

Evaluation of Strategies for Enhanced Use of Socio-Cultural Activities on Quality Pre-Academic Skills in Kakamega South Sub – County, Kenya

Jesca B.M. Musungu^{1*}, John Ng'asike², Specia Akello³, Anne Muiru⁴

^{1*,2,3,4}School of Education, Mount Kenya University (MKU)

DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.06.2019.p9072

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.06.2019.p9072>

Abstract- Social interaction between children and more knowledgeable members of society is essential for children to acquire ways of thinking and behaving. Although socio-cultural activities enhance learning in pre-school children, some teachers and parents in Kakamega South Sub-County have not embraced them in relevant learning areas such as language, poetry, outdoor activities and mathematics. This study aimed at establishing the influence between socio-cultural activities and pre-academic skills among ECDE learners in Kakamega South Sub-County. The specific objectives were: to determine the main socio-cultural activities affecting pre-academic learners and to evaluate existing strategies used to improve the use of socio-cultural activities for quality pre-academic skills. The study focused on learning theory of Albert Bandura and social cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky. Descriptive survey design was employed with a sample size of 384 respondents. Simple random sampling was applied to the stratified samples to identify respondents among pre-school teachers and learners. The data collection instruments included questionnaires, interview schedules, key informants interviews and FGDs. Data analyses were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics by employing SPSS. The results obtained reveal that the main socio-cultural activities affecting attainment of pre-school academic skills include dances (18%), marriage ceremonies (17%), drama (17%), music festivals (16 %) and singing games (16%). The study identified planning socio-cultural activities outside school programmes (42%) and sensitizing communities on pre-school education (16%) as the main strategies needed for improving the quality of pre-academic skills in Kakamega south sub county. The findings of this study contribute to knowledge in addition to guiding teachers, parents and the Ministry of Education (MOE) in pre-school curriculum review at both County and National levels. These results will further be used to enhance nurturing of pre-school learners in Kakamega South Sub-County.

Index Terms- Pre-school learners, learning areas, social interaction, children activities, moral behaviour

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is categorized as a system that controls social values in young children, adults and the aged and is transferred from one generation to another after it has been translated into

symbols (Manali, 2011). Socio-cultural aspects like storytelling, music, folktales and play are believed to form a strong foundation to societal behaviours. Reflective practices help in learning, developing and managing desirable and undesirable attitudes (Maffini 2012) where parents, teachers and guardians intervene directly to help children behave positively. Children who grow in alcoholic families and maintain their families' celebrations and rituals are less likely to become alcoholics themselves. However, those who grow up with an alcoholic parent who does not maintain tradition are likely to become alcoholics. Wise parents provide children with a variety of outlets so that they develop many skills (Brooks, 2004).

Use of folktales was a method that helped children learn safety and instilled fear in children from the environment they interact with hence improving their ability to think and make judgment (Boudinot, 2005). Goodman (2006) posits that social culture holds many different habits within a group of people. It is important to remember in connection with socialization that there is considerable reciprocity between those who socialize and those who are being socialized (Koller & Richie, 1978). During the early childhood years of development children need to lay foundation on understanding ideas which strengthen communication skills and language such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading and promotes sharing of knowledge learned Wright and Nueman (2009). It is during this growth stage that children expand their skills by engaging the immediate family, educators and peers on diverse aspects within the surrounding environments.

Students who acquire vocabulary skills find it easy to cope with early years education and primary education when given the opportunity to explore more complicated ideas, relationships, behaviours and emotions (Wright & Nueman, 2012). Formulating a sense of social competence is vital in a young child's development (Han & Kemple, 2006). Young children may face difficulty in acquiring social skills if they delay in conceptualizing communication skills. Low socio-economic environments and lack of experiences with text are responsible for the disparity in literacy of young children today (Wright & Nueman, 2009).

Use of play activities, particularly those with articulation of sounds, increases the child's exposure to phonetic concepts (Pepper and Weitzman, 2004). Parents and teachers prepare the child's vocabulary through diverse ways. Children can be encouraged to interact with letters, sounds, and words through;

flash-cards, letter cards, sounds of animals, modeling letters, letter cut-outs and letter puzzles. This study sought to understand how children express their feelings while taking part in socio-cultural activities for enhanced quality pre-academic skills in Kakamega South Sub – County, Kenya.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Area

The study site covered areas inhabited by Idakho's, Maragoli, Tiriki and some Isukha ethnic groups of Kenya. These groups have diverse socio-cultural activities such as bull fighting, brewing and circumcision. Kakamega South Sub – county has two divisions namely South Ikolomani and North Ikolomani divisions. The study area was located in Kakamega south sub-county of Kakamega County, Kenya.

