

A Study on the Pre-School Teachers' Beliefs about Children's Play at their Pre-school Aged Level

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Abstract

The research was carried on for exploring preschool teachers' beliefs about children's play at their pre-school aged level. Major objective of the study was to investigate preschool teachers' beliefs about children's play at their preschool aged level. All the 2713 primary school teachers, 1773 male and 940 female of district Karak, comprised the population of the study. At the rate of 35% of the population, total 950 teachers consisting 621 male and 329 female teachers were selected through random sampling techniques. The standardized Parent Play Belief Scale (PPBS) of five points Likert's Scale ranging from Disagree =1 to agree = 5 very much was adapted. It was edited and modified keeping in view the local circumstances and was validated through Cronbach alpha and its value was 0.87. Data was analyzed through SPSS. Findings of the study were that male teachers had moderate level of positive beliefs and female teachers had low level of negative beliefs about students' play at preschool aged level. There was significant difference between male and female teachers' beliefs. Findings of this study may suggested the policy makers, curriculum developers and management for giving due attention to boost teachers' beliefs regarding play at preschool aged level.

Keywords: *Play beliefs, Preschool aged children, Primary schools' Teachers*

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Introduction

Primary school teachers have the foundation role in preparing the children for further education. It is their responsibility to provide advantageous practices to the young children enrolled with them for fostering their learning domains and ensuring their optimal development. The basic practice which is considered as the most beneficial for early childhood aged children is their play. Play exists in all civilizations despite the fact that cultural differences are always there, it is considered as inherent and universal activity present in children (Haigh et al, 1999). The phenomena and existence of play can be traced back to ancient times and throughout the world children are engaged in various forms of play (Singer & Singer, 1990) relevant to the prevailing cultures, values and norms of the nation. Play has been declared by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in its Article 31, of the convention of the rights of the child (1989) as the constitutional and basic right of every child. Play is broad and rich in its nature. It can accommodate the diverse needs of children and is different in form over place and time (Eberle, 2014). It is accepted worldwide phenomena and is crucial for optimal learning and development (Frost & Norquist, 2007). Children's play is affected by many factors. Some of the factors support play while some factors become hurdles in children's play. The persons in experiences and lives of children and the kindergarten, preschool and early childhood teachers are some important factors that have certain role in children's play. Teachers are the agent of molding children's lives in a favorable direction. The determination of favorable direction of children starts from their childhood age. This shows the importance of teachers working in the early childhood education and they play the foundation role in preparing children for their future lives. The teachers of early childhood program can create environment and opportunities of play for young children and they are capable to improve the educational value of play (Dako-Gyeke, 2011). The researchers Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers, & Roberts (2000) have stated that research from the last four decades reveals that play is considered by teachers as the important teaching and learning standard. Due importance was given to play and play oriented activities were the core elements in the early childhood classrooms (Bodrova, 2008; Patte, 2010). However, orientation of activities in the classroom are shaped by the teachers' beliefs (Levin, 2015). Activities in the classroom are modified in accordance with the teachers' beliefs about teaching practices.

Literature Review

Play facilitates the building and enhancement of those skills which are needed for survival and adaptation and it has been known as the essential characteristic of human evolution. Its importance has long history in many disciplines (Dupuis & Smith, 2007). Play is the useful learning means for young children. The policy makers concerning early childhood education have accepted the use of practices based on the guidelines and principles of play-based curricula (American Educational Research Association, 2005), as play-based pedagogy is helpful in the optimum development and growth of young children (NAEYC, 2010). Through play the physical development of young children can be augmented. Their creative faculties, social skills, literacy, language and cognitive capabilities can be improved through play. Research considers play as a vital factor of early childhood program because it is helpful in the physical, emotional and social development of children (Calabrese, 2003) and play has the leading role in their development and growth (Malloy & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004, Nagel 2012). Development of friendship among children take place during play and this is maintained by them through cooperative participation by emerging and establishment of trusting relationship among themselves (Hewes & McEwan, 2006; Reed & Brown, 2000; Reed, Brown & Roth, 2000). For children, play in various forms is a vital and unavoidable element (Craig & Dunn, 2007) an adequate time and opportunity for them to play is essential for their vigorous development (International Play Association, 2008). If play opportunities are not provided to the children for the time being, they will later on play longer and in a more energetic way (Mezghani et al., 2022). Play is the critical and primary source for the development of children (Panksepp, 2007). It makes the children able to work in group, enhance the spirit of cooperation in children, recognize others' rights in the form of taking turns and are used to follow the rules and directions (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Through play, emotional and social competence of children can be boosted and their positive self-esteem can be enhanced (Bosacki, Varnish, & Akseer, 2008). Their creativity is restricted if they have insufficient play (Anistasiadou, 2008) and the lack of play cause to hamper the development of their brain (Pellegrinin et al., 2007). The higher-level thought process of children is impeded due to the lack of play (Russ & Schafer, 2006) as cognitive development of children is supported by play (Bosacki et al., 2008). The importance of play in education has also been supported by Parker and Thomsen (2019). According to them playful pedagogies are beneficial to foster the physical, creative, emotional, cognitive and social skills of the children. Allee-

