

# Influence of Instructional Drama Activities on the Development of Early Years Learners in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya

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**How to cite this paper:** Boinett, F. J., Oranga, J., & Obuba, E. (2022). Influence of Instructional Drama Activities on the Development of Early Years Learners in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10, 348-359.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2022.104026>

**Received:** March 10, 2022

**Accepted:** April 23, 2022

**Published:** April 26, 2022

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## Abstract

This study was an in-depth investigation into the influence of instructional drama activities on the development of learners in Early Years (Early Childhood) Education Centers in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. The study was guided by Piaget's Cognitive development theory and utilized a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design. It made use of 513 respondents comprising 334 teachers, 172 Head teachers and 7 officials in charge of Early years in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Data were collected through questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. The study established that teachers in the ECDE Centres do not frequently use instructional drama. They instead use the Ministry of Education Models for teaching and learning in ECDE. The study concludes that drama provides a neutral vehicle through which ECDE pupils can explore, express themselves, discover and interpret the world around them, thus making them acquire skills to co-operate with peers and control impulses. One recommendation is that teacher training institutions and ECDE schools should work together to ensure that teachers are appropriately prepared to use instructional drama.

## Keywords

Drama, Learning, ECDE, Teaching, Pupils, Early Years, Pre-School Children, Kindergarten, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

As noted by Christie et al. (2007), the growth of a child in the early stages of life

has a significant impact on his/her future advancement, including education and employment. The foundations for good literacy and academic skills can be laid by providing young children with a rich environment full of language and literacy interactions and opportunities to listen and speak regularly. In order for children to learn these skills, they must engage in active, reciprocal interactions with their peers and adults. It's important that preschoolers engage in social interactions with their friends and teachers while participating in literacy programs.

A study by [Kao and O'Neill \(1998\)](#) found that both drama and non-dramatic forms of storytelling can motivate students to learn more effectively. The concepts are presented in a way that makes it easier for students to grasp them. Drama allows students to put what they've learned in the classroom into practice. This study is based on the premise that drama can be useful in the ECDE classroom for both teaching and learning. Young children who are prone to being impulsive benefit greatly from socio-dramatic play, which has been shown to improve "self-regulation" in children who have had experience in the play world, according to [Whitebread and Jameson \(2010\)](#), who found that children aged five to seven benefit greatly from play-world experience in developing their narrative skills, their deductive reasoning, and their social competence.

As a result, children must be given the opportunity to learn through hands-on experiences in public places like a grocery store, hospital, or fast-food restaurant. It is possible to incorporate literacy acts and artifacts into the learning process by using real-life experiences as a basis for the development of drama themes and topics. Further research into the role of socio-dramatic play in the development of emotional self-regulation has been done by [Berk et al. \(2006\)](#). Study after study shows that young children learn to deal with emotional or stressful situations, notably through drama, in the form of role-playing games. The evidence shows that children instantaneously engage in socio-dramatic play relating to stressful or traumatic scenarios in their experience, and that this type of play can be very productively aided and backed by adults in therapeutic contexts with children who have experienced tremendous anguish or terrible tragedy.

## 2. Literature Review

The use of drama in educational settings is one of the most important ways of expressing feelings, emotions and actions geared towards improving imagination and depicting reality ([McNaughton, 2004](#)). Accordingly, drama enables children to think, learn and act independently. It also helps stretch the children's imagination, ultimately improving learning outcomes. This, thus necessitates the incorporation of drama activities in pre-school learning.

[Rogers and Flemming \(2007\)](#) similarly contends that children get an opportunity to express themselves more easily through drama. Additionally, drama also turns children into active participants in the learning activities by placing them at the centre of the learning process. Accordingly, children are able to think crit-

ically, creatively, multi-dimensionally and freely ultimately leading to enhanced affective, social cognitive and psychomotor development. It is a fun way of learning as children develop empathy, develop cooperative skills and implement their knowledge. Additionally, it gives the children a sense of belonging as they become members of the dramatizing group in class (McNaughton, 2004).

Dramatization is a crucial teaching strategy that has been in use globally over a long time to strengthen and practice various concepts. Accordingly, dramatic features such as mimicry, role play and simulation are used to stimulate thinking and facilitate learning. Thus, dramatization cultivates imagination which eventually assists the learners to discover and explore new horizons of knowledge (Peter, 2009). Furthermore, dramatization presents the learner as an active participant in the process of learning eventually resulting in learner-driven/centered learning.

