



PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' USE OF PLAY BASED TEACHING STRATEGIES IN THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS

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Theories of Piaget and Vygotsky on learning through play highlight the significance of during early years. Play is important for the development of concepts and skills in preschool children needed for their academic skills in later life. Studies have shown that the mushrooming of preschools and increasing demand of desk work have threatened the important of using play for learning in the current context of Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka. This leads to a problematic situation to investigate to what extent the play based teaching is used in the current context. The study attempted to investigate to what extent the preschool teachers use play based teaching strategies in the teaching learning process, teacher's perception of using play based strategies and children's participation in those activities. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 30 preschool teachers registered in the Certificate in Preschool Education (CPE) Programme offered by the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) in 2014/2015. The observations and interviews were carried out with randomly selected 12 teachers from the sample. The quantitative data was analysed using charts and tables and qualitative data was descriptively analysed. The data revealed that nearly 50% teachers from the sample used play based teaching strategies to a certain extent while the other half used more activities similar to desk work due to institutional and parents requirements. It showed that though teachers perceive the importance of using play based teaching, they were not aware of how to incorporate play properly into the activities. Use of play based teaching strategies was helpful for teachers to control the classroom and maintain children's attention throughout the lesson. Further it helped to obtain a significant participation of children particularly towards the outdoor play activities and dramatic play regardless of their gender and age. However, longer play sessions didn't increase the children's participation throughout the activity. Thus the study concluded play based teaching strategies were used in the teaching learning process to certain extent and children were very much interested in those activities. Further the study recommends making aware of preschool teachers on how to incorporate play into teaching learning process through teacher training programmes.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, Play based Teaching Strategies, Teaching Learning Process, Teacher Perception*