2.2 Research Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted while focusing on children in pre – schools in Kakamega South Sub – county (Carter & Douglas, 1954). Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to collect data. The research instruments involved the use of questionnaire, focus group discussions (FGDs) and interview guides and the data collected were analyzed using both inferential statistics and descriptive methods by employing the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

2.2.1 Sampling procedure

The target population comprised both public and private ECD centers, teachers and parents in Kakamega South Sub – county. There were a total of 109 ECD centers of which 79 were public and 30 were private schools. The ECD centers in Kakamega south sub-county had 308 teachers. The study area was divided into two strata (south and north divisions). Subsequently, simple random sampling was used to select samples from all other categories. To identify samples in each category, papers representing each category were folded put in a container and thoroughly mixed. Then four public pre-schools and two private pre-schools were picked in each division. The teachers and pre-school learners were sampled in the same way considering gender (Ligeve & Poipoi 2012).

2.2.2 Sample size

Since the study used a descriptive survey research design, a sample size of 10% (Gay, 1981) was identified from each of the categories observed. In order to determine the actual samples for each category simple random sampling was used. The target population for ECDE learners was above 10,000. The sample size was obtained using the following formula (Muganda & Mugenda, 2003):

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:

n = the desired sample size (if the target population is greater than 10,000)

z = the standard normal deviation at the required confidence level

p = the proportion in the target population estimated to have

Characteristics being measured

$q = 1-p$

d = the level of statistical significance set

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.50)(0.50)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 384 \text{ respondents}$$

The sample size for each category is as shown in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Sample size for ECDE categories

Category	Sample size
Key informant-Sub county ECDE director (1)	1
Parents	4 (per school)
Private ECDE Schools (30)	3 (10%)
Public ECDE Schools (83)	8 (10%)
ECDE Teachers (308)	31 (10%)
ECDE Learners (10,000)	384 (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003)

2.2.3 Research Instruments

The study used the following research instruments; questionnaires were used since they can be administered to many respondents at the same time in addition to accumulating a large amount of data (Orodho, 2009). The instruments were administered to teachers while focus group discussions (FGDs) were administered to parents using an interview guide. Interview schedules were used on pre-school learners and some of the pre-academic skills were observed in the field. Document analysis was done after collecting quantitative data. Information collected from all the groups was treated with confidentiality.

2.3 Data collection procedure

Questionnaires were administered to the respondents in the field by the researcher. On the otherhand, interviews were carried out through interview guides to collect data from the learners. Where interview schedules were not applicable, the researcher requested the E.C.D.E teachers to use observation schedules to collect data as they took part in the socio-cultural aspects (storytelling, folktales, music and play). The study sought consent from the respective respondents including teachers, parents and other stakeholders who were assured that the exercise was voluntary and a respondent was free to withdraw from it at any time and stage. However, for pre-school learners who are minors permission was sought from their parents, guardians or teachers before administering the questionnaires and interviews to them. The researcher acknowledged all work cited in the current study (Creswell, 2002). All information collected was treated with confidentiality. The researcher organized focus group discussions (FGDs) which had respondents from different

categories (teachers, parents, education officers) and collected data on the influence of socio-cultural activities on pre-academic skills among E.C.D.E learners. The key informants (E.C.D.E Officers) gave their views on the questionnaires given.

2.3.1 Validity of Research Instruments

Validity refers to the precision and relevance of inferences obtained using the research instruments. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) assert that experienced researchers should be involved in establishing the applicability of research tools. The results obtained using the instruments were examined by experts who advised the researcher accordingly on how to improve the instruments before commencing with the study. This ensured that accurate and representative field data focusing on the research variables was collected.

2.3.2 Reliability of Research Instruments

Reliability is the measure of the level to which a research instrument gives consistent results after carrying out repeated trials (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). To enhance the accuracy of instruments, the questionnaire, interview guide, focus group discussions guide and observation checklist were pre-tested on a representative small sample in Lurambi Sub-County. The split-half method was used for reliability test. The study piloted in a few pre – schools which were not included in the piloting programme.

The study interviewed children aged (3 – 6) years, teachers and parents. This exercise offered an opportunity to make necessary adjustments and include the respondents concerns. The results from the pre-test study were used to calculate the Pearson’s coefficient of correlation the value obtained ($r > 0.65$) was within acceptable levels.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data collected. Descriptive methods included use of mean standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. These were done using the SPSS statistical software package.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics had direct impact on the study, to the extent that they helped to understand the level of children participation in socio-cultural activities and how these activities affected the children’s performances. Healy (2000) posits that demographic data are obtained from the respondents’

aid in understanding sample characteristics in addition to establishing the representativeness of the target population. The demographic characteristics considered included age, gender and level of education. All these are discussed in the following sections.

