De Witt and Booysen (2007:122) develop the above point further and state that play contributes largely to the young child's sensorimotor development through activities such as throwing the balls, lifting and carrying around objects, running around, climbing, and construction play. In concurrence, Gordon and Browne (2004: 122) add that the movement exploration done by children enhances children's ability with regard to (a) problem solving, (b) exercise divergent thinking, (c) responding at their own age and developmental level, (d) learning to cooperating with others, (e) becoming more aware of others' viewpoints of view and ideas, (f) sharing, (g) the notion of taking turns, (h) being self- expressive, (i) **being creative**, (j) gaining confidence, (k) developing strong muscles, and (l) refining motor skills.

In describing the role of play in children, Gordon and Brown (2004: 142) make reference to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which relies on both maturation and environmental factors. With regard to the notion of maturation, the Piagetian theory sets out a sequence of cognitive (thinking) stages that is governed by heredity which, in turn, affects people's learning by the biological structure of the body as well as the automatic, or instinctive, behaviour of people such as the infant's sucking at birth.

Staying with Piaget, Althouse (1981: 46) points out that Piaget believes play is important for intellectual development, and that he (Piaget) sees it as the bridge between sensorimotor development and symbolic thought: a stick becomes a gun, a rope a snake. Therefore, Piaget suggests that the development of language is dependent on play. Piaget still goes on to say that

play is pure assimilation whereas imitation is accommodation. Althouse further presents objectives for the child's development through play. These have been chosen as realistic ones for the teacher to select from, premised on the understanding that play affects the development of the whole child. Althouse (1981: 49) gives these objectives as follows

- **Cognitive Domain** – whereby the child uses various processes such as classifying, creating, observing and predicting in play to solve problems; combines material, words or symbols in a unique way during the play experience; shows through dramatic play an interest and knowledge gained through experience; assumes a role and expresses it through make-believe play; substitutes movements or verbal actions for real objectives and situations; plays in a way that becomes more realistic and structured.

-Affective Domain - whereby the child: assumes roles in order to dramatize situations which s/he must cope; shows by actions and words that s/he is open to the ideas and suggestions of other children; shows through actions and words such as smiling, laughing, jumping with joy, that s/he enjoys play experiences.

- Social Domain – whereby the child: shares playthings with other children; solves conflicts with other children through verbalisation rather than physical aggression; persists in a play episode with others for 10 to 15 minutes (five to six years), 5 to 10 minutes (three to five year olds).

-Psychomotor Domain. Within this learning domain, the child develops: eye-hand coordination by painting, stacking blocks, putting together construction toys and puzzles, etc.; eye-foot-coordination by climbing, jumping, kicking and dancing; large and small muscles by running, walking a beam, climbing, throwing.

De Witt and Booysen (2007: 122) also contend that play promotes the preschool child's understanding of certain concepts. They illustrate this by explaining that through play, for

instance, the child learns what the concepts of up and down, hard and soft, and big and small are further contend that play contributes to the child‘s knowledge about construction, to his/her creative abilities, his/her understanding of sorting and classification, his/her exploration and his/her search for solutions and answers.

2.5.Creativity and play for young children

When considering young children, it is appropriate to adopt a broad, democratic definition of creativity (Sharp, 2004). In this way, every child can be considered to have creative potential and to be capable of creative expression.

Some theorists have studied the way in which creativity develops in children. Most theories of child development view young children as highly creative, with a natural tendency to fantasise, experiment and explore their environment. However, this high level of creativity is not necessarily maintained throughout childhood and into adulthood (Sharp, 2004).

Most writers on creativity agree that it is possible to encourage or indeed to inhibit the development of creativity in young children. Sharp (2004) givesMellou’s suggestion that young children’s creativity can be nurtured through three educational settings namely the creative environment, creative programmes and creative teachers and ways of teaching. Creative environment is fundamental in the encouragement of children’s play. Play is strongly featured in many of the discussions about creativity in young children. Indeed, older children and adults are often encouraged to be ‘playful’ in order to facilitate creative thinking. Imaginative play (especially role play) and free choice of activities would seem to be key components of the early childhood setting in relation to creativity. Both creativity and play require imagination, insight, problem solving, divergent thinking, and the ability to experience emotion and to make choices (Sharp, 2004). Research has also shown that it is possible for adults to help children improve

their imaginative play skills, with apparent positive consequences for their creative abilities. Two other issues have been raised concerning the environment in early childhood settings. The stimulation offered by a child's physical environment is important, as Runco (quoted by Sharp, 2004) has pointed out. This could include the size and layout of the classroom and outdoor space, the quality of equipment and materials, and access to varied and new environments. A second key issue is the need for children to be given sufficient and sustained periods of time in which to develop their creative projects

We have seen earlier the importance of play such as Garvey (1977) andGordon and Browne (2004) who share same idea that play allow children to be creative and explore the world.As the children master their world (Garvey, 1977), play helps them develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resilience they will need to face future challenges. We can affirm that, though play, children grow creatively with competencies to deal with challenges in his/her life.

Figure 1: Common Principles of Early Years Education

10 COMMON PRINCIPLES OF EARLY YEARS EDUCATION
1. The best way to prepare children for their adult life is to give them what they need as children 2. Children are whole people who have feelings, ideas and relationships with others, and who need to be physically, mentally, morally and spiritually healthy. 3. Subjects such as mathematics and art cannot be separated; young children learn in an integrated way and not in neat, tidy compartments. 4. Children learn best when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to make errors, decisions and choices, and respected as autonomous learners. 5. Self-discipline is emphasised. Indeed, this is the only kind of discipline worth having. Reward systems are very short-termand do not work in the long-term. Children need their efforts to be valued. 6. There are times when children are especially able to learn particular things. 7. What children can do (rather that what they cannot do) is the starting point of a child's education. 8. Imagination, creativity and all kinds of symbolic behavior (reading, writing, drawing, dancing, music, mathematical numbers, algebra, role play and talking) develop and emerge when conditions are favourable. 9. Relationships with other people (both adults and children) are of central importance in a child's life. 10. Quality education is about three things: the child, the context in which learning takes place, and the knowledge and understanding which the child develops and learns. (*by Tina Bruce, Learning Through Play in the Early Years*)

2.5.1. Creative and Imaginative play

One of the most important types of creative activity foryoung children is creative play. Creative play is expressedwhen children use familiar materials in a new or unusualway, and when children engage in role-playing andimaginative play. Nothing reinforces the creative spirit andnourishes a child's soul more than providing large blocks oftime to engage in spontaneous, self-directed playthroughout the day. Play is the serious business of youngchildren and the opportunity to play freely is vital to theirhealthy development (www.pbs.org/).

Parents must have some ideas on how to setup imaginative and creative play activities for their childrento engage in that will take them away from screens andencourage healthy development. As stated on www.kathyeugster.com/ blog, when children focus their attention onto a screen, it is avery passive form of learning or entertainment. On the contrary, imaginative and creative play is a more natural way forchildren to learn about the world and does involve the wholebody. Children manipulate and touch various play materials.They express themselves through play both verbally andnon-verbally. They use all of their muscles and senses tomove around. Actively using their large and small musclesas well as their different senses in play, children develophealthy, strong, and complete neurological connections intheir brains (www.kathyeugster.com/).

Children play imaginatively and creatively in variousdifferent ways based on many factors such as *age, playenvironment, toys provided*, etc. Children can engage inimaginative and creative play by themselves or with others. Some types of creative play are illustrated on www.kathyeugster.com/ as follows:

Imaginary play happens when children use theirimaginations to create **pretend** and **make-believe** scenarios.Children can engage in this type of play using small toyfigures, puppets, dolls,

or stuffed animals for example. Orchildren can act out a particular role themselves andbecome a part of a play drama. Often, dressing up andusing props will be part of this kind of imaginary play.

Active play happens when children use their large musclesand move around rather than staying in one place. This typeof play releases energy and develops coordination.