Herndon and Roberts (2020) are of the view that as compared to the educational approaches which are lacking play activities, the holistic development of children is possible by learning through play.

Play in the early childhood enables children to rightly handle their worries. It prepares children to adopt appropriate manners in their adulthood age (Hurwitz, 2003). Through play young children acquire the skill of building strong relationship with their peers (Dunn & Hughes, 2001). It makes children able to know and regard others' perspectives. Play help children in realizing and understanding the effect of their behavior on others (Logue & Harvey, 2010). Children's concepts of good and bad or right and wrong and abstaining violation of rules are developed by play activities (Bauer & Dettore, 1997) while the growing of children's communication and behavioral regulation skills can be optimally developed in their first five years of life (Keenan, 2012).

Play is unavoidable for making children active learners in the classroom. There are three stages of play. In the first stage, the body is physically used for performing any activity. For instance, jumping, hopping and messy play. Such play is referred as embodiment. When the children express themselves by using various media for example, children utilize colors, papers or clay for presenting themselves. This is the second stage of play and is called as projection. The third and the last stage of play is role play. In this stage children usually use various means these may be verbal or non-verbal for developing stories and characters (Jennings, 2017). For this, children can also use various sorts of play as means and manners. Normally, by the age of 7 years, these three stages are completed (Garvey, 1990).

Play is the most suitable way for children's learning. It helps in developing problem-solving capacity of children and enhances their social skills and mind growth (Bailey, 2002). Through play children are likely to be easily adjusted to school settings and their readiness for learning is improved (Ginsburg, 2007). Enhancement of various skills and mind growth of children depends upon the type of play used by teacher for children's benefits. Play exists in various forms like it can be focused or messy, noisy or quiet and social or solitary.

Play and Education

Education experiences through play have been highlighted by the researchers (Zosh et al., 2017) and the quality education in the early childhood age is subject to learning through play (Nilsson et al., 2018).

Play is the source of creating stimulating and happy environment for children in which various opportunities of learning are provided to the children (Smith & Pellegrini, 2023). Research has revealed that absence of play in the daily experiences of children negatively affect their development and learning (Ranz-Smith, 2007; Pankseep, 2007). Due to the provision of fewer opportunities for play to the children in their early childhood, they are not active learners (Miller & Almon, 2009) in the classroom which seriously affects the school system. Consequently, it impacts the economics sustainability of a country (Heckman, 2011).

For provision of play, the teachers teaching to the preschool or play group children are supposed to structure play for them. These teachers can give educational values to the play designed for children. For structuring of play, teachers can aid various activities like color and pattern matching games, jigsaw puzzles etc. and they can also use different materials for play such as clay, water and sand etc; (Skene, K; et al, 2022). Using of materials for play and learning through play by children is only possible if the important stake holders for instance preschool teachers are willing to provide play opportunities to them in their classrooms.

Teachers' willingness regarding provision of play opportunities in the classroom depends upon their beliefs, as educational processes are structured and changed in light of the teachers' beliefs (Tondeur, J. et al; 2017). The belief of teacher is more significant and it determines his/her teaching activities in the classroom. Teachers' practices and use of different teaching activities in the classroom are the practical manifestation of their beliefs (Li ,2012), as beliefs give birth to intention and the intention arises someone's desire to involve in performing certain activity (Wilcox-Heroz & Ward, 2004).

