DOI: https://doi.org/10.67203/jerd.2026.qy8fub8i

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING ON CREATIVITY AND CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA: IMPLICATION FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, with implications for guidance and counselling. A descriptive survey design was adopted, involving 360 pre-primary school teachers selected through multi-stage sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that play-based learning significantly enhances children's imagination, originality, social creativity, curiosity, self-expression, confidence, and culturally relevant learning experiences. Results further showed a significant gender difference in teachers' perceptions of the influence of play-based learning on creativity, with female teachers reporting higher mean scores than male teachers. The study concludes that play-based learning is an effective pedagogical approach for fostering creativity in early childhood education. It recommends strengthened integration of play-based strategies in pre-primary classrooms, supported by guidance and counselling services for early identification, intervention, and holistic child development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Play-based, Creativity, Childhood, development

Introduction

Play-based learning is widely recognised as a developmentally appropriate pedagogy that actively engages young children in exploration, symbolic thinking and social interaction processes that drive creativity, language, problem-solving and socio-emotional growth (Courtois, 2024). Play-based learning is also seen as a foundation of early childhood education, serving not only as a source of enjoyment but also as a powerful medium for learning and development. In pre-primary education, play provides children with opportunities to explore, imagine, and express creativity while building essential cognitive, social, emotional, and communication skills. Play is far more than mere recreation; it is a fundamental right of every child. Through play, children discover, experiment, and acquire essential skills that shape their future.

Teachers generally perceive play-based learning as essential for holistic child development boosting creativity, literacy, and social-emotional skills supported by theories linking play to cognitive growth (Shuaib et al., 2021). While teachers recognize its value, practical implementation is often constrained by lack of resources, training, or rigid curricula. Effective play-based approaches enhance creativity and social skills like empathy and cooperation, providing key opportunities for early guidance and counseling intervention. Moreover, the concept and development of play-based learning offer different approaches to learning at the preschool level. It promotes benefits and programs at the preschool level. It is a preschool curriculum for play-based learning that enhances the learning outcome, development, and academic success of the learners.

The concept and development are set for the success of preschool children's relevant skills in the 21st- century educational system. Children in preschool will naturally be motivated to enjoy playing. It is a play-based program that will build on the context of learning by using playing as the motivation factor. In this case, children solve problems in imaginative ways through discovery, experimentation, exploration, and playful ways. The approach of play-based learning involves supporting teaching and learning and child initiative.

Preschool teachers will encourage the learning of children through interaction and inquiry that stretch their knowledge and thinking at the level of learning. It explores the concept and development of play-based learning practices and teachers' beliefs in designing capacity-building curricula. It ensures play-based learning, pedagogical practice

development, and the perception of preschool children. It exhibits the curriculum play-based learning needs of preschool children's developmental background and strengths (Cheung, 2022). In addition, it examines the context of play-based learning for preschool teachers. It explores the capacity and ability of preschool teachers' motivation and opportunity to incorporate the practice of play- based learning. It recognizes preschool teachers' value and applies the motivated play-based learning approach and pedagogy. It incorporates and attempts the practice of play-based learning skills and knowledge. It adopts the opportunity of play-based learning approaches in preschool children's development (Khalil, 2022.).

In addition, it nurtures creativity, stimulates imagination, and strengthens social interaction, thereby laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and holistic development (FRN, 2024). At no time in the past have policymakers, professionals, and parents had access to such a clear and well-informed set of recommendations for strengthening early childhood development as is now available. Play builds cognitive growth, enhances physical health, creativity, cultivates social skills, nurtures emotional well-being, and lays the foundation for educational success (Bernard, 2024).

In support of the above, the National Policy on Education (2014, p 7-9) highlights the central concerns of stakeholders in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE). Every child has the right to play, as play significantly shapes their growth and well-being. Beyond mere recreation, play serves as a vital avenue for fostering holistic development. Drawing inspiration from the conviction that play serves as the primary conduit for the tender minds, these skills also form the bedrock of robust relationships that enable the child to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally. In the theatre of play-based learning, children's innate curiosity and instinctual drive to explore their surroundings harmonize with their desire to express their creative essence. Play allows children to partake in scenarios mirroring real life, where emotional responses and social dynamics are artfully experimented upon. The spontaneity and autonomy inherent in this performance provide a stage where children traverse the entire spectrum of emotions, forging an intimate connection with their inner feelings and crafting a repertoire of strategies for emotional equilibrium, a masterstroke aptly described by Dockett and Perry (2014).