Arts and crafts and **construction/building play** are ways forchildren to express their creativity, encourages focus andconcentration, and develops fine motor skills and eye-handcoordination. It also allows children to feel proud ofthemselves and gain a sense of mastery after they havecreated something.

The type of play known as **Games with Rules** includes boardgames, card games, and structured sports activities. Thistype of play becomes important for children as they growolder, especially from ages 6 or 7 and up. With this type ofplay, the focus is playing by the rules and often involves awinner or loser. There is much less room for a child usingimagination and creativity with this type of play because it isstructured and rule-bound. (That being said, children cansometimes play creatively with Games with Rules bymaking up their own rules.)

Although Games with Rules playis important for children to learn to deal with competition,rules, and the real world, creative and imaginative play isalso very important for children’ shealthy development andshould not be ignored in favor of Games with Rules.

2.5.2. Ways to encourage creative play in classroom

Caregiversmust be careful to avoiddominating the play themselves. Play should be the result ofthe children's ideas and not directed by the adult. Throughplay, teachers/parents should try to foster children's abilities to expressthemselves. They should also try to help children base playon

their own inspirations. The goal is to stimulateplay - not control it - and to encourage children'ssatisfaction in playing with each other.Pay attention to play, plan for it, and encourage it. Learnhow to extend children's play through comments andquestions. Stimulate creative ideas by encouraging childrento come up with new and unusual uses of equipment. Try toremain open to new and original ideas, and encouragechildren to come up with more than one solution or answer.Be careful about over-restricting equipment and make sureto have play materials quickly available when children wantthem. Buy and use equipment in ways that encourage theuse of imagination. Avoid toys and activities that spelleverything out for the child and leave nothing to theimagination. Provide children with a good range and balanceof equipment, and keep equipment exciting by changing itfrequently or changing its location (www.pbs.org/).

CHAPTER III: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology of this study. It includes the research design, the study area and population, the sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation, validity and reliability of the study and ethical considerations.

3.1.Research design

The research was conducted quantitatively and a survey research design was adopted. The research was conducted in Nyarugenge district early schools. Data were collected from school staff including teachers and school administrators. The data were collected through self-administered structured questionnaire which was delivered by hand to participants. All respondents answered the same questions. As the English is the language of instruction, the questions were constructed in English. Questions were framed in a way that is easy to understand using simple English expressions. Difficult technical terms were avoided in the preparation of the questionnaire

3.2.Area of study and population

This study was conducted in Nyarugenge District, Kigali City. Data were gathered from some pre-primary schools of Nyarugenge district boundary as indicated in Table 2. According to statistics (MINEDUC, 2016), there are 43 preprimary school establishments in Nyarugenge district with 174 teachers and head-teachers. This number 174 represents the population under study in this research. The study population included teachers of all those schools and all school administrators of each school.

Table 1: Study population

Categories	Male	Femele	Population
From above data	33	141	174

Source: 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook (MINEDUC, 2016: 88)

3.3.Sample size and sampling procedure

In order to get results that are reliable and generalizable, data must be collected from a sample that represents the whole population (Creswell, 2008 p.152). Due to accessibility, time frame and available resources, the researcher cannot reach all population. He has managed to reach a number of schools to be provided with 20 percent of respondents meaning 35 respondents out of 174 study population. The simple random sampling was adopted where all subjects have equal chance to be selected.

All present teachers and administrators of any school selected were requested to participate until the number sampled is reached. Eleven schools have been visited and the table 2 shows the number of teachers and school administrators from those schools who participated.

Table 2: Schools sampled for research

No	**School name**	**Location**	**No**	**School Name**	**Location**
1	STE FAMILLE N.S	Muhima	7	UNITY ACADEMY N.S	Kimisagara
2	KAMUHOZA ISLAMIC S.	Kimisagara	8	LES P'TIBOUTS	Nyarugenge
3	E.M George Defour	Nyamirambo	9	URUHONGORE N.S.	Nyarugenge
4	LES ANGES SCHOOL	Nyamirambo	10	APACOPE	Muhima
5	FOUNDATION N.S	Kigali	11	E.M. LES POUSSINS	Nyarugenge
6	INKESHA	Kigali			

Source: Researcher’s primary data (2016)

3.4.Instrument of measurement

This research used questionnaire and observation as methods of data collection

3.4.1. Questionnaire

In this research, a questionnaire was used. It was administered by the researcher himself, bring them to the schools and help the teachers and schools administrators to understand before completing it. Close-ended questions and fixed responses whereby Likert scales were composing most of all questions. The questions were drawn in search of responses to the research questions and hypothesis earlier mentioned. The questionnaire was set in English language as it has become popularly a teaching language in Rwandan schools.

3.4.2. Observation

Observation method was needed in this research in order to watch the situation of environment at schools which can influence creative play education. The observation was limited to physical components such as playgrounds, amphitheaters, library houses, class size and sitting position etc. It is a non-participatory kind of observation and it was used while administrating the questionnaire. Some photos were captured during observation.

3.5.Reliability and validity of the instruments

The questionnaire, before being administered, was sent to research supervisor for approval. It was also given to the third party for correction, judgment and recommendations. The construct of questionnaire and interview used clear simple words, easy to understand with omission of difficult terms to avoid any ambiguity.

The pilot population helps the researcher to identify inconsistencies, inadequacies and weaknesses of research instruments and made corrections before presenting to target population (Best & Kahn, 2006). Though the questionnaire particularly, was piloted to 5 subjects in order to

see its appropriateness, to verify whether it is too long or not, and difficult and unacceptable questions. After pretesting, correction was made.

3.6.Data analysis

Most of data collected were quantitative. Quantitative data were analysed and interpreted by using statistical method with frequency tables and graphs. The relevance of indicators was analysed using percentages. Qualitative data, which came from the observation, were discussed to complement the findings from the questionnaire.

All 35 sampled from population were reached giving a response rate of 100%. The returned questionnaires were checked for completeness and no questionnaire was found to contain missing pages. No half-completed responses were found. Collected data were coded, entered, cleaned and were analyzed using Microsoft Excel

3.7.Ethical consideration

The basic concepts of ethics were duly observed in the conduct of this study on the part of the researcher and the principles of autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence were observed.

Autonomy of participants

The concept of individual autonomy was upheld in this study. All participants were approached with respect and honour. Their participation in the study were solicited, after a verbal consent to participate, a copy of the questionnaire is given to them and they were asked to read the introductory letter carefully and sign the written consent as an evidence of voluntary participation after they have understood the purpose of the research. No individual was coerced, induced or deceived to participate in the study. The right of individual not to participate or to withdraw from participation was documented on the introductory letter.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The researcher wrote a letter to the informants to accompany the questionnaires explaining the researcher's aim of collecting data and to act as assurance that the data was given and treated with high confidentiality. The introductory letter was attached to the questionnaire then respondent were informed of the purpose of the research and the need to respond truthfully.Participants in the study were assured of the protection of their identity. Only initial and signature of participant appeared on the consent form. The anonymity of all participants is protected because it is not possible to link the identity of any participant with the data in anyway.

Privacy and dignity

All participants have the right not to answer any part of the questionnaire if they consider it will have an adverse effect on them. Privacy and dignity were ensured in this study, we visited all participants in their home or at school and discussed with them personally and they answered the questionnaires in privacy.

Avoiding harm, right to withdraw and informed consent

Efforts were made to ensure that participants did not suffer any harm. They were treated with honour and respect, the questionnaires were carefully phrased to avoid embarrassment or subjecting any participant to any form of psychological trauma and very sensitive questions were avoided. A copy of the questionnaire is given to them and they were asked to read the introductory letter carefully and sign the written consent as an evidence of voluntary participation after they have understood the purpose of the research.

CHAPTER IV: Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1.Introduction

This chapter reports the results of this study, according to the three research questions presented in chapter1, namely (a) to find out if the schools are equipped with facilities important to put the school at the center of creative games and play(b) to determine ways to promote children's numeracy, literacy and life skills through play and (c) to discuss with the teachers their understanding on promoting creative education through play and games.