Teachers' beliefs are composed of their personal theories, values, conception, perspectives, opinion, attitude and judgment (Pedersen & Lu, 2003). Research shows that teachers' practices are greatly influenced by their beliefs as compared to their training (Abu-Jabar et al., 2010). Teachers' practices in the classroom can be certainly improved through understanding and studying their beliefs because their teaching performances are shaped through their beliefs (Levin, 2015).It has great impact on learners' outcomes (McMullen et al., 2006). Teachers' beliefs about play provide chances for children to be ready for higher classes in their social, cognitive, emotional, language and physical domains (Vu, Han, & Buell, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine female teachers' beliefs about children's play at their preschool aged level.
2. To investigate male teachers' beliefs regarding children's play at their preschool aged level.
3. To find the difference between beliefs of male and female teachers about the play of preschool aged children.
4. To examine association between teachers' beliefs regarding Personality Support and Academic Focus regarding play of preschool children.

Research questions of the Study

1. What are female teachers' beliefs about children's play at preschool age level?
2. What are male teachers' beliefs about children's play at preschool age level?

Hypotheses of the study

- H₀1: There is no significance difference between the beliefs of male and female teachers?
- H₀2: There is no association between teachers' beliefs regarding Personality Support and Academic Focus

Limitations and delimitations of the study

This study was delimited to the primary school teachers of district Karak of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This district has values, traditions and customs distinct from other areas of the province and the country. So, generalizing findings of this study is its major limitation. Further, this study was delimited to the teachers of public primary schools only. The environment, facilities and teaching activities in public schools are different from that of private schools in the district. So its findings are limited to the public primary school teachers only.

Methodology

Descriptive research design with survey technique was exercised in this study. All the 2713 primary school teachers, 1773 male and 940 female of district Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa comprised the population of the

study. At the rate 35% of the population, total 950 teachers consisting 621 male and 329 female teachers were selected on proportionate basis as respondents of the study through the use of random sampling techniques. All the teachers were teaching to the preschool aged level children having the age between 3.5 years and 5 years in their respective schools. The standardized Parent Play Belief Scale (PPBS) of five points Likert's Scale ranging from Disagree =1 to very much agree =5 (Fogle & Mendez, 2006), was adapted as instrument for collection of data. The instrument was edited and modified keeping in view the local circumstances. After editing and removal of some items of the original instrument, it was validated through Cronbach alpha and its value was 0.87. The instrument has two segments one is about Play Support consist 16 items and the other is regarding Academic Focus containing 8 items. Belief of teachers was categorized according to the means ranges in the following manner presented in table 1.

Table 1
Mean Ranges regarding Level of Teachers' beliefs

Mean ranges		Level of beliefs
From	To	
1.0	1.5	Low Negative beliefs
1.6	2.5	Moderate Negative beliefs
2.6	3.5	Low positive beliefs
3.6	4.5	Moderate positive beliefs
4.6	5.0	High positive beliefs

Data from male teachers was collected partially by the researcher himself and partially through friends. Data from all female teachers was gathered through assistant. After data gathering, its statistical analysis was done through descriptive and inferential of statistics by using SPSS version 2.1. Means and standard deviation were used for investigating teachers' beliefs about play. For finding difference between male and female teachers' beliefs an independent sample t-test was applied. To determine association between personality focus and academic focus beliefs of teachers, Pearson Correlation test was exercised.

Analysis and Findings of the study

Table 2

Responses of male teachers' beliefs regarding children's play about Personality Support at their preschool aged level

Personality Support	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Very Much	Mean
Play can help children to develop their social skills, such as cooperating and making friends.	90	152	177	139	63	2.89
It is important for me to participate in play with my students.	98	107	124	118	174	3.26
I have a lot of fun with my students when we play together.	181	126	123	120	71	2.64
Play can improve children's language and communication abilities.	101	117	129	119	155	3.18
I can teach social skills to my students during play.	188	139	129	121	44	2.51
I can help children learn to control their emotions during play.	187	136	128	126	44	2.52
Playing at pre-school stage will help children get ready for kindergarten.	94	121	164	129	113	3.16
Play can help children's develop better thinking abilities.	101	119	168	139	94	3.00
Playing with my children is one of my favorite things to do.	81	97	168	171	104	3.28
If I take time to play with my children they will be better at playing with other children.	84	99	174	180	84	3.13
The children do not enjoy playing with their teachers.	181	159	144	130	7	2.39

Play helps children learn how to express their feelings.	103	118	174	129	97	2.99
Playing with preschool children is more useful than teaching letters and numbers.	113	117	179	130	82	2.92
Play is a fun activity for children.	110	119	180	124	88	2.94
I do not think children learn important skills by playing.	71	80	172	177	121	3.32
Through play, children develop new skills and abilities.	121	115	180	121	84	2.89

Regarding personality support male teachers have somewhat positive beliefs about children's play at their preschool aged level as except one, in all the items the means of the responses are above the range of 2.5. Only in one item regarding personality support of play, teachers have somewhat negative belief. The items is children's enjoyment of playing with their teachers, as their responses mean is 2.39 and is below the range of 2.5 shown in table 2 above.