Drama as a mode of instruction can be used within ECDE/Early Years centres and helps learners to engage with whatever is being learnt in a playful manner. It takes full advantage of children's characteristics like curiosity, enthusiasm, inquisitiveness playfulness and enthusiasm (Rogers & Evans, 2007).

Hence the need to incorporate drama in different kinds of learning activities in Early Years Education in order to nurture, creativity, imagination and thinking that would ultimately result in enhanced learning outcomes.

### 3. Statement of Problem

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) is a crucial part of schooling, because it affects all the subsequent education of individuals. Thus, all children require thorough ECDE if they are to be competent in later levels of education. However, there is no universal consensus on the approaches that should be applied to teach children during ECDE (Wambiri & Muthee, 2010). According to Rogers and Evans (2007), drama can be used as a mode of instruction within ECDE and helps pupils to engage with what they are learning in a playful manner that takes full advantage of children's characteristics such as curiosity, playfulness and enthusiasm. Despite the significant role played by use of drama in the teaching and learning process, there is a tendency of both teachers and parents to emphasize on reading, writing well and even good performance academically (Ruppert, 2006). Drama helps children understand what they like and what they do not like, as well as how they interact with others. Young children get great joy in drama. Drama and education are one and the same for children. However, despite Rice et al. (2018)'s strong support for drama in education, it has yet to be put into action in the classroom. Routines and drills have taken the place of giving pupils the opportunity to build knowledge and comprehension in order to get the right response. There are many possibilities squandered in early childhood schools when theatre is disregarded or underrated as a learning and development tool. We deprive children of the chance to learn critical social skills

and the ability to develop strength and flexibility to deal with complex situations if we do not allow them to participate in drama. Therefore, the current study sought to influence of instructional drama activities on the development of learners in early childhood education centres in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya.

#### 4. Methodology

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The target population in this research comprised of 1090 ECDE teachers, 573 Head teachers and 7 ECDE officials. The researcher used stratified sampling to stratify Elgeyo Marakwet County into sub-counties that form Keiyo (155) North, Keiyo south (144), Marakwet East (118) and Marakwet West (156). Simple random sampling was used to select 47 ECDE schools from Keiyo North, 43 from Keiyo South, 35 from Marakwet East and 47 from Marakwet West Sub-Counties. These represented 30% of the total number of ECDE schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County. Simple random sampling was used to select 2 ECDE teachers from each of the selected schools. This implies that 344 teachers participated in this study. All the 172 head teachers in the schools selected were included in the study. In Elgeyo Marakwet County there are 7 ECDE officials distributed across the four Sub-Counties. Data were collected by the use of questionnaires, and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to organise and compute the quantitative data. The data was thereafter summarized and presented in tabular form (see **Table 1**).

#### 5. Theoretical Framework

The research was based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Drama, according to this view, provides children with the best opportunities for learning. Theory's purpose is to describe the mechanisms and processes by which infants and children develop into individuals capable of reasoning and thinking in terms of hypotheses. As a result of biological maturation and environmental experience, Piaget saw cognitive development as a progressive realignment of mental processes. Children build a grasp of the world around them and then uncover disparities between what they already know and what they discover in their surroundings. Piaget's theory can be used in the classroom, according to [Mwamwenda \(2009\)](#). Students are not passive in their learning according to Piaget's constructivist perspective. According to Piaget's thesis, children need a curriculum that helps them develop their cognitive abilities by teaching them topics stepwise. In addition, he claims that children are only able to learn certain things at certain points in their development. According to Piaget, learning occurs when students take an active role in the process. As a result, teachers must see their students actively participating in the lessons they are teaching and learning.

To be effective, instruction must be tailored to each student's individual

needs. The teachers' primary responsibility is to help children learn by providing them with a variety of experiences. Drama provides pupils with opportunities to experiment and discover new ways of thinking. As long as students of diverse cognitive abilities can collaborate, it is possible for them to learn from one other and grow as individuals.

The utilization of hands-on experiences to help all students learn is a possible future implication for student instruction and this becomes even more meaningful for children with disabilities (Christensen, Knezek, & Tyler-Wood, 2015; Oranga, Obuba, & Boinett, 2022). This ultimately boosts their transition rate to the next level (Mugo, Oranga, & Singal, 2010). According to Sloman & Thompson (2010) as well, drama techniques, is an effective strategy for promoting positive attitudes towards learners with different kinds of disabilities. Thus, the significance of drama cannot be over-emphasized as every one of the aforementioned abilities and behaviours as well as various intelligences, and the capacity for self-reflection, are enhanced by drama.