However, these results are preceded by the presentation of the biographical information pertaining to the respondents. The major findings of the study emerge out ofthe interpretation of the results. Thus, these are presented and discussed in chapter five

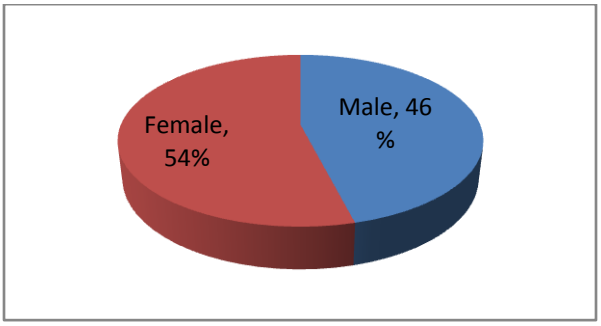
4.2.Biographical information

This section provides data on the respondents' sex, age, experience, training etc. The information from the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents was judged important because it can influence on the respondents' responses. On the other hand, the school location and status was mentioned.

4.2.1. Gender of respondents

Respondents were asked to mention their sex. The results in figure 2 show responses from them.

Figure 2: Gender distribution (n=35)

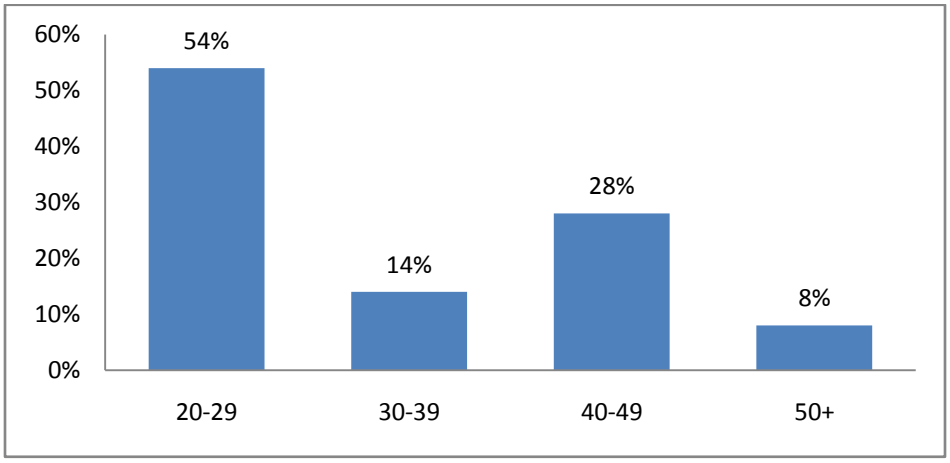


In above figure 2, the number of men is 46 percent while women are 54 percent. This number is quite balanced as female teachers are slightly dominating male teachers.

4.2.2. Age of respondents

Information on teachers' age is given in the figure 3

Figure 3: Age of respondents (n=35)

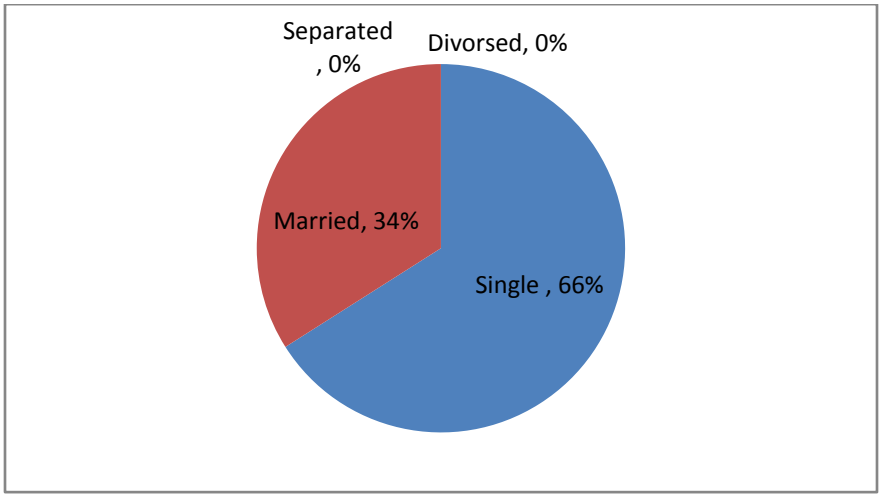


The figure 3 shows that 54% of respondents are between 20-29 years, 28% fall between 40-49 years, 14% are between 30 and 39 years old while 8% is only 50 years and more. This may reveal that the population is composed by young graduate teachers.

4.2.3. Marital status

The information in marital status of the serpondents is summarized in figure 4

Figure 4: Marital status (n=35)

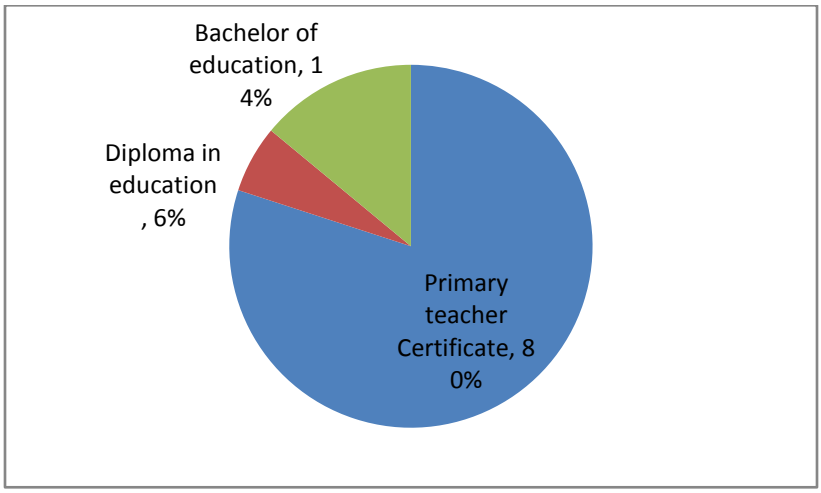


It is observed in the figure 4 above that married respondents are 34% while single are 66%. The researcher did not found divorced or separated respondents.

4.2.4. Highest professional qualification

The highest qualification of teachers is very important in teaching and learning. It is obvious for the researcher to know the educational level of the respondents. The results are shown in the figure 5

Figure 5: Level of education of respondents (n=35)

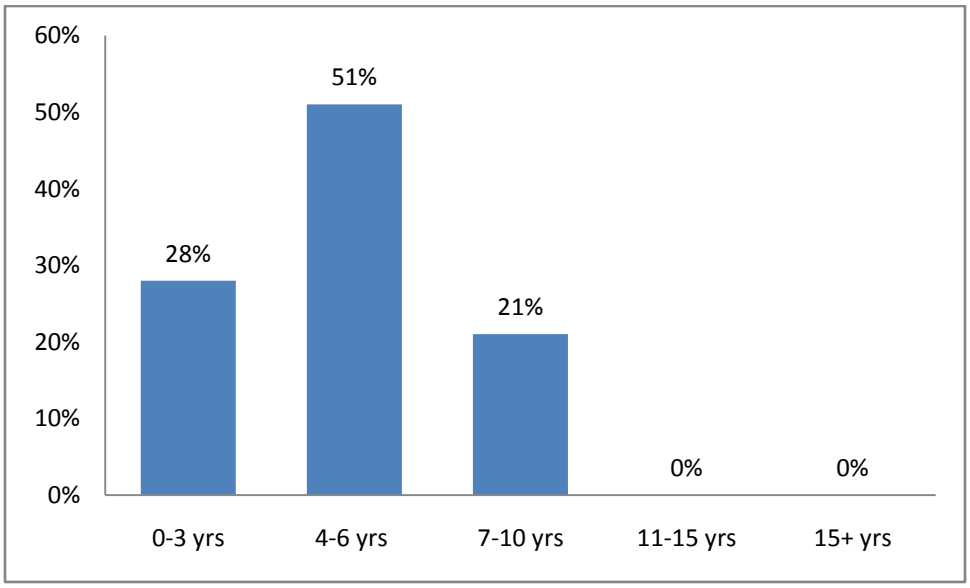


Most of respondents, as shown in figure 5, are certified with primary teaching level, with 80%. Teachers qualified with diploma in education are 65 while 14% are qualified with bachelor degree. These results prove that teachers in Rwanda are qualified with the educational level needed for the government of Rwanda.