Table 3
Responses of female teachers' beliefs regarding children's play about Personality Support at their preschool aged level

Personality Support	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewh at Agree	Agree	Very Much	Mean
Play can help children to develop their social skills, such as cooperating and making friends.	101	99	65	53	11	2.31
It is important for me to participate in play with my students.	107	102	67	39	14	2.24
I have a lot of fun with my students when we play together.	119	105	57	43	5	2.11
Play can improve children's language and communication abilities.	114	107	51	45	12	2.19
I can teach social skills to my students during play.	121	111	51	42	4	2.08

I can help children learn to control their emotions during play.	131	104	55	31	8	2.03
Playing at pre-school stage will help children get ready for kindergarten.	41	79	117	84	7	2.88
Play can help children's develop better thinking abilities.	43	76	118	82	10	2.81
Playing with my children is one of my favorite things to do.	24	68	121	113	3	3.0
If I take time to play with my children they will be better at playing with other children.	121	117	50	30	11	2.0
The children do not enjoy playing with their teachers.	27	71	119	106	6	2.98
Play helps children learn how to express their feelings.	29	74	113	102	11	2.98
Playing with preschool children is more useful than teaching letters and numbers.	105	101	61	52	10	2.27
Play is a fun activity for children.	102	101	56	58	12	1.76 2.98
I do not think children learn important skills by playing.	28	76	112	99	14	
Through play, children develop new skills and abilities.	103	107	59	53	7	2.25

In majority of the items, female teachers have shown somewhat negative beliefs about children's play at their preschool aged level regarding personality support of the children. However, they have somewhat positive beliefs about the items of children's enjoyment of play with their teachers, helpfulness of play for children to express their feelings and learning of important skills by children through play as its means values are above the range of 2.5 presented above in table 3.

Table 4
Responses of male teachers' beliefs regarding children's play about Academic Focus of play at their preschool aged level

Academic Focus	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Very Much	Mean
Play does not help children to learn academic skills like counting or recognizing letters.	181	138	129	96	77	3.40
I would rather read with my students than play together.	91	125	135	167	103	2.98
Play does not influence children's ability to solve problems.	98	132	133	123	135	2.98
It is more important for children to have good academic skills than to play well with other children.	161	153	121	163	23	3.42
Playtime is not a high priority in my school.	64	110	174	182	91	2.80
Reading to children is more worthwhile than plying with them.	168	161	162	117	13	3.66
Children will learn more if they are allowed to play without teachers.	178	163	140	121	19	2.42
Playing at school will help children get ready for next class.	118	114	188	172	29	2.80

Male teachers have shown positive beliefs in all the items except one about children's play regarding the factor of academic focus of play at their preschool aged level. Respondent have expressed negative beliefs only about the item that children will learn more if they are allowed to play without teachers. In this item, the mean of teachers' responses is 2.42 and is below the range of 2.5, shown in table 4 above.

Table 5
Responses of female teachers' beliefs about children's play at their preschool aged level regarding Academic Focus

Academic Focus	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Very Much	Mean
Play does not help children to learn academic skills.	26	73	103	99	28	2.91
I would rather read with my students than play together.	35	81	113	81	19	3.10
Play does not influence children's ability to solve problems.	29	79	113	101	7	3.07
It is more important for children to have good academic skills than to play well with other children.	29	81	104	89	26	2.99
Playtime is not a high priority in my school.	24	67	117	109	12	2.94
Reading to children is more worthwhile than playing with them.	26	69	120	107	7	3.0
Children will learn more if they are allowed to play without teachers.	29	81	110	102	6	2.91
Playing at school will help children get ready for next class.	110	105	61	49	4	2.19

Female teachers have expressed negative beliefs in one of the item of the academic focus factor of their beliefs regarding children's play at the preschool aged level. This item is about playing at school will help children get ready for next class, as their mean response values about this item is below 2.5. Except this one, in all the items, the mean values of female teachers' is above 2.5, as given above in table 5.