3.1.1 Distribution of respondents by gender

This study aimed at establishing how gender was distributed among the respondents. The data was analyzed and presented as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Gender distribution of respondents

Category of respondents	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
ECDE learners	180	47%	204	53%
Parents	16	36%	28	64%
Teachers	12	39%	19	61%
Total	208		251	

The results show that there were 47% (180) male ECDE learners and 53% (204) female ECDE respondents, then 36% (16) male parents and 64% (28) Female parents. The results further show that there were 39% (12) male teachers and 61% (19) female teachers. The gender disparity in this study is in favour of female except for the ECDE learner’s category. The results show that the number female gender was dominant in this research and this disagrees with Dorsey (1989) findings that there is poor female gender representation in the teaching profession because women have generally lower qualification than men when it comes to the recruitment of teachers.

It is argued that occasionally teacher’s gender may affect the child’s performance (Smith, 2004). Communications between the teacher and the pupil could be influenced and shaped by teacher’s gender (Dee, 2004), consequently the teacher acts as a gender-specific role-model, despite his or her actions under learning circumstances. Dee (2004) in a study that correlated teacher gender and child performance affirmed the large effects of teacher’s gender on student’s test performance.

3.1.2 Distribution of the Respondents by age

The study focused on the age of the ECDE learners. Results from the analyzed data are presented in Figure 3.1.

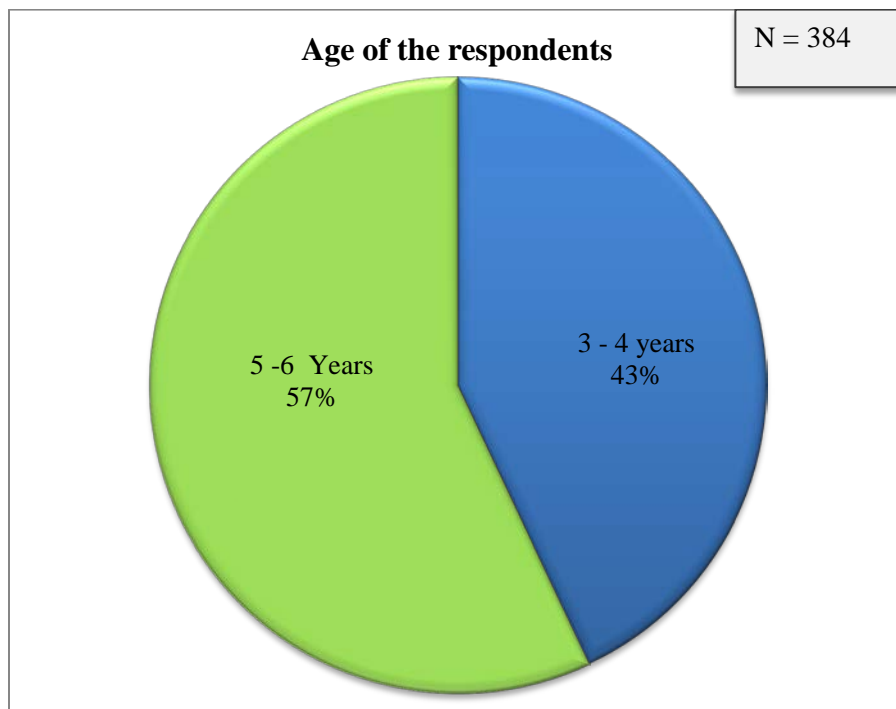


Figure 3. 1: Age distribution of the respondents

These results reveal that respondents in this category were between the ages of 3 – 6 years. The learners between the age bracket 3 – 4 years were 43% (165) and 57% (218) were between 5-6 years.

3.1.4 Academic qualification

The academic qualification of teachers in this research was analyzed and presented as shown in Figure 3.2.

3.1.3 Teachers teaching experience

This section sought to establish the level of teacher’s experience. The results in Table 3.2 indicate that 11% (4) had acquired 3 to 4 years of teaching experience, 26% (9) had 5 to 6 years of teaching experience while 63% (18) had 7 years and above respectively. The research shows that teachers had good experience to handle the curriculum and helping the students towards working hard in class. The teachers experience has a direct impact on the learners’ performance.

Table 3.2: Distribution of teachers working experience

Teachers working Experience		
	Frequency	Percentage
3-4 years	4	11%
5-6 years	9	26%
7 years and above	18	63%
Total	31	100%

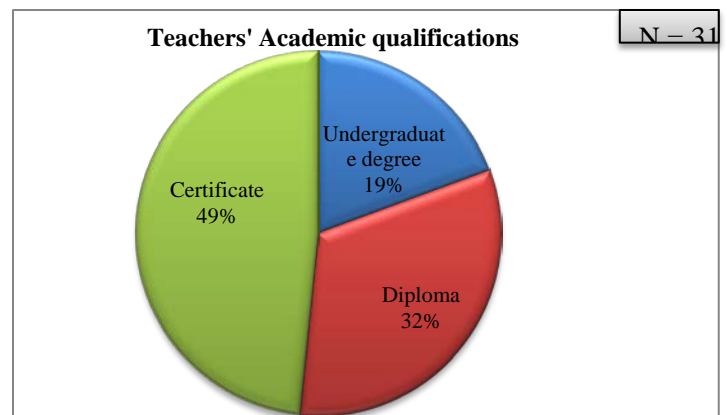


Figure 3. 2: Academic qualification of ECDE teachers

Stringfield & Teddlie, (1991), found out that the attributes of experienced teachers include having good background of experience in addition to the ability to contribute insight and ideas in teaching and learning, coupled with openness to correction and self-regulation in classroom. Furthermore, experienced teachers are known to be flexible and can capture the attention of varying categories of learners with different capabilities.