4.2.5. Experience in teaching preprimary schools

The experience of teachers were gathered and are presented in the figure 8

Figure 6: Teaching experience (n=35)



It is shown in the figure 6 that half of respondents (51%) have the experience of between 4 and 6 years. On the other hand, 28% have experience between zero and 3 years, while 21% are experienced between 7 and 10years. As the results shows, there is no one above the experience of 10 years. From the results above, the low experience is assumed to be connected with the historical background of nursery schools in Rwanda as we have seen that it recently the government put in place policy and most of schools are newly established.

4.2.6. Type of schools participated

This was asked to know whether the school is public or private owned. The research found that all schools visited are private owned. It is in this regard that the government is encouraging private people to invest in preprimary teaching because it is hard for the government to put in place the infrastructure necessary for it. Private preprimary schools dominated public ones in last five years as it is illustrated in 2015Education Statistical Yearbook (MINEDUC, 2016:16). The book shows that public school were only 2 between 2011 and 2013, it is in 2014 where this number exceptionally increased to 1420 schools and slowed down to 1211 in 2015.

4.2.7. Location of school

For reminder, this research was conducted in Nyarugenge district. This district is administratively located in Kigali City, the capital of Rwanda. But economically, there are some parts of the district and the city in general, which are still considered as rural. These are places which are poor on infrastructure, and the plan is to extend the city and economic activities in that rural area. However, the researcher considered that because it may have impact on schools infrastructures which are in rural and in township.

The table 3 below show the number of schools located in town and in rural part of Nyarugenge district.

Table 3: School location

School location	Number of schools	Percentage
Township	9	82
Rural	2	18
Total	11	100

Source: Primary data (2016)

The table 3 shows that 82% of schools visited are in town while 12 percent are in rural area. The table 2 in chapter three illustrates the names if those schools.

4.3.Ways to promote children's learning skills through play

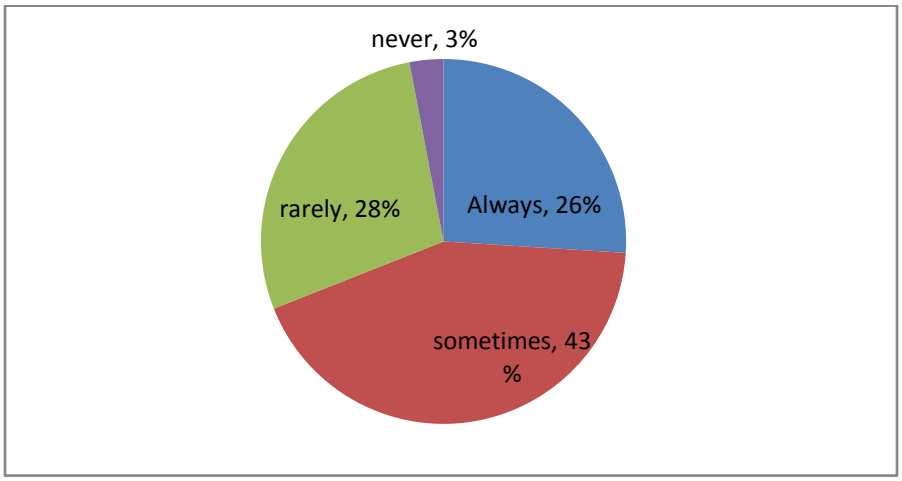
In this section the researcher presents the information related to how the preprimary educators promoted learning though play. This is done by way of presenting theresults of the study with regard to the statements in the questionwhich sought to reveal theways in nursery schoolsuse paly to promote teaching and learning.

The results reported below pertain how educators promote learning with referenceto numeracy, literacy and life skills – which are the three pillars of the early childhood developmentcurriculum. The results are summarized in Figures 7 to 12according to a number of sub headings. The information is both in the form of descriptivestatistics (diagrams and a summary table) as well as qualitative data elicited as part of theeducators' elaborations.

4.3.1. Allowing children to pursue their interest during play

The first item of the semi-structured section of the questionnaire sought to find out whether or not educators allowed their learners to pursue their own interests during play. The findings are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Allowing children to pursue their interest (n=35)



The results in figure 7 show that 43% of respondetns ‘sometimes’ allow learners to pursue thei interest, 26% ‘always’, 28% ‘rarely’ and 3% ‘never’ allow children to pursue thei interest during play.

In elaborating their responses, some educators affirmed their answers that they allowed learners to pursue their interests during play activities, by stating that learners have their own choices, they know what they want at their early stages, they choose positions they feel comfortable in and the group they want to belong to.”

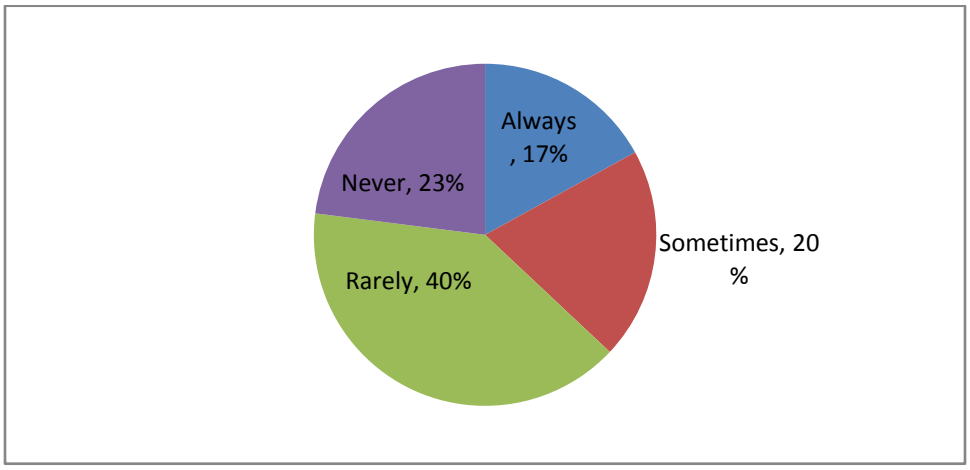
Some of the educators who did not allow their learners pursue their own interests gave the reason that of lack of space, large number of learners, and too much noise in the classroom when they are allowed.

It is clear from the educator that many of them ‘sometimes’ or ‘rarely’allow their learners to pursue their interest when playing and they see school work as being quite separate and distinct from play activities.

4.3.2. Using learners' ideas to enhance play activities

This statement was to see if teachers allow, receive and use ideas from learners to enhance play activities. The results are illustrated in the figure 8.

Figure 8: Using learners' ideas to enhance play activity (n=35)



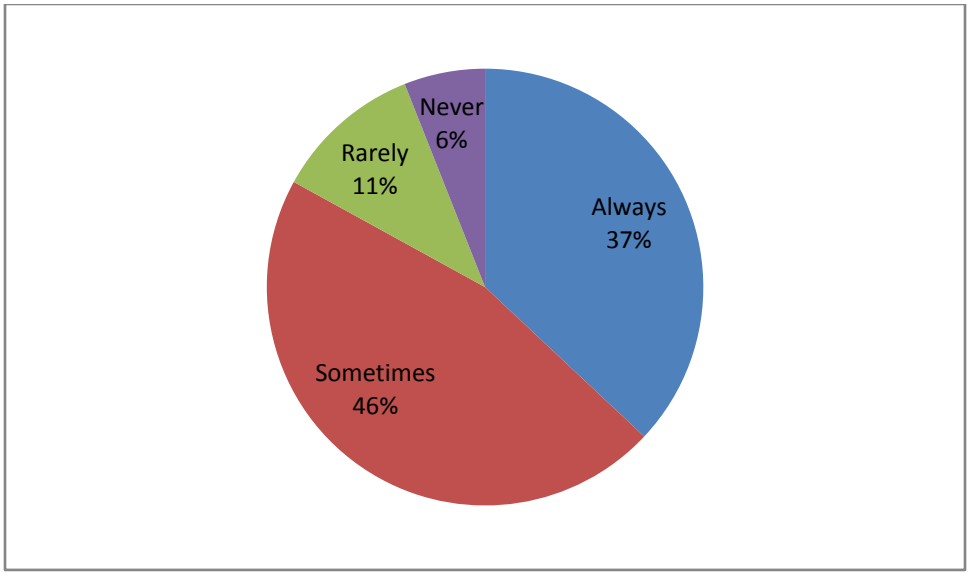
From the Figure 8, the data shows that 40% if respondents are 'rarely' using students' ideas and 23% 'never' do it. Only 20% and 17% of respondents 'sometimes' and 'always' respectively welcome ideas from learners and use them to enhance play activities. On this question, the majority of respondents do not use learners' ideas to enhance play activities.