Ultimately, early childhood is crucial for cultivating and developing a person's creative potential. Consequently, encouraging children's creativity is a fundamental part of education. Creative activity, such as problem solving, creative art or creative exploration, is essential for motivating intellectual development including the ability to scrutinise, create broad perspectives and enable new ways of working (Craft, 2005). The creative nature of children's play and exploration is essential in relation to fostering the foundations of intellectual, emotional, social and physical development, which also has positive effects in relation to personal development and mental well-being. Essentially, creativity acts as a driving force for enhancing self-esteem and land motivation in the classroom (QCA, 2003). Children that become active in creating and interacting with other people adjust better to the environment around them and are able to communicate, collaborate and develop good relationships in society, and adapt accordingly. It is thus apparent that creativity in early years of learning is a fundamental component for development and also enhances a person's potential, life skills and mental well-being.

Statements of the Problem

Early childhood education is universally acknowledged as the foundation for lifelong learning, creativity, and holistic development. In many countries, play-based learning is central to pre-primary education because of its proven impact on children's creativity, socio-emotional competence, problem-solving ability, and overall development. However, in Nigeria, pre-primary classrooms continue to be dominated by teacher-centred and rote learning approaches, with limited integration of play as a pedagogical tool despite policy recommendations in the National Policy on Education (2014).

Despite growing global recognition of play-based learning as a critical approach for fostering creativity and holistic child development, pre-primary education in Nigeria remains largely dominated by teacher-centred, rote-learning methods. Many pre-primary schools prioritise early academic drills over structured play, thereby limiting opportunities for children to explore, imagine, and develop creative thinking skills. This neglect raises concerns about the adequacy of current instructional practices in supporting cognitive, social, emotional, and creative development during early childhood. Furthermore, the limited integration of play-based learning reduces the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in identifying and nurturing children's developmental needs, interests, and potentials at an early stage. The lack of empirical evidence on the influence of play-based learning on creativity and

child development in Nigerian pre-primary schools further complicates policy formulation and professional counselling interventions. Consequently, there is a need to examine teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how play-based learning contributes to the enhancement of creativity among pre-primary school children in Nigeria.

Research Question:

What are the influences of play-based learning on the development of creativity among children in pre-primary education as expressed by teachers in FCT, Abuja?

Research Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling on the basis of gender.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey method. Descriptive survey method was used to conduct the study since it enabled the researcher to gather information about the population of the study (Akodere et al., 2022). The population for this study comprises all pre-primary school teachers in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, while the target population consists of teachers in selected secondary schools from Gwagwalada metropolis. According to Universal basic Education (UBEC) National Personnel Audit, (NPA), (2022), the total number of pre-primary school teachers in FCT are 3497, both male and female teachers. For a population size of this magnitude, the Research Advisor (2006) at 95% confidence level and 5.0% margin of error recommended a sample size of 346. However, the researcher increased the sample size by 10% to allow for more participants and cater for possible attrition during administration of the instrument. Therefore, 371 pre-primary school teachers participated in the study.

A two-stage sampling technique was employed to select respondents for the study. At stage one; proportional sampling procedure was used in the ratio of 1:1:1 to choose 3 area council from the 6 Area councils in FCT; at state 2, purposive sampling techniques was employed to select 10 primary schools which have densely populated pre-primary school teachers from each of the area council. This made a total of 30 primary schools that were selected for the study. At stage 3, a simple random sampling techniques was used to select 12 teachers in each of the primary school. The dip hat method was adopted to give all the teachers a fair choice of participating in the study. This made a total of 360 respondents were selected which was still above the recommended participants by research advisor to cover the loses that may arise after the administration of the questionnaire in the study. The responses were structured using 4-point Likert-type rating scale with the following grading: Strongly agree (SA) =4 points, Agree (A) =3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 point and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 point. The mean score is 2.5 (4+3+2+1/4). This implies that for section B of the instrument, any mean score between 2.5 and above will be adjudged the Influence of Play-based learning on the development of creativity and child development in Pre-primary education as expressed by teachers in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for Guidance and Counselling