The results show that 19% (6) teachers had an undergraduate degree, while 32% (10) had a Diploma level. The results further shows that 49% (15) had a certificate level. The results show that the teachers had the required qualifications to train the pre-school learners. The teachers’ qualification was directly proportional to learners’ good performance. These findings agree with Maundu (1986) who pointed out there exist a

significant relationship between teacher qualifications and pupil performance in KCPE in Kenya. There is a clear link between good performance and qualified teachers in addition to resources availability in learning institutions. Akinsolu (2010) affirms that the learner is able to acquire more pre-academic skills when exposed to highly experienced teachers.

3.1.5 Learners Education Level

Age of the respondents was determined through the questionnaire where they were asked to indicate their ages. The study revealed that 4% (15) were in pre-care, 25% (96) of the children were in baby class, 34% (65) were in pre-unit while 37% (131) were in middle class, which reflects their education level. This middle pre-unit class at 37% is the age that was observed to be highly involved in play activities, therefore the age allows greater opportunity for language acquisition (Pepper and Weitzman, 2004). Education is key to achieving sustainable development while at the same time is responsible for harnessing attitudes and behaviours. In the spirit of the Hyogo framework for action (2005), governments and civic society were encouraged to use education in facilitating knowledge and innovation which would strengthen resilience in achieving different goals.

3.2 Observation Checklist showing how the learners responded on socio-cultural aspects.

Some of the respondents (ECDE learners) could not give answers to the interview schedule used; therefore observation checklist was used to capture the data (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Socio-Cultural aspects that learners are involved in

Aspects of socio-cultural activities	No. of learners involved	Percentage (%)
Proverbs	8	4
Play	101	53
Folktale	6	3
Storytelling	10	5
Riddles	8	4
Singing games	29	15
Music	15	8
Rhythm	6	3
Drama	10	5
Total	193	100

The study indicated that ECDE learners 101 (53%) interacted with their environment through play whether simple or complex. A study by Pepper and Weitzman, 2004 cites that it is during play that children discover their interests, acquire cognitive motor, speech, language and social emotional skills. The study observed that children when given freedom, they get involved in play that may either be simple or complex structured or unstructured. Within the play other aspects of socio cultural activities would be realized and are accompanied with a set of rules. Therefore the growth of language and cognitive skills are

realized which leads to complex imaginary play. This makes the children develop from make-up believe play to cooperative play (Pepper and Weitzman, 2004). Examples of songs within the play are as follows:

“Ndiegu yatsia khusuma yima mwana
 mwana yasia khusuma yima Ndiegu
 Ndiegu baba ukhaliranga guu
 tsunu tsunu tsunu”

(Ndiegu is a father who looked for food and denied the child to have some but when the child got some food, he denied the father too. The father started crying. The child questioned why the father should cry yet he/she learned from him).

Riddle:

“Esiomika Nisinyala!”
(What is at hand should be functional)

Children appreciate their social cultural activities and others from the nearby culture which creates an enjoyable learning environment. This is enhanced when children interact with the elders who are knowledgeable and rich in socio-cultural aspects (Bredenkamp & couple, 1981) for example:

A child question: Prikicho
 The rest: Bandura; Nikuje?
 The child’s answer: Hapana
 The rest: Nikuje?
 The Child: Ndio.

(The researcher observed that one of the learners lay down his/her face facing downwards then starts calling “Prikicho” and the rest respond “bandura” as they are seen hiding until the child responds “Ndio” the child starts to search for them)

One of the parents from FGD had this to say:

My children may be exposed to the social cultural activities because they can learn and grow in their societies once they get a good understanding of their social interactions. They also learn one another’s activities and understand them; this promotes intercommunity cohesion and unity.

3.3 Socio- cultural activities affecting pre-academic learners

The study sought to establish the socio-cultural activities affecting pre-academic learners in Kakamega south Sub-County. The respondents who comprised of teachers, parents and pre-school learners were asked to list socio-cultural activities, which take place around children’s environment and call for their participation in Kakamega south Sub-County. The results were analyzed and presented in each respondents category; teachers, parents and students.

3.3.1 Teachers response

The response from teachers on the socio-cultural activities were analyzed and results presented in Figure 3.3.