From the educators who reported not using learners' ideas to enhance play activities, theyelaborated their reasons around that those learnersare still small and don't have many ideas.

4.3.3. Using examples from play to help learners understand concepts in classroom

The information searched was to know if the teachers combine play with teaching so that what practiced during play can also be examples used in teaching. The results are summarized in the figure 9.

Figure 9: Examples from play to help understand concepts in class (n=35)

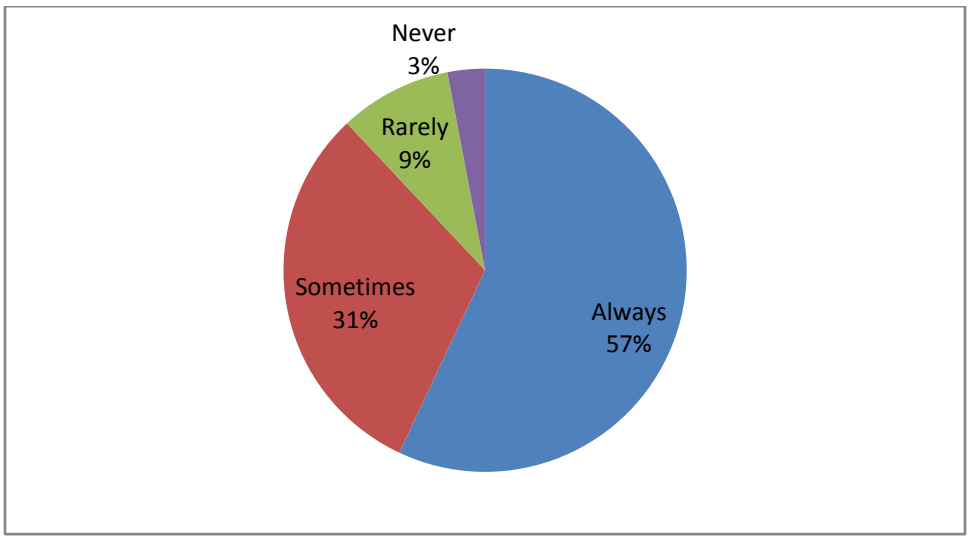


The data in the figure 9 show that 46% of respondents 'sometimes' and 37% 'always' use examples from play in the classroom to help learners understand concept. 11% of the respondents 'rarely' use examples from play to help learners understand concept in classroom and 6% 'never' do it. It is observable that, on this question, play is important to teachers in such way that most of respondents use examples from play in teaching. They elaborated the example of maths concepts which are easier understood through play e.g capacity, mass, lengths.

4.3.4. Using guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities

The results are illustrated in the figure 10

Figure 10: Assist learners understand play activities (n=35)



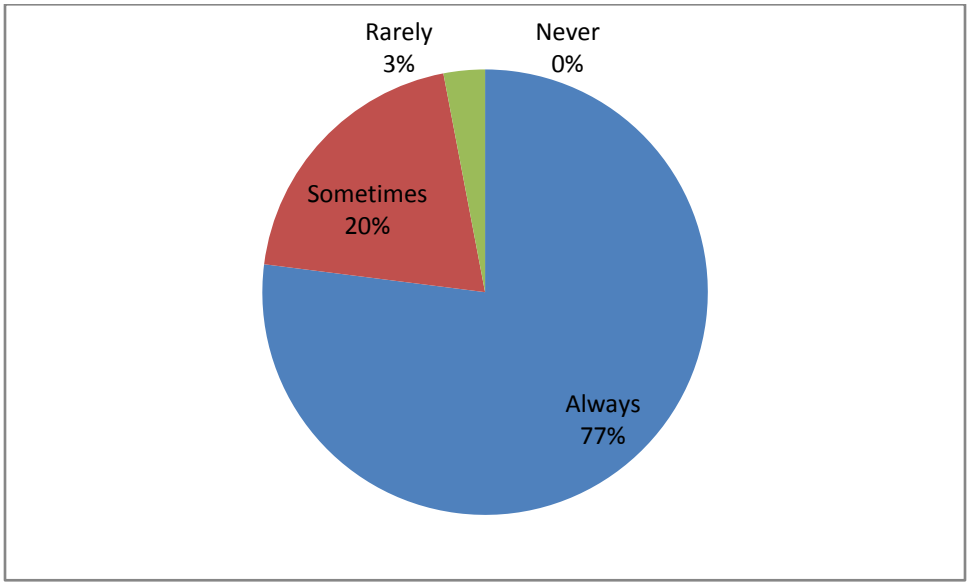
The figure 10 shows that 57% of respondents 'always' used guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities, 31% 'sometimes' do so, 9% 'rarely' and 3% 'never' used guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.

As many of them are always and sometimes using guided questions, some of them said that questions help the educator to see how much the learners know and help them towards the expected goal. Others said that learners need to understand what they are doing and by asking questions you get to know the level of understanding.

4.3.5. Learners are asked questions that lead them to discover and find things out of themselves

This question was sought to know whether or not educators used the question method in order to help learners discover thing out of them. The results are in the figure 11.

Figure 11: Questions that lead learners to discover things are asked (n=35)

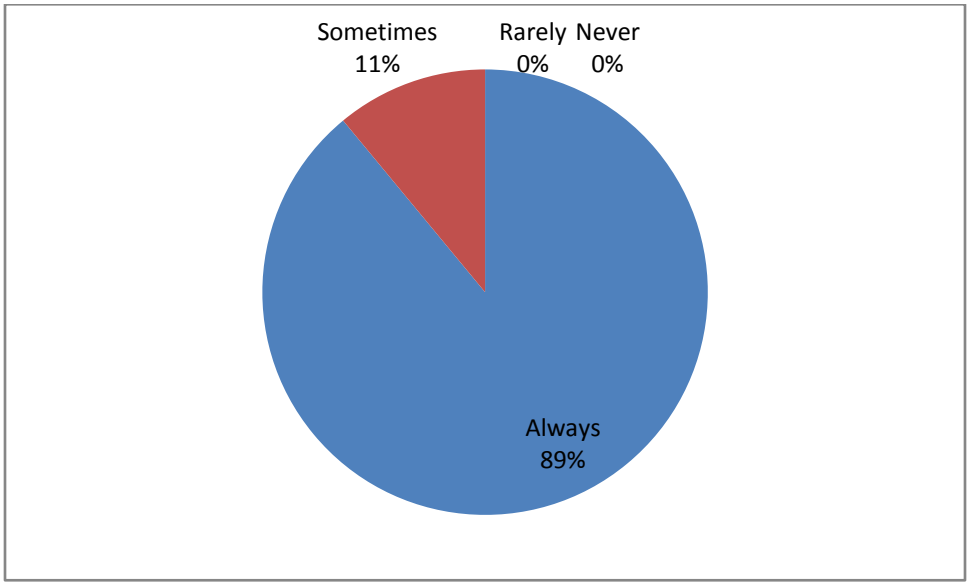


With the results in figure 11, 77% ‘always’ ask learners questions that lead them to discover things and 20% ‘sometimes’ do so. Only 3% ‘rarely’ ask questions leading learners to find things out of themselves. The ‘always’ and ‘sometimes’ keep the majority of all responses equals to 97%. These respondents commented on this that asking learners questions help themimprove thinking skills and concentration.