The instrument used for collecting data for this study was titled "Teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education questionnaire" (TPPLCCDPEQ). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and the items were derived from the reviewed literature. The instrument has two parts (Section A & B). Section A consists of demographic information and Section B has 20 items. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, it was given to experts in Educational Research Centre (ERC), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, (NERDC) Sheda- Abuja to vet. The experts made corrections and suggestions which were taken into consideration. The experts adjudged the instrument valid. To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on a representative sample of (20) respondents twice at an interval of four weeks. The two set of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula. A correlation coefficient

of 0.88 was derived which shows that the instrument was reliable for the study. Descriptive statistics; percentage and mean score were used to analyze participants' demographic data, research question and t-test hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Result and Discussions

This section presents the result of the analysis of data obtained from the field. The study investigated teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling. The demographic data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender: Male 109 (30%) Female 251 (70%)

Research Questions: What are the influences of play-based learning on the development of creativity among children in pre-primary education as expressed by teachers in FCT, Abuja?

Table 1: Teachers responses on the influences of play-based learning on the development of creativity among children in pre-primary education in FCT, Abuja**.**

	No	Factors that influence play-based learning for the development of creativity	Mean (X)	SD	Cronbach's Alph
A		**Enhancement of imagination and originality**	**3.17**	**0.11**	
	1	Children combine materials in creative ways during play activities.	3.28		**0.72**
	2	Children use locally available materials creatively during play activities.	3.25		
	3	Play-based learning improves children's confidence in expressing imaginative ideas	3.10		
	4	Play-based learning allows children to express ideas beyond what is taught directly.	3.06		
B		**Promotion of social creativity**	**3.18**	**0.15**	**0.85**
	1	Play-based learning encourages children to share creative ideas with the peers.	3.40		
	2	Play-based learning helps children develop creativity through teamwork	3.15		
	3	Play activities encourage children to communicate creative ideas clearly	3.12		
	4	Group play encourages children to express creative ideas confidently.	3.05		
C		**Stimulation of curiosity and exploration**	**3.14**	**0.10**	**0.72**
	1	Children ask more questions during play-based activities	3.24		
	2	Play activities encourage children to explore new materials and ideas	3.20		
	3	Play activities promote hands-on learning and discovery	3.06		
	4	Play-based learning helps children connect new experiences with prior knowledge	3.04		
D		**Improved self-expression and confidence**	**3.10**	**0.08**	**0.71**
	1	Play activities help shy children participate more actively in class	3.20		
	2	Children show confidence when expressing themselves through drawing singing, or drama.	3.12		
	3	Children willingly share their ideas with peers during play	3.07		
	4	Children demonstrate confidence when performing tasks during play-based lessons.	3.02		
E		**Cultural relevance and Age-appropriate contextual learning**	**3.06**	**0.05**	0.70
	1	Play-based learning incorporates local games, songs, and stories in classroom activities.	3.12		
	2	Play-based activities allow children to connect learning with their everyday experiences.	3.08		
	3	Children demonstrate creativity using locally available materials during play	3.04		
	4	Indigenous games, songs, and storytelling common in Nigerian communities allow children to connect creativity with their cultural background, making learning meaningful and authentic	3.01		
Overall mean			**3.13**	**0.05**	

The research sought to investigate the influences of play-based learning on the development of creativity among children in pre-primary education in Nigeria. Table 1 presents the responses of teachers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, regarding how play-based learning fosters creativity in young children. The data are

organized into five key factors: Enhancement of Imagination and Originality, Promotion of Social Creativity, Stimulation of Curiosity and Exploration, Improved Self-Expression and Confidence, and Cultural Relevance and Age-Appropriate Contextual Learning. Each factor includes four items assessing specific aspects of creativity development, with their mean scores, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha values provided. Enhancement of Imagination and Originality had a mean of 3.17 (SD = 0.11) and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72, indicating acceptable reliability. Teachers agreed that children combine materials creatively during play (mean = 3.28) and make use of locally available materials (mean = 3.25). They also noted that play-based learning improves children's confidence in expressing imaginative ideas (mean = 3.10) and allows them to go beyond what is taught directly (mean = 3.06). Promotion of Social Creativity received a slightly higher mean of 3.18 (SD = 0.15, α = 0.85), reflecting strong internal consistency. Teachers reported that play-based learning encourages children to share creative ideas with peers (mean = 3.40), develop creativity through teamwork (mean = 3.15), communicate ideas clearly (mean = 3.12), and express ideas confidently in group play (mean = 3.05). The factor Stimulation of Curiosity and Exploration had a mean of 3.14 (SD = 0.10, α = 0.72). Teachers observed that children ask more questions during play-based activities (mean = 3.24), explore new materials and ideas (mean = 3.20), engage in hands-on discovery (mean = 3.06), and connect new experiences with prior knowledge (mean = 3.04). Improved Self-Expression and Confidence recorded a mean of 3.10 (SD = 0.08, α = 0.71), indicating that play-based learning helps shy children participate actively (mean = 3.20), express themselves confidently through creative activities (mean = 3.12), share ideas willingly (mean = 3.07), and demonstrate confidence during tasks (mean = 3.02). Finally, Cultural Relevance and Age-Appropriate Contextual Learning had a mean of 3.06 (SD = 0.05, α = 0.70), showing that play activities incorporating local games, songs, and stories allow children to connect learning with everyday experiences (mean = 3.08) and express creativity through culturally relevant materials (mean = 3.04–3.12). The overall mean of 3.13 indicates that teachers generally agree that play-based learning positively influences the development of creativity among pre-primary children in Abuja. The small standard deviations across factors suggest consistency in responses, while the Cronbach's alpha values (0.70–0.85) demonstrate that the questionnaire items are reliable for measuring the construct of creativity.