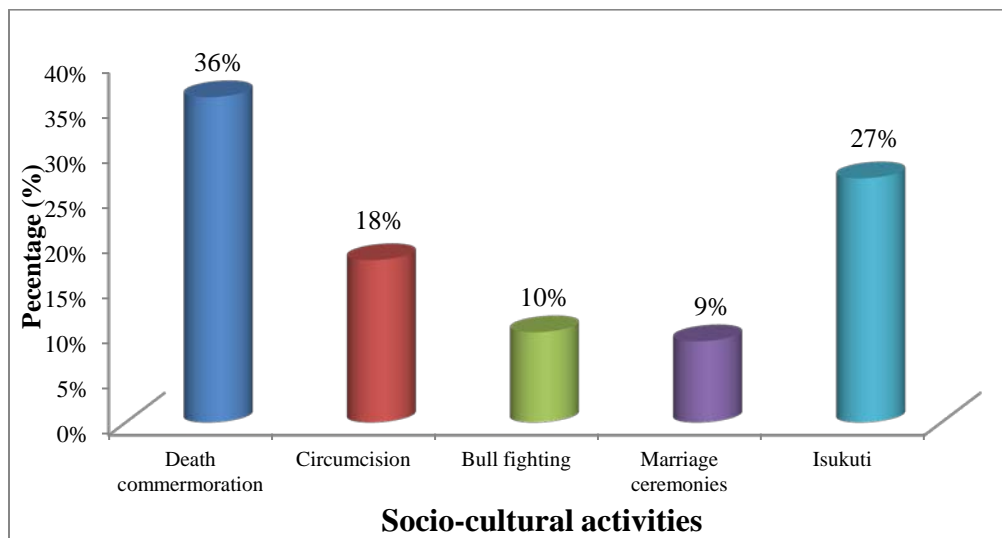


Figure 3.3: Socio-cultural activities from teachers' response

The results show that according to the teachers, the socio-cultural activities included death commemoration 36% (11), Isukuti dance 27% (8), circumcision ceremonies 18% (6), bull fighting 10% (3) while marriage ceremonies were at 9% (3) respectively. This response reflects the socio-cultural activities which take place in Kakamega South-Sub County; these events affect pre-school learners in one way or the other depending on the interactions. The strength of social interaction and the authentic cultural experiences for children has been strongly emphasized Vygotsky (1978). In the theory of development,

children's growth may be determined through biological growth patterns in addition to culture and individual experiences. Studies have shown that cognitive development Sowers, (2000) does not occur in isolation particularly for the child.

3.3.2 Parents response

The parents' response on the socio-cultural activities were analyzed and presented as shown in the Figure 3.4 below.

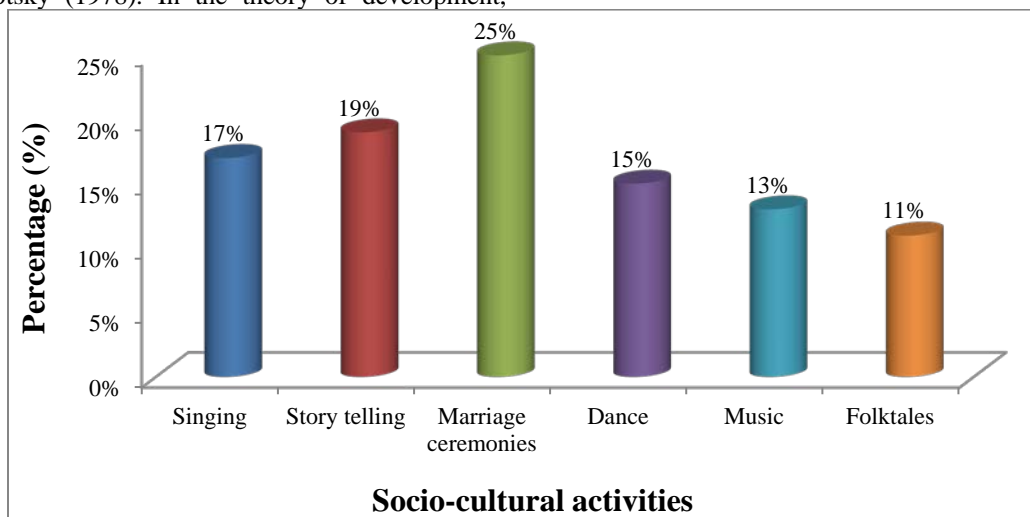


Figure 3.4: Showing socio-cultural activities from parents' response

The results show that there were a number of socio-cultural activities which take place around children in Kakamega South Sub-County. It was revealed that contribution of socio-cultural activities vary with marriage/wedding ceremonies leading with 25% (11), storytelling 19% (8), singing games 17% (7), folktales 11% (4), music festivals 13% (6) while isukuti dance contributes 15% (7) respectively. Parents' responses introduced an important socio-cultural feature of storytelling. Folk-tales are well formulated and shared therefore they enhance the learning process. A Common version entails characters—human or animal—partaking in a story with a good opening

statement, climax, and end. A good song requires involvement of the audience through a chorus, quite often choruses require group activities which may include rhythmic clapping, cock fighting, dancing and teasing each other. The end is usually a moral puzzle for the learners to solve, in addition to promoting moral judgment while developing moral standing (Vitz, 1990). To motivate children the stories must leave them in suspense however, if familiar with the storyline, allow them participate through group audience and activities. Children should be guided on how to pay attention in addition to following instruction while

allowing them to actively participate in the learning process (Abdi, 2007; Kadodo, 2011).