4.3.6. Helping learners engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills

This question was very important to know if through play, learnersengage all three pillars consisting ECD curriculum. The results are in the figure 12

Figure 12: Learners engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills



It is shown that all teachers, 89% ‘always’ and 11% ‘sometimes’ help learners engage in activities that involving numeracy, literacy and life skills. For numeracy, teachers elaborate that when playing, learners count, create patterns, measure thing etc. For literacy, learners can tell stories, sing a song, imitate animal sounds etc. And for life skills, they paint, color things, do handwork activities like cooking, crafting, music etc.

4.3.7. Summary table: ways to promote children’s learning skills through play

The table summarisesthe findings from figure 7 to 12. It is important to bring the reader to one summary page as all question conduct to one objective to know the ways to promote children’s learning skills through play. It also help researcher to analyse then in one view.

Table 4: Results for ways to promote children's learning skills through play

Ways of promoting children's learning skills	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
During play, I allow the children to pursue their own interests	26	43	28	3
I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities.	17	20	40	23
I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class.	37	46	11	6
I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.	57	31	9	3
I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves.	77	20	3	0
I help learners to engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills	89	11	0	0

In order to simplify the response in Table 4, and for ease of comparison between the affirmative and non-affirmative responses, the researcher made the Table 5 to present condensed data of the information in the table 4; this enabled to combine the 'Always' and 'Sometimes' columns, to obtain affirmative responses (YES), and combine 'Rarely' and 'Never' responses to obtain non-affirmative responses (NO).

Table 5: Simplified table 4: Ways to promote children's skills through play combined

Ways of promoting children's learning skills	Yes (%)	No (%)
During play, I allow the children to pursue their own interests	69	31
I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities.	37	63
I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class.	83	17
I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.	88	12
I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves.	97	3
I help learners to engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills	100	0
Average	**79**	**21**

Source: Primary Data (2016)

From this summarized table, it is clear that the yes or affirmative responses outweigh the no or negative responses to the statements written in the questionnaire. From the researcher's view on this results, understand well the importance of play in promoting students' learning but they allow their fully participation such as welcoming their ideas during play, allow them to learn what interest them etc.

4.4.The benefits of play on child's development and creativity

As the previous data were on the ways to promote students' skills through play, for this sub-chapter, the researcher was concerned by the benefits of play on child's development and creativity particularly. The participants were asked to respond to a number of statements concerning possible benefits of play. The respondents' answers are summarised under the indicated subheading, and illustrated in Figures 13 to 15. The information is in the form of descriptive statistics (figures and summary tables).

Table 6: The results for the benefits of play on child's development and creativity

Item description	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development.	54	40	0	6	0
Play is important for developing children's social skills.	46	51	3	0	0
Play is important for developing children's motor (manipulative) skills.	74	26	0	0	0
Learners develop language skills through play.	57	31	6	3	3
Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.	28	60	0	9	3
Play helps learners expanding their imagination.	54	31	6	9	0
Play helps learners to build trust in self and others	23	31	34	0	12
Play helps learners developing initiative	31	37	9	17	6
Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.	23	28	28	12	9
Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.	54	23	9	14	0
Play helps learners to think/create (of) new things	46	34	20	0	0
Learners develop problem-solving skills through play	71	26	0	3	0

Let's simplify the response in Table 6, and for facilitating comparison between the 'agree' and 'disagree' responses, the researcher made the Table 7 to present condensed data; this enabled to combine the 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' columns, to make 'Agree', and combine 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree' responses to make 'Disagree' responses. The column of 'Neutral' remains.

Table 7: Simplified table 6: the benefits of play for child's development and creativity

Item description	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development.	84	0	6
2. Play is important for developing children's social skills.	97	3	0
3. Play is important for developing children's motor (manipulative) skills.	100	0	0
4. Learners develop language skills through play.	88	6	6
5. Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.	88	0	12
6. Play helps learners expanding their imagination.	85	6	9
7. Play helps learners to build trust in self and others	54	34	12
8. Play helps learners developing initiative	68	9	23
9. Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.	51	28	21
10. Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.	77	9	14
11. Play helps learners to think/create (of) new things	80	20	0
12. Learners develop problem-solving skills through play	97	0	3
Average	80.75	9.5	8.8

Source: Primary data (2016)

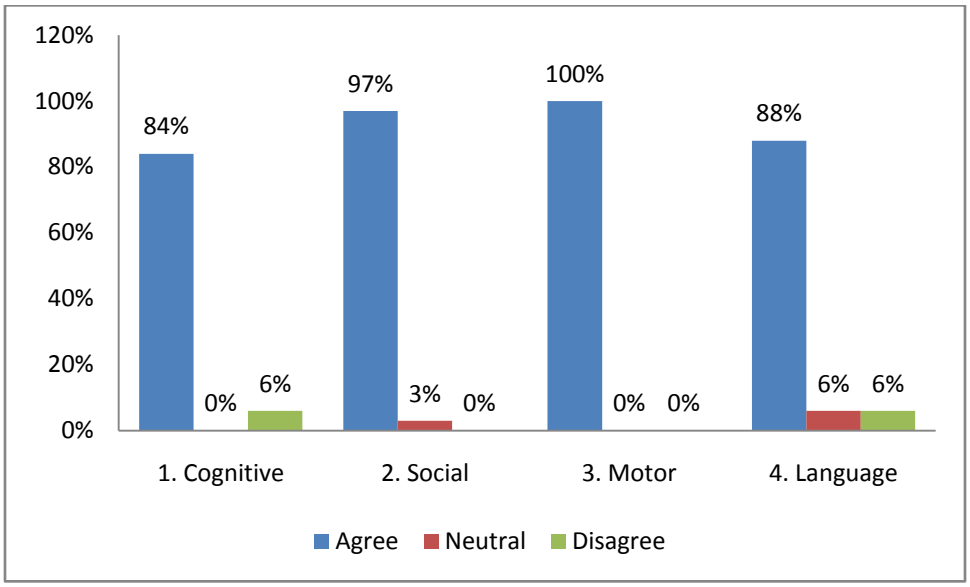
It is clear from this condensed table that the overwhelming response indicates that the respondents concurred with the statements in the questionnaire. But you can observe uncertainty for some statements where the neutral responses are deciding over other such as building trust and self, reveal the personality of learners, and the way if thinking or creating new things.

The researcher grouped the statements under subheadings in order to analyse thoroughly the results as below:

4.4.1 Play is important in developing learners' mental, motor, social and language skills

The first four statements all concern the skills and ability of learners and consist of the development part of children. The results for those statements are summarized in the figure 13 below

Figure 13: Results for statements on mental, motor, social and language skills (n=35)

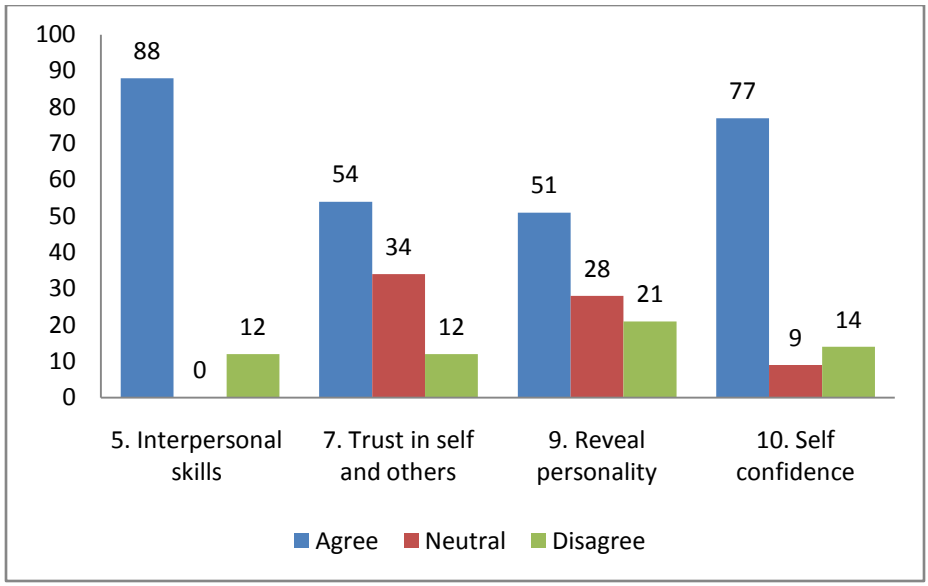


According to data in the figure 13, the respondents agreed on all statements that put the aspects of learning skills that the learners acquire during play.