Research Hypothesis: There is no significant difference on teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling on the basis of gender.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-value of the teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling on the basis of gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	109	81.18	9.58	358	7.41*	1.96	0.02
Female	251	89.16	13.03				

*Significant, p<0.05

Table 2 shows a calculated t-value of 7.41, critical t-value of 1.96 and a p-value of 0.02. Since the calculated p-value of 0.02 is less than the alpha p-value at 0.05, the hypothesis was rejected. Hence, there was a significant difference of the influence of play-based learning on the development of creativity among pre-primary school children in FCT, Abuja on the basis of gender as expressed by teachers. The results present the mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results comparing the influence of play-based learning on the development of creativity among pre-primary school children in FCT, Abuja, based on gender. A total of 360 teachers participated, with 109 males and 251 females. Male teachers had a mean score of 81.18 with a standard deviation of 9.58, while female teachers had a higher mean of 89.16 with a standard deviation of 13.03. The calculated t-value (t = 7.41) is greater than the critical t-value (t = 1.96) at 358 degrees of freedom, and the p-value = 0.01, which is less than 0.05. in the findings of the study, the difference in mean scores between male and female teachers on the influence of play-based learning on the development of creativity on the learners is statistically significant. Female teachers scored higher than male teachers, suggesting that play-based learning had a stronger influence on the development of creativity among female pre-primary school children compared to their male counterparts.

Discussion of Findings

The study employed a descriptive survey design to examine teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling. A total of 360 pre-primary school teachers participated, selected through a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure representation across area councils and schools. Analysis of the data showed that play-based learning positively influences the development of creativity among pre-primary school children. Table 1 revealed that teachers consistently agreed that play-based learning fosters imagination and originality, encourages social creativity, stimulates curiosity and exploration, promotes self-expression and confidence, and incorporates cultural relevance and contextual learning.

Gender-based analysis (Table 2) revealed a significant difference in teachers' perception of play-based learning on creativity and childhood development in pre-primary education in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: implication for guidance and counselling. Female teachers reported a higher mean score (89.16) compared to male teachers (81.18), with a calculated t-value of 7.41 exceeding the critical t-value of 1.96 and a p-value of 0.02 (<0.05). This indicates that play-based learning had a stronger influence on the development of creativity in children when facilitated by female teachers. The results suggest that gender may play a role in how teachers implement play-based strategies and the effectiveness of these strategies on learner creativity.

In support of the above, gender significantly influences play and creativity through societal stereotypes, socialisation, and environmental factors. While inherent creative ability shows little difference, children often gravitate toward gendered play (e.g., boys in active, spatial play; girls in creative, expressive activities) which dictates how they develop creative skills, though these differences are decreasing over time.