## **6. Influence of Instructional Drama Activities on the Development of ECDE Learners**

Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (2006) looked at how children's cognitive and social-emotional development is aided and motivated by play. Involvement in dramatic play helps youngsters build abilities that they can use for the rest of their life. Plays written for the stage are the simplest definition of theatre. As a means of fostering social cohesiveness and national consciousness, as well as uniting people around a common set of issues, the theater offers a variety of vantage points from which to consider one's own place in the world. Any event in life can be a subject of theater, because it is a reflection of the world around it. Instead of reenacting an event or memory, drama uses theater activities like improvisation and role-playing in a relaxed setting with a leader and players to recreate a thinking or concept.

Akyol & Hamamci (2007) stated that some of the predicted benefits of studying theater include learning about other people's lives, acquiring experience with diverse situations and occasions by playing different roles, and developing a perspective on life that takes into account multiple dimensions. These assertions are in line with the findings of this study, which show that those who are skilled and informed in the arts of theater and drama obtain societal advantages from doing so. Despite the difficulties, the opportunity to collaborate with peers to improve educational quality is essential. As a result, collaboration between schools and teachers is essential if they are to have access to new resources and possibilities for professional growth.

Maden's (2011) shows that Turkish instructors' perceptions of their competency in theatre and drama are in line with Maden's findings. For Turkish teachers, one challenge is that their undergraduate training in theater is not suf-

ficient for them to effectively employ this method, according to Maden (2011). According to Dogan and Ozberk (2013), teacher candidates have a generally favourable view of theater and drama applications courses. According to the findings of Okvuran's (2003) study on the competency of drama instructors, teacher candidates' perceptions after receiving the theatre and drama applications course and their perceptions of the contributions of the theatre and drama applications course are in line. Teachers who took the course said it was fun and amusing, enhanced co-operation, is pragmatic, soothing, and comfortable, and that it helped them build self-esteem and confidence, handle their anxiety, socialize, and have fun. Among other things, they have stated that they have improved their public speaking skills, learnt how to work with others, discovered their gifts, and developed empathy, as well as gaining responsibility and discipline. The current study was conducted in Kenya in order to determine the instructors' views on the use of theatre as an instructional approach for pre-school students.

Ginsburg (2007) found in his research into the views of second-level Turkish language students that drama, like in many other nations today, takes its rightful place as a modern tool for strengthening essential linguistic abilities, creativity, and grammar instruction. This strategy will become increasingly important in the context of constructivist education, especially in Turkish courses, he said.

Among the findings of Unal (2013) was the perception of teacher candidates with regard to the employment of theatre and drama applications in the education field. Drama is the most effective means of fostering both imagination and basic linguistic abilities. Acting and dramatization are more appropriate methods to employ here. Teachers and teacher candidates will benefit from the use of theater in education. Teachers should also emphasize the importance of practical labor in the real world, according to the researcher.

## 7. Conceptual Framework

In research, a conceptual framework is a diagram that illustrates the relationship between the variables under investigation (Sloman & Thompson 2010). As depicted in Figure 1, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is represented.

## 8. Findings and Discussions

The study sought to determine influence of instructional drama on the development of ECDE learners. The findings are presented in Table 1.

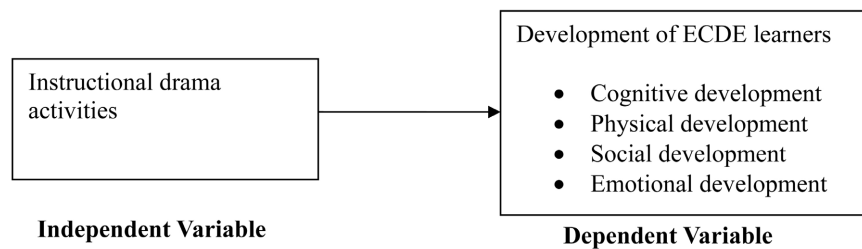
Table 1 shows that 34.1% (104) of respondents stated that imaginative play was vital to children's development, mainly cognitive and social development whereas 56.4% (172) disagreed. Another 49.9% (152) of the respondents stated that when young children participate in drama activities, they embark on a creative adventure that helps them develop their social, intellectual, and language skills whereas 35.7% (109) disagreed.