4.4.2. Play help learner develop personality, trust, self-confidence and interpersonal skills

The figure 14 put together personality related statements. The researcher wanted to know how the play can develop the learner as person. The results are summarized in the figure 14

Figure 14: Results for personality, trust, self-confidence and interpersonal skills (n=35)

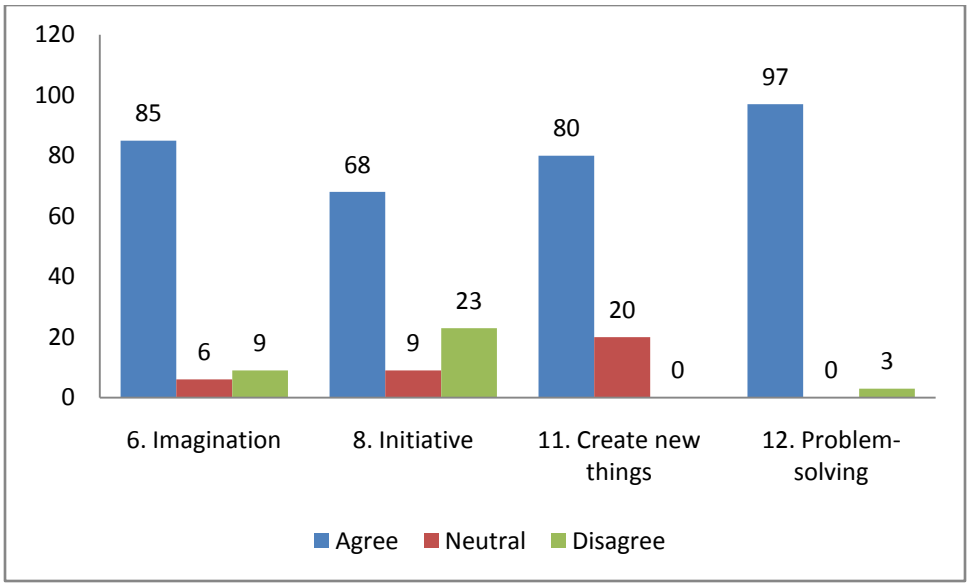


In the figure above, the respondents agree on almost all statements. But on trust and personality, the neutral and disagree responses are high; which is meaningful for the research.

4.4.3. Play is important in developing imagination, initiative, and problem-solving of students

This subheading was put together with the intention to see the capacity of learner to do, to use her/his capacity in tangible activities. The results are summarized in the figure 15.

Figure 15: Results for imagination, initiative, problem-solving and creativity statements



With the results in the figure 15, the respondents agree on the statements, and 23% disagree on statement of initiative, while 20% are neutral on the statement of creating new things.

4.5.Summary of observation by the researcher

One of the methods used during this research, was a non-participatory observation made by the researcher. The objective was to see the school environment with consideration of any facility which can made play enjoyable and successful to the learner.

As we know that most of learning activities for children must be made through play method, the classroom and class size and position was the first to be observed. The researcher found that most of schools in Nyarugenge district have a reasonable number of students in classroom. This because all visited schools are private (see 4.2.6) and the owners try their best to attract students. The inside of classroom was found decorated with diverse sort of drawings. The sitting position is in most schools rounded table and it changes depending on the lesson.

Figure 16: Nursery schools operating in appropriate building

E.M. Georges Defour (left) and Burla Africa World Academy (Right). Photo by Ben (2017)

When we asked the teachers to know if the school building is the owner property, a half of school visited said that they rent the building where schools are operating. And you find sometimes the way the building was designed looked not matching how the schools building should be.

Figure 17: Nursery school operating in ordinary building

EcoleMaternelleLumiere -Saint Esprit. Photo by Ben (2016)

That's why when we looked outside in the garden; most of schools have not got enough space that can provide ground for outdoor plays. Schools do not have enough space for that activity.

That's why learners are not engaged in many outdoor plays. The photos taken in some schools can illustrate the status of school environment and how it play role in promoting play for students in class and out the class.

Figure 18: Nursery school garden with play facilities

Photo by Ben (2016)

4.6.Discussion of findings

This research was conducted around three main objectives such as find out if the schools are equipped with facilities important to put the school at the center of creative games and play, determine ways to promote children's numeracy, literacy and life skills through play and the understanding of teachers on promoting creative education through play and games.

The questionnaire was structures in the way that it responds to the second and third objective while the first objective was to be assessed by individual observation by the researcher. The first objective was analysed qualitatively while the others were analysed quantitatively.

Looking back in the literature, the development of nursery schools in Rwanda is not old. It is in 2011 the ECD policy was put in place. It is from that period children at the age were called to attend schools and school establishments began to increase in the number. The government encouraged private owners to establish schools as the government only should not suffice the target.It is in this regard many independent schools were born with flexibility to allow them to work even the conditions their schools are not well as needed.

The findings are not far from the literature, as the half of schools visited is not located in good environment for ECD learning, and many of them were constructed for other purposes that teaching. That why schools do not have enough garden for students to play outside. And the schools which have some garden do not prepare it enough with many facilities for play. Teachers are encouraged to prepare their classrooms so that the learners learn in play style(as all of them have been seen as qualified, see the figure 5). But that is not enough if the learners do not continue enjoy the play outside the classroom while they are at school.

There are many ways to promote children's literacy, numeracy and life skills and through play. The researcher took only six which he judged more powerful. The findings showed that teachers do use them many times during teaching and learning but few of them are rarely or never used. Teachers got opportunity to elaborate in their words on why they practice them. Teachers, 67 percent of them always or sometimes allow children to pursue their own interest during play time. Teachers who rarely allow their learners to pursue their interest see play as separate to the learning and or said that class size is too big (large number of learners and lack of space) to allow each learner to work on his interest.The second way given by the researcher was: using learner's idea to enhance play activities. As result from the respondents, this ways is practiced by few of respondents; only 37 percent always or sometimes get learners' ideas. The remaining 63 percent rarely or never do it. Teachers give the reason that kids are still small and don't have many ideas. On the researcher's view, these two ways are involving learners' participation. And it has been found from other research that the education system is too reliant on testing and assessment and they are restricted from staying outside the curriculum (Adobe survey, 2013). That's why many teachers continue to be stacked on curriculum and school achievement than the

need of the learners. It is quite understandable that even though learners participate in their learning, they cannot anticipate what the teacher has prepared for them.

Teachers use examples from learners' play to help them understand classroom concepts (83 percent of them affirm). They are not far from Rudolph and Cohen (1984) view that teachers who observe children as they play can gain important insights into what children are thinking and feeling and that children need teachers who value children's play. Teachers use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities (88 percent), they ask questions that lead learners to discover and find things out of themselves (97 percent) and help learners engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills (100 percent). These four ways mentioned are always and sometimes being used by the teachers and the researcher's view in the mind is that they (ways) involve teachers first and the learners second – in opposite with the first two ways which are viewed to engage learners first. This shows how much teachers are involved in learners' activities but the important thing from this research, was it found out that teachers use various ways to promote learning skills through play.