3.3.3 ECD learners response

The ECDE learners were asked to indicate the socio-cultural activities in which they participate. The responses in Figure 3.5 indicated that children participation in kids play was

rated at 25% (96), storytelling 19% (73), singing games 17% (65), folktales 11% (42), Christmas dramas 13% (50) respectively. The results further reveal that participation of children in choir was 15% (50). After they have interacted for a length of time, they have a great influence on behaviour and language skills (Bredekamp and Couple, 1981).

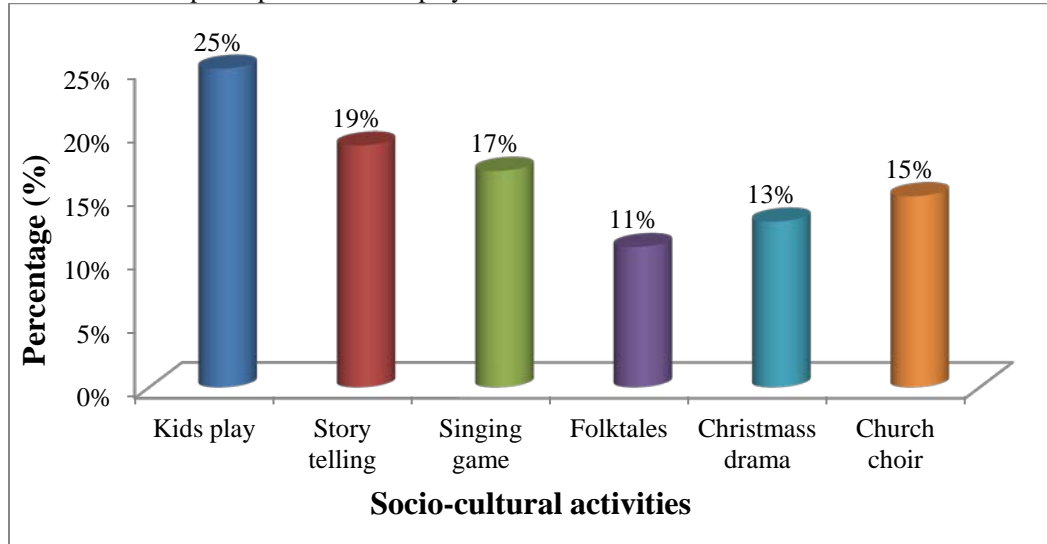


Figure 3.5: Socio-cultural activities from Children's' response

The study revealed that these activities help socialize children and integrate them in the society. According to Manali (2011), culture as a social control that makes people shape their standards and behavior. Cultural values influence one's principles and philosophies and form the founding principles of life. Culture is a link between people and their value systems which explains its importance. The values and traditions of one society might vary with those of another society.

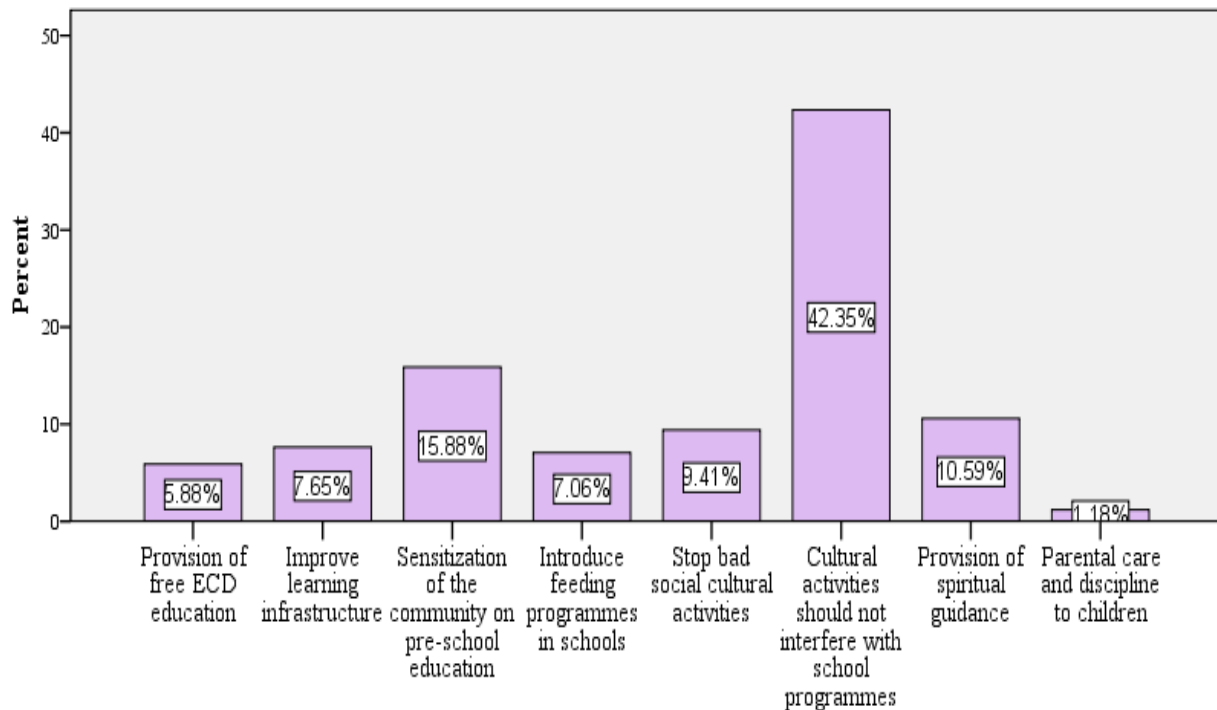
3.4 Strategies used to improve pre-academic skills in learning situations