**Table 1.** Influence of instructional drama on development of ECDE pupils.

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA		TOTAL	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Cognitive development</b>												
Imaginative play is so central to children's development	62	20.3	110	36.1	29	9.5	37	12.1	67	22.0	305	100.0
Using drama activities with young children puts them on the path of a creative journey	55	18.0	54	17.7	44	14.4	74	24.3	78	25.6	305	100.0
Creative problem solving through drama works because drama is a social activity.	27	8.9	28	9.2	80	26.2	86	28.2	84	27.5	305	100.0
Experiences in the drama play a valuable role in helping pupils to achieve their potential	34	11.1	61	20.0	98	32.1	62	20.3	50	16.4	305	100.0
<b>Emotional development</b>												
Imaginative play is so central to children's emotional development	53	17.4	37	12.1	14	4.6	116	38.0	85	27.9	305	100.0
Using drama activities with young children puts them on the path of a creative journey and helps them to develop their emotional development	46	15.1	58	19.0	16	5.2	114	37.4	71	23.3	305	100.0
With drama play children will be able to express and communicate their feelings	15	4.9	44	14.4	10	3.3	158	51.8	78	25.6	305	100.0
Drama is the catalyst for the establishment of interpersonal relationships	28	9.2	51	16.7	4	1.3	107	35.1	115	37.7	305	100.0
<b>Social development</b>												
Imaginative play is so central to children's social development	28	9.2	65	21.3	15	4.9	163	53.4	34	11.1	305	100.0
Using drama activities with young children puts them on the path of a creative journey and helps them to develop their social development	55	18.0	54	17.7	8	2.6	129	42.3	59	19.3	305	100.0
Using drama to teach ECD pupils increases the sensitivity involved in sharing with other people	28	9.2	58	19.0	62	20.3	103	33.8	54	17.7	305	100.0
Drama is a catalyst for the establishment of interpersonal relationships outside of the classroom so that it will lead to social development	24	7.9	114	37.4	6	2.0	80	26.2	81	26.6	305	100.0
Drama provides a natural vehicle through which ECD pupils can explore and express themselves	37	12.1	51	16.7	63	20.7	98	32.1	56	18.4	305	100.0
To engage in dramatic play with others, children have to negotiate roles	31	10.2	64	21.0	57	18.7	87	28.5	66	21.6	305	100.0
Play gives children a venue to make sense of the world	40	13.1	44	14.4	65	21.3	98	32.1	58	19.0	305	100.0
When children engage in dramatic play, they deepen their understanding of the world and develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives	52	17.0	84	27.5	7	2.3	106	34.8	56	18.4	305	100.0
<b>Physical development</b>												
Imaginative play is so central to children's physical development	12	3.9	66	21.6	5	1.6	170	55.7	52	17.0	305	100.0

## Continued

Using drama to teach ECD pupils enable the children to acquire skills to cooperate with peers	46	15.1	46	15.1	77	25.2	67	22.0	69	22.6	305	100.0
Using drama to teach enhances proper coordination in large and small muscles enabling children's growth	6	2.0	70	23.0	2	0.6	172	56.4	55	18.0	305	100.0
Use of drama creates coordination and balance in organs, flexibility in movements and agility	53	17.4	49	16.1	4	1.3	93	30.5	106	34.8	305	100.0



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

There were 49.9% (152) of the respondents who stated that children will be able to express and share their thoughts and feelings in their own unique ways through drama play while 19.3% (59) disagreed and 30.8% (94) were neutral. Further, 51.7% (157) of the teachers who participated in this study stated that using drama to teach ECD pupils increases sensitivity involvement in sharing with other people and party by choosing for themselves the sort of the world they wish to live in. Only 28.2% (86) disagreed. A majority (53.7%) of the teachers stated that the creative, problem solving is a social activity. There were 59.9% (182) of the teachers who stated that the formation of interpersonal ties outside of the classrooms is facilitated by the use of drama, whereas 25.9% (79) disagreed. Clearly, most early childhood educators value drama's contribution to students' social and emotional growth.