Play is important in developing learners' mental, motor, social and language skills. 84 percent of respondents said that play is important in developing learner's mental or cognitive skills, 97 percent affirm that the motor skills is developed through play, 100 percent for social skills and 88 percent for language skills. It is clear that teachers are aware of the child's development particularly physical, mental and social development and the way they develop. These are main components of child development which will have an impact on child learning and thinking as part of psychological development.

On the statements given on that play help learner develop personality, trust, self-confidence and interpersonal skills, 88 percent affirm that it helps develop learner's personality. But on the view

that play help them build trust, only 54 percent affirm that, 34 percent stayed indifferent while 12 percent didn't agree with the statement. It is obvious that teachers do not understand well and at which level the learners develop trust though play that's why some of them (34%) didn't agree or disagree. The same on the view that play help learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem where 51 percent agree, 21 percent disagree and 28 percent neutral. On the other hand, 77 percent agreed that play help learners develop inter-personal skills through play. On the researcher's view, the teachers are hesitating to affirm that learner can have trust, can have confidence and esteem or others can trust them, or have confidence in them.This has maybe a common stand with culture which has always put behind the kids as they are still kids and can't do anything until they are old enough.

Play is important in developing imagination, initiative, and problem-solving of students. 88 percent are with the researcher's view that play is important in developing child' imagination, 68 percent agree that play is important in developing initiative, 80 percent agree that play is important in creating new things while 97 agree that it help develop problem solving. Imagination, initiative, problem-solvingand create new things were considered by the researcher as the core pillars of creativity which can be manifested during play time. And they were there to see if educators are aware of the role of play in creativity. For the pillar of initiative, 23 percent did not agree and 9 percent were neutral. This brings again the way the young kids areconsidered in the society and the researcher thought that some teachers can't welcome the initiatives from the kids. On the other hand, 20 percent were neutral on the point that play help learner create new thing. The researcher thought that those teachers don't know about creativity or know little about it. Despite that, the researchers can affirm that the respondents are with his

view that play is important in developing child's imagination, initiative, problem solving and creativity.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion and recommendation

Play is the key for child's learning and development. Many governments have taken initiatives to develop children's learning access by availing budget and drafting policies and programmes. The countries in sub-Saharan Africa are expanding ECD sector. Rwanda has adopted the ECD policy recently in 2011 and the preprimary enrolment is still below expected. There has been the notable number of new schools established, but the environment of some of them still under the norms of the normal conditions of preprimary schools.This research on the benefits of play on child's creativity; had main objective to studythe development of preprimary education, particularly benefits of creative play in early schools with emphasis on its role child's creativity and development. As it has been found in this study, the majority of respondents are engaged in the activities that promote learners' skills through play. The learning of numeracy, literacy and life skills is taking place through play. Teachers use guided questions, ask questions, and use learners' examples in play and understand their learning. At this point however, teachers need to understand that learners can come up with ideas and let them pursue their interest when learning through play.

The development and creativity of children should be a concern of teachers in early years. Teachers understand well the benefits if play on the development and creativity of children. They agree that the imagination, initiative, problem solving, creativityare developed though play and can be emphasized. Skills such as mental, motor, and social and language are highly accepted as important in child's development and creativity.

It has been found that, in this research, it is very important to show trust to the kids during play so that they will trust others, and have self-confidence. This will help them to be responsible for their learning and make it a success.

The preprimary schools in Rwanda are challenged by facilities; not enough space, school building which are not appropriate for kids learning, class size, no enough garden space at school, lack of playgrounds for games and other facilities for structured play, the research has found. There is a need on the part of the government, to encourage school owners to make their schools a good environment for kids play as the only method for their learning.

The findings of the research are described above from which the research objectives have been verified. It is however important to note that its success will be in terms of the reactions and actions taken from the readers. It is in this regard, some recommendations are suggested hereafter:

The government should foster the development of nursery school infrastructure by encouraging people invest in nursery education to take it into consideration

Nursery teachers should be trained on the role of play in teaching and learning and particularly the role of play on child development and creativity

Creativity should be focused by educators and that should be nurtured in childhood

Teachers should consider various ways of teaching through play in order to promote child's skills.

The policy makers should put in place policy or guidelines on the importance of play in child's development and creativity, and make sure that the educators are implementing it.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ON 'The benefits of play in child's creativity, preprimary schools'

(To be completed by preprimary educators)

INSTRUCTIONS: This study is being conducted under the supervision of Mahatma Gandhi University Rwanda, towards a Master degree in Creativity and Education. Participation is voluntary.
However, *I depend on your participation to make this project a success*. All responses will be handled with utmost confidentiality, and will not prejudice the respondents in any way.

The survey is composed of 25 questions among which 18 are Likert items where you just need to select the Likert scale which is most meaningful to you. Therefore, the questionnaire should take you not more than 10 minutes to complete.

In order to obtain valid and reliable information, please, be as honest as possible in your responses. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will only be used for the purpose of this study. The answers you will provide will remain confidential and no name will be mentioned. In responding to the statements, please, place a tick [✓] in the spaces provided. Equally importantly, please, elaborate on each of your responses.

SECTION A:Biographical information

1. Gender:
Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Age (Years):
20 - 29 ☐ 30 - 39 ☐ 40 – 49 ☐ 50+ ☐

3. Marital Status
Single ☐ Married ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced ☐

4. Highest Professional Qualification
Primary Teachers Certificate / Diploma ☐ Diploma in Education ☐
Bachelor of Education ☐ Master of Education ☐
Other (Specify: ……..)

5. Years of Teaching Experience in preprimary school:
0 – 3 ☐ 4–6 ☐ 7–10 ☐ 11 – 15 ☐ 16+ ☐

6. Type of School
Private ☐ Public ☐

7. Location of School

Township ☐ Rural ☐

SECTION B: Ways to promote children's learning skills through play

Item description	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
During play, I allow the children to pursue their own interests **Please, elaborate:**				
I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities. **Please, elaborate:**				
I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class. **Please, elaborate:**				
I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities. **Please, elaborate:**				
I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves. **Please, elaborate:**				
I help learners to engage in play involving numeracy, literacy and life skills **Please, elaborate:**				

SECTION C: The benefits of play on child's development and creativity

Item description	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development.					
Play is important for developing children's social skills.					
Play is important for developing children's motor (manipulative) skills.					
Learners develop language skills through play.					
Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.					
Play prevents learners from expanding their					

imagination.					
Play helps learners to build trust in self and others					
Play prevents learners from developing initiative.					
Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.					
Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.					
Play helps learners to think of new things					
Learners develop problem-solving skills through play					

I am very grateful for your time and contributions towards the success of this project.
Karenzi Ben
MGUR Student

BIOGRAPHY

Karenzi Ben

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Thesis: THE BENEFITS OF PLAY IN CHILD'S CREATIVITY; CASE OF NURSERY SCHOOLS OF NYARUGENGE DISTRICT

Major Field: Creativity and Education

Ben KARENZI was born on 24th August 1987 in one of rural villages in Nyagatare District, Eastern Province, Rwanda. Even though the life was not easy because of economic destabilization followed 1994 Genocide that ravaged the country, Ben straggled to continue his studies and completed primary school in 1999-2000 and secondary school in 2007. He served as teacher in Primary school before he pursued an undergraduate degree at Kigali Institute of Education on a four academic years and graduated in 2011 with a Bachelor of Education + History

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He has been an integral person in the society. He has been a teacher in secondary school in 2011 at Lycee de Nyanza as Ateacher of History and Geography in ordinary Level, Entrepreneurship and English in Advanced level, after he become The Director of studies in the same year at GS Mweya in Nyanza District . He then went at Nyaruguru District as Sector Education Officer of Kivu Sector from January 2012 up to 2014. From 2015 He became ateacher at GS Nyagasozi in Gatsibo District in his carrier of teaching History, Geography, Entrepreneurship and ICT. He has been a master student at Mahatma Gandhi University Rwanda, and he has completed the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in specialization of Creativity and Education, Kigali, Republic of Rwanda, January, 2017.

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