The findings in previous sections have shown that socio-cultural activities have influences on pre-academic skills of early learners. The data obtained from teachers and parents on strategies used to improve pre-academic skills was analyzed presented in the following sections.

3.4.1 Parents response

The parent respondents suggested various strategies which would help minimize the negative effects of socio-cultural

activities on pre-school children as presented in the Figure 3.5. Parents suggested that socio-cultural activities like circumcision should be rescheduled in order to avoid interference with school programmes, 42% (18), sensitization of the community on pre-school education 16% (7), provision of spiritual guidance 11% (4), improvement of learning infrastructure in ECDE 8% (3) and provision of free ECD education, 6% (3), would attract more pre-school children to school. In an FGD, a parent reported that: Some socio-cultural activities are scheduled in a way that they affect the normal schooling programmes. Activities like circumcision ceremonies go beyond scheduled time thereby interfering with schooling of pre-school children whose families are directly involved. Bull fighting activities too affect schooling by resulting in injuries and drawing children attention from school to such activities. It also causes parents to divert their financial commitment from school fees to betting games during bull fighting.



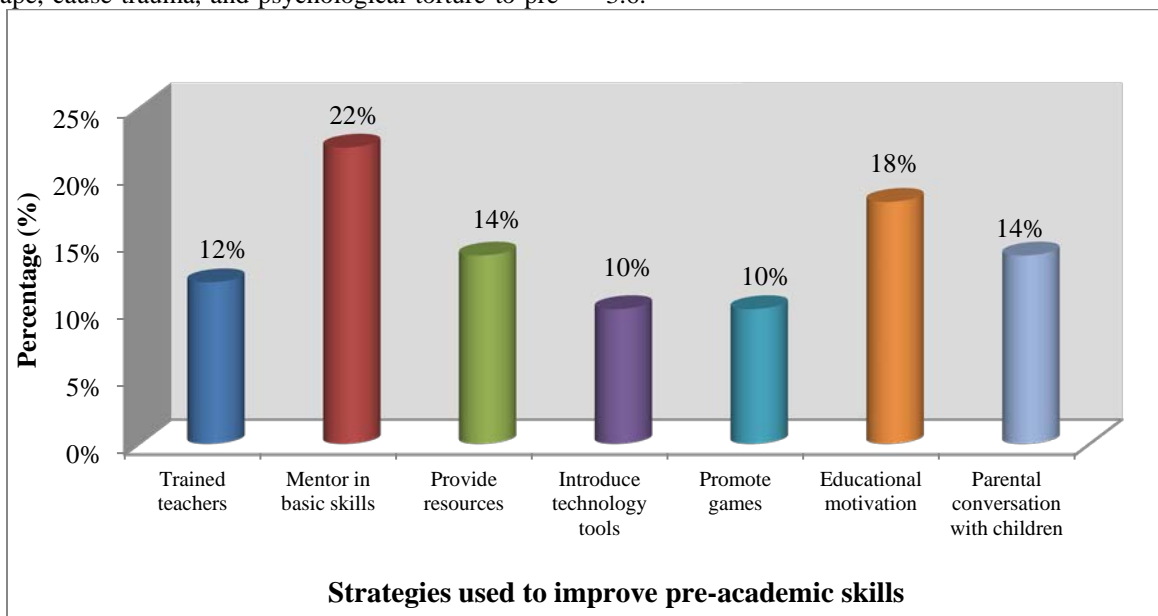
Strategies to be put in place to improve the learning of children in future
Figure 3.5: Strategies to improve ECDE learning in Kakamega South Sub-County, Kenya

Possible strategies to avoid interfering with school programmes could involve restricting some of these activities to take place outside the school calendar. Community awareness on pre-school learning needs to be encouraged. On the other hand, the socio-cultural activities which are retrogressive should be stopped. Alcohol brewing and local community dances influence chances of rape, cause trauma, and psychological torture to pre-

school children, causing school dropout and poor school enrolment.