In support of the findings of this study, Van de., Vermeir and Pandelaere, (2012) opined that due to biological and sociological factors, men and woman are different and these differences show early in life. Examining children's behaviour will provide a deeper understanding of the constitution of these gender differences. Gender inequalities still exist when it comes to awarding creative abilities, we find that seven- to nine-year-old girls outperform boys of the same age in two divergent creativity tasks, except for the elaboration measure of these tasks. We find no differences in convergent creativity. In addition, we find that mothers and fathers also evaluate girls as more creative than boys. Because playing is an important aspect of children's developmental process. Boys in comparison to girls have a better aptitude for playing with Lego, cars, action figures etc. Girls in comparison to boys on the other hand have a better aptitude toward crafting, drawing, coloring, painting, making music etc. their study reveals that the toys and games girls evaluated positively are in fact found to be the. most conducive to creative expression. We also show that children's toy and game attitudes are consistent with parents' measures of the actual play frequency of their children regarding these toys or games: The implications 'of these findings are interesting 'in regard to the way gender prejudices might be shifting. Since parents are well-aware of-the fact that girls may be more creative than boys and like other play activities, we believe girls nowadays might be stimulated more by their parents and environment to break through certain stereotypical influences.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that play-based learning is an effective approach for nurturing creativity among pre-primary school children in Abuja, supporting imaginative thinking, collaborative skills, and culturally meaningful learning experiences. These results underscore the importance of teacher involvement, gender considerations, and culturally relevant materials in designing early childhood education programs.

In line with the findings of this study, Ekeh (2023) carried out a study in Owerri Education Zone, Imo State explored how various forms of play-based pedagogy affect creativity among preschool and early grade learners. The study found that when teachers engage in professional development programmes that expose them to modern play-based pedagogies, learners' creative skills increased. However, one challenge observed was low depth of understanding by teachers of diverse "21st-century play-based pedagogies.

This supports the hypothesis that integrating play into educational settings enhances creative thinking in preschool children, highlighting the value of play-based approaches in early education. Riska, Khairi and RatihIrma (2025). The Role of Play Based Learning in Early Childhood Development. this study investigates how play-based learning activities improve the cognitive and social along with emotional and physical development of early childhood students. The research design uses both interviews with teachers and parents as well as direct observation to explore

how play-based learning activities help develop every aspect of development. The research indicates that through play children become better at learning new information while also developing creativity skills and critical thinking abilities as well as social and emotional competencies through empathy and emotional control and they are able to learn physically through better motor skills. The research study delivers practical solutions for implementing play in scheduled curriculum alongside key implementation strategies for resolving related problems.

Wilhelmina, Nelly and Nkechinyere (2020), play strategies and creativity development among preschoolers in obio-akpor local government area of rivers state. Results showed that there was significant relationship between play strategies and creativity development. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made, that caregivers should use structured play in instructional delivery of the learning process to encourage creativity among preschoolers and educationist and caregivers in early childhood education centers should embrace the use of unstructured play as an instruction delivery strategy to make learning fun and interesting for the children for creativity development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that play-based learning is a powerful and developmentally appropriate pedagogy that significantly enhances creativity and holistic development among pre-primary school children in FCT, Abuja. Teachers' responses revealed that play-based learning fosters imagination, originality, curiosity, social creativity, self-expression, confidence, and culturally relevant learning experiences. The overall findings affirm that children learn best when actively engaged in meaningful play that reflects their real-life contexts and natural curiosity. The significant gender difference observed suggests that teacher characteristics may influence the effectiveness of play-based strategies, highlighting the need for targeted professional development. Consistent with existing literature and national policy provisions, the study underscores play as not merely recreational but a vital medium for nurturing creative potential, emotional balance, and lifelong learning skills. Therefore, greater integration of play-based learning into pre-primary classrooms, supported by guidance and counselling practices, is essential for optimizing early childhood education outcomes in Nigeria.

Implications for Guidance and Counselling

The findings imply that play-based learning provides guidance and counselling practitioners with an effective, child-centred framework for identifying and supporting children's creative, social, and emotional development in pre-primary education. Through play observation, counsellors can assess children's needs, strengths, and behavioural challenges in a non-threatening manner and implement early interventions. Play-based activities also enhance collaboration between counsellors and teachers in promoting self-expression, confidence, and positive peer relationships. Furthermore, the results underscore the need for counsellor-led advocacy, teacher support, and parental sensitisation to strengthen the integration of play-based learning for holistic child development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Pre-primary school teachers should consistently integrate play-based learning into classroom instruction to enhance children's creativity, self-expression, and holistic development.

1. Guidance counsellors should collaborate with teachers to use play as a tool for early identification of children's emotional, social, and developmental needs and for timely intervention.
2. Government and education stakeholders should organise regular training and professional development programmes to equip teachers and counsellors with practical skills in play-based pedagogy.
3. School administrators should provide adequate play materials and create safe, stimulating, and culturally relevant play environments in pre-primary schools.
4. Parents should be sensitised by counsellors and schools on the educational value of play to encourage continuity of play-based learning at home.

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