	Equal								
	varian								
	ces	26.0	.00	-					
	assum	94	0	5.70	948	.000	-.46211	.08105	.6211
				1					.3030
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	ces not			6.04	785.207	.000	-.46211	.07646	.6122
	assum			4					0
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	Equal								
	varian								
	ces	67.0	.00	-					
	assum	36	0	3.27	948	.001	-.13503	.04126	.2160
				3					.0540
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	varian								
	ces not			3.51	812.494	.000	-.13503	.03841	.2104
	assum			6					2
	ed								5

In light of the table 7 above, the p-value of teachers' beliefs regarding the factor of personality support of play is 0.000 and the factor of academic focus is 0.001. Both are less than 0.05. These values are less than 0.05 and hence the null hypothesis (Ho1) cannot be accepted. This shows that there is significant difference between male and female teachers' beliefs regarding the factor of personality support as well as the factor of academic focus of play at preschool aged level children. Results are shown in table 7 given above.

Table 8

Correlations between the factor of personally support and academic focus of play at preschool aged level children

		Per Focus N	Acad Focus N
Per Focus N	Pearson Correlation	1	-.935**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	950	950

AcadFocusN	Pearson Correlation	-0.935**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	950	950

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results presented in above table 8 shows that the p-value 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, so the null hypothesis (H₀) that there is no association between teachers' beliefs regarding the factors of personality support and academic focus of play at the level of preschool aged children. Association exists between teachers' beliefs about the factor of personality support and academic focus factor of play at the level of preschool aged children.

Conclusion

From findings of the study, it was concluded that female teachers had moderate level of negative beliefs about the personality support factor of children's play at their preschool aged level. But the male primary school teachers had low level of positive beliefs regarding the factor of personality support of children's play at the age of their preschool level. About the academic focus factor of children's play at their preschool aged level, both male and female teachers' beliefs was moderately positive. There was significant difference between the beliefs of male and female teachers regarding the personality as well as academic focus factor of children's play at the level of pre-school aged children. Although the male teachers' belief was positive towards play of children at preschool aged level. But it was not encouraging. However, the beliefs of male teachers about students' play at preschool aged level was more positive as compared to female teachers' beliefs regarding students' play at their preschool aged level. There is positive association between the beliefs of teachers about factors of personality support and academic focus of play at preschool level aged children.

Discussion

The low level of positive beliefs of male teachers towards play at preschool aged level indicates that teachers will use limited activities during teaching to the preschool aged children, because teachers' beliefs influences their teaching practices (Abu-Jabar et al., 2010). Further, their

low level of positive beliefs may be possibly due to lack of their training and giving only more importance to the academic skills of children at their preschool aged level.

Female teachers' negative beliefs towards play at preschool aged level are the signal of their low teaching performance in their schools due to the fact that teachers' beliefs shape their teaching performance (Levin, 2015). It is pertinent to mention that negative beliefs of female teachers towards play at preschool aged children may be because of the attitude, customs and traditions of the locality towards' female play. The element of culture is like a soul of teachers' beliefs in the context of teaching and learning process (Abdessallam, Aziz, and Jellali, 2020). In the culture of Karak females are almost confined to their homes and play by female after reaching to certain age is disliked. This factor may likely to play role in the formation of negative beliefs of teachers about play even at the preschool aged level. Because female may not be able to comprehend the importance of play in life.

General Recommendations

1. Male teachers' low level positive beliefs towards play of children at preschool aged level is the alarming message of pushing out of play from the curriculum of preschool education. It is therefore recommended for the curriculum planners that the academic concepts at preschool level may be more augmented with the integration of play materials in the curriculum. In this regard age appropriate roles or scenarios may be designed and included in curriculum for kids to perform various role play through pre-tend/ imaginative play in their classroom. Creative play, language play and numeric play also be integrated with curriculum of preschool education. Story telling can also be integrated in curriculum for teaching some concepts of mathematics to the children.
2. Short and long duration courses for enlightening preschool teachers about the value and importance of play in the early childhood programs and preparing preschool teachers for the increased and effective use of play during their teaching to the preschool aged level children may be arranged periodically for preschool teachers.
3. Awareness programs for the elders, women and female teachers may also be arranged about the importance and need of play at the preschool aged level.

4. Incentives for encouragement of female teachers to apply play activities during teaching to preschool students in their classrooms may be introduced at national level.

Recommendations for further studies

1. It is recommended for further study to investigate teachers' practices regarding selection, development and use of play materials during teaching to the preschool aged children.
2. Further study is recommended to be conducted about the factors influencing implementation and use of play activities in early childhood classrooms.
3. Experimental studies are recommended to be conducted to find the effect of integrating local play in teaching to the preschool aged children.

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