3.4.2 Teachers responses

The teachers' responses on the strategies used to improve pre-academic skills in learning situations are presented in Figure 3.6.



Strategies used to improve pre-academic skills
Figure 3.6: Strategies used to improve pre-academic skills

The results show that teachers recommended various strategies including; mentoring basic skills 22% (7), education motivation 18% (6), encourage parental communication with children 14% (4), provision of learning resources 14% (4), deployment of trained ECDE teachers 12% (3), introducing children to technology tools 10% (3), and promoting individual and group games for children 10% (3) respectively.

The strategies presented by teachers are linked towards parent-child close relationship, teacher professional approach and resource mobilization. Parents and teachers are among the first interventionists Ramey & Ramey (2004) in cases of delayed infants and young children development. Teachers have initial responsibility to identify resources needed to promote learning and building confidence among learners as well as providing support groups for the parents and children.

Downs *et al.* (2007) discuss the results of a study that focused its teaching on teaching methods for learners that have development disabilities. Their findings indicate that many children that have been exposed to a variety of teaching methods have shown positive results and have posed higher achievement. The key methods identified include strategies where children interact with their peers, modeling activities and intermittent reinforcement. Such methods if adopted need to be implemented to enhance conformity and regularity. However, it is a difficult job for both educators and parents since proper training is required to implement these teaching strategies. Children have different and unique learning abilities and educators have a responsibility to handle them cautiously to avoid disadvantaging slow learners (Downs *et al.*, 2007), likewise caregivers and parents should be able to keep this in mind when implementing the intervention strategies. Many young children are naturally curious about scientific information and at the time when they join pre-schools they already have acquired investigative and problem solving skills. Those who take part in exploration and experimental activities develop skills that are important for further learning and particularly in reading and science. Currently young children actively participate in scientific technology which is important for their future acquiring of pre academic and social skills.

It is common for pre-schoolers to get involved in interactive games on smart phone and laptop, the technology has advanced very fast in the world today. Presently the world of smart phones, laptops, computers and iPads is normal life used to introduce children to science language and scientific information and skills. According to Wright and Nueman (2009), it is during early years in life that young children build their foundation of understanding scientific content as they interact and develop communication skills and language skills. This is the time when they eagerly question the way everything works. If given an environment that is supportive they engage in language activities, mathematical practices, exploration and experiments.

When pre-scholars are encouraged to sing children songs and singing games that have sounds it speeds up the phonological awareness (Wright & Nueman, 2009). Normally teachers and parents who use alphabetical principle and help the children to sound out letters always help the child acquire phonological awareness. There are many ways that can be used to help children practice phonological awareness and alphabetic principle such as modeling letters, flash cards and letter puzzles.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results indicate that there are several socio-cultural activities which take place in Kakamega South Sub-County within which socio-cultural aspects are found. Children engage in a number of activities within a plethora of diverse interactions among age mates and families with both rural and urban experiences. The most common socio-cultural activities practiced are; wedding ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, singing games, folktales within which storytelling, drama, kids play, folktales, music, and dance are expressed. These socio-cultural activities which children interact with identify with their culture.

The results further show that there must be coordinated efforts between the parents and teachers, who are the first people in a pre-school child's life. Parents are required to share and communicate with children, encourage them to play together and make new friends. The world of today has gone digital and children aspire to acquire scientific information early in their lives and this should be an advantage to introduce technology to them.

Based on the findings obtained from the analysis it is recommended that parents and teachers should be at the fore front in helping children understand the role of socio-cultural activities in enhancing pre-academic skills. Consequently teachers should be encouraged to embrace socio-cultural activities in the learning process as indicated in the syllabus and try to elaborate on what happens during certain occasions in comparison with neighbouring communities' culture.

The teachers' body needs to develop a strong guiding and counselling unit to help learners understand why socio-cultural activities are important and assist them achieve their cognitive skills when it comes to mental development. This helps in building future knowledge on socio-cultural activities from neighbouring communities.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Jesca B.M. Musungu, School of Education, Mount Kenya University (MKU), Corresponding Author: jescamusungu@yahoo.com

Second Author – John Ng'asike, School of Education, Mount Kenya University (MKU)

Third Author – Specia Akello, School of Education, Mount Kenya University (MKU)

Fourth Author – Anne Muiru, School of Education, Mount Kenya University (MKU)