

Gender socialization and societal expectations have an impact on children. Available literature shows that the type of socialization a child undergoes in childhood has a great impact on his/her later life, notably on his/her perceptions, personality, role definition and role performance.

The early childhood years are very important in the life of every individual. Different types of activities assigned to children at this stage will determine how they come to perceive themselves as they do. Curriculum developers regard the activities that are assigned to children by parents, teachers or guardians as part of the hidden curriculum. Children learn from these activities what society expects them to learn and to be. Social pressures are borne, therefore, upon boys and girls to conform to masculine and feminine characteristics respectively.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate, therefore, gender stereotyping in the selection and use of play materials by pre-school children. Specifically, this study looked at gender and age differences in selection and use of play materials. It also investigated teachers' influence as a contributing factor to children's selection and use of play materials. This study used a quasi-experimental research design with two experimental groups and no control group and with repeated measures. The children were presented with three kinds of play materials. These were: - Play materials considered appropriate for boys - play materials considered appropriate for girls - play materials considered as gender neutral. Frequency counts were then made as the children selected and used certain kinds of play materials.

This study used a quasi-experimental research with two experimental grouped and no control group and with repeated measures. The children were presented with three kinds of plays materials. These were:

- Play materials considered appropriate for boys
- Play materials considered appropriate for girls
- Play materials considered as gender-neutral

Frequency counts were then made as the children selected and used certain kinds of play materials.

The subject variables in this study were gender and age of the preschool children while the independent variables were the teachers' Behaviour, and the types of play materials. The dependent variables were:

- The extent of selection of gender-appropriate use of play Materials.
- Extent of gender-appropriate use of plays materials.
- Extent of cross-gender selection of the play materials
- Extent of cross-gender use of plays materials.
- Extent of gender-neutral selection of the play materials.

- Extent of gender-neutral use of the play materials.

The population of the study was a children in City Council pre schools in Nairobi. The City Education Department classifies the preschools into three groups - that is, groups 'E', 'F', and 'G'. The sample was randomly drawn from three City Council preschools that were purposefully selected as representative of each of the three categories of Nairobi City Council preschools.

Two researcher instruments were used in this study. These were an observation schedule and a questionnaire.

The time sampling technique was used whereby the children and teachers were observed for a time period of 15 seconds after which the researchers noted down on their hands how the children selected and utilized the play materials and also how the teachers interacted with the children to influence them in selection and use of the play materials. This data was transferred left the classrooms. This procedure ensured that the observation Data Sheet did not distract the children when the observation were taking place.

Frequency counts were made of children selecting gender-appropriate, cross-gender or gender-neutral play materials. Frequency counts were also made of children using play materials in gender-appropriate, cross-gender or gender-neutral manner. The researchers also made frequency counts of teachers encouraging or discouraging children to sex-type the play materials.

The t-test was used in data analysis to determine the significance of any differences and direction of the differences. The level of significance adopted was 0.05.

The findings of the study showed that:

- Preschool children selected gender-appropriate play materials significantly more than cross-gender and gender-neutral play materials.
- Preschool children used play materials in a gender-appropriate manner significantly more than in a cross-gender and gender-neutral manner.
- Preschool boys and girls were not significantly different in their selection of gender-appropriate use of play materials.
- Preschool boys and preschool girls were not significantly different in gender-appropriate use of play materials.
- Older preschoolers selected gender-appropriate play materials significantly more than younger preschoolers.
- Older preschoolers used play materials in a gender-appropriate manner significantly more than younger preschoolers.

- Preschool teachers influenced preschool children to select gender-appropriate play materials significantly more than cross-gender and gender-neutral materials.
- Preschool teachers influenced preschool children to use play materials in a gender-appropriate manner significantly more than in a cross-gender and gender-neutral manner.
- Preschool teachers influenced preschool boys significantly more than preschool girls in selection of play materials.
- Preschool teachers influenced preschool boys significantly more than preschool girls in use of play materials.

One of the interesting findings of this study was that although there was no significant difference in selection and use of gender-appropriate play materials between the preschool boys and preschool girls, the three year old girls selected and used more gender-appropriate play materials than the three year old boys while the five old boys selected and used more gender-appropriate play materials than the five year old girls.

The findings of this study will prove useful to teachers, parents, curriculum developers, teachers' trainers and material developers.

This study has implications concerning the relationship between teachers and children because the teachers admitted that they directed more attention to the slow learners. This implies that slow learners received more attention than the other children. The teachers also reinforced gender-appropriate behaviour while ignoring cross-gender behaviour. This implies that the teachers reinforced behaviour they perceived as appropriate while they ignored the behaviour they considered to be inappropriate. Another implication of this study concerns teachers and parents in terms of the gender prejudices they hold and how they pass these prejudices on to young children.

The study also has implications for materials developers in relation to the type of play materials they create and how teachers and children view the play materials. The findings of this study also imply that the present curriculum does not emphasize adequately the need to regard all play materials as gender-neutral.

Therefore, some of the recommendations that have been made as a result of this study are:

- Teachers and parents should try to adopt an androgynous gender role attitude and encourage the same in children.
- more studies also need to be carried out to determine which groups of children receive the most attention from teachers.
- Materials Developers should strive to create more gender-neutral play materials.

- Curriculum Developers should encourage all play activities incorporated in the curriculum for learning purposes to be regarded as gender-neutral.
- Other researchers should also try to adopt the methodology that was used in this study since this kind of methodology had not been tried out before.
- Longitudinal studies also need to be carried out to determine if teachers is reinforcement for gender-appropriate behaviour while ignoring cross-gender behaviour.