In addition, 36.7% (112) of the participants avowed those experiences available in the drama play are important in helping pupils to attain their potential as learners and to take part fully in their community. Only 31.1% (95) disagreed and 32.1% (98) were neutral. As indicated, 50.5% (154) of the participants agreed that drama provides a neutral vehicle through which ECDE pupils can explore and express themselves through which they can discover and interpret the world around them. Less than half (28.9%) or the respondents were of contrary opinion. As indicated, 50.1% (153) of the respondents agreed that it is necessary for youngsters to work together to play out diverse scenarios in order to participate in dramatic play with others. However, 31.1% (95) disagreed. Another 44.6% (136) of the teachers who participated in this study were of the opinion that using drama to teach ECD pupils enables the children to acquire skills to cooperate with peers, control impulses and are less aggressive than children who do not engage in this type of play. On the contrary, 30.2% (92) of the teachers were of different opinion and 25.2% (77) were neutral. The findings indicate that



50.1% (156) of the respondents stated that when children play, they are able to make sense of the world and to put their newly learned skills into practice, whereas 27.5% (84) disagreed.

As a result of poor social and emotional development, students are more likely to fail in school (McNaughton, 2004). Blair and Peters (2003) discovered a link between preschool readiness and the development of social and academic competence in Head Start students. All possibilities must be considered in early interventions to enhance academic performance and prevent school failure, as this study shows. For the sake of early intervention, researchers Blair and Peters (2003) proposed that multiple components of child control should be examined. A more in-depth look at the child's behavior could be gained by examining both externalizing (i.e., disruptive) and internalizing (i.e., adaptive) behaviors.

For the participants, the process of creating, progressing, and reflecting is how they come to terms with who they are as individuals as well as the larger environment in which they live (Fulford et al., 2001). People might compare their own views to those of others in this situation by giving a variety of viewpoints. According to our research, theater and drama can help people develop empathy and see things from diverse perspectives. According to Akyol and Hamamci (2007), the expected individual benefits of drama studies include learning about other people's lives, developing the ability to perceive life in multiple dimensions, and providing a foundation for future research. Learning by doing, experiencing, and doing, and providing a foundation for future learning are also stated as expected outcomes of drama studies.

Taking a lead in showing the important role of outdoor play in the development of social skills, several studies have been carried. A study by Ginsburg (2007) found that children create lifelong friendships, even with their adult playmates, while having fun. Children between the ages of five and seven who are proficient in pretend play are able to participate in school activities, according to Laushey and Heflin (2000). It was found that children who performed badly on the play assessment were more likely to have difficulties socializing and participating in other school activities. Children's capacity to engage in pretend play was clearly associated with social competence, according to this study. All these activities can be done if there are qualified teachers recruited and when the educational policies provide room for play in educational institutions. The facilities should also be available to enable the learners play and therefore interact well with each other in the pre-schools.

## 9. Conclusion

According to the findings of the study, the majority of teachers in the ECDE Centers where the research was conducted do not commonly employ drama as an instructional method of teaching. Further, a majority of the teachers use the Ministry of Education Models for teaching and learning in ECDE. It can also be concluded that the common drama instructional resources available for use in

teaching and learning in ECDE include tables and chairs, doll bed carriage, buckets and dish bans, assorted dolls, dress-up clothing and costumes, assorted tubs, child-sized kitchen equipment, assorted those dishes and silverware, telephone, child-sized ironing board and iron.

The study concludes that the majority of the teachers do not enjoy using drama in teaching ECDE class. Further, dramatic arts in ECDE schools were not seen as co-curricular activities. It was also found that teachers were of the opinion that the use of drama in teaching improves pupil ability to use symbols and think abstractly, improves cognitive/intellectual capabilities, sense of sight, hear, touch, communication skills of the pupils, and reading skills of the pupils. The study found that engaging drama activities with young children helps them to enhance their social, intellectual, and communication skills, as well as their creativity. A child's ability to express his or her thoughts, feelings, and knowledge through play is enhanced when he or she is taught through the use of drama in the classroom. Creative and problem solving is also a social activity, according to the research. ECD students' social development is greatly aided by drama, according to most teachers.

### Recommendations of the Study

In light of this study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made: In-service training for ECDE school teachers should focus on teaching and learning through theatre, and schools and teacher training colleges should work together to ensure that instructors are appropriately prepared to use drama in ECDE classrooms; that there should be revision of ECDE curriculum to enable integration of drama as a way of learning and that, education officials at the county level should be empowered for efficient monitoring of ECDE dramatic play time. Allocation time for drama and reading and numeracy education should be shared. Effort should also be made to develop a uniform curriculum for ECDE that will integrate all the models for uniformity.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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