

**STRATEGIES TEACHERS EMPLOY IN ASSESSING CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NAIROBI WEST
DISTRICT, NAIROBI PROVINCE, KENYA.**

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been submitted for an award of degree in any other institution.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved husband, Peter Gitari, daughter Whitney, and son Rodney.

Their support gave me strength to work even harder.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to recognize the assistance accorded to me by my supervisors Dr. Justus Inyega and Mr. Timothy Maonga. I could not have completed this work on schedule were it not for their informed guidance and commitment to see me through this project. I also wish to thank my colleagues who read and constructively criticized my work. The time and knowledge that we shared is highly appreciated. I specifically thank the pre school children and the teachers of Nairobi West District for their support as I collected data in their institutions. Finally, I thank everyone else who in one way or another contributed to the completion of this project.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

B.Ed:	Bachelor of Education
DICECE:	District Centers for Early Childhood Education
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE:	Early Childhood Education
KCSE:	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
NACECE:	National Center for Early Childhood Education
PE:	Physical Education

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies employed by preschool teachers to assess the academic achievement of their pupils in Nairobi West District. The objectives of this study were to identify the assessment strategies adopted by preschool teachers, establish the influence of assessment strategies in enhancing learning and establish the characteristics of these assessment strategies in enhancing learning in preschools. The study employed mixed methods techniques to achieve its objectives. The study population for this study comprised of all the 78 preschools in Nairobi West District. Data collection instruments used included questionnaires, interview guides and observation schedules. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found that the teachers favoured performance assessment strategy (that is assessment of learners as they participate in daily activities) followed by comprehensive assessment strategy (that is where information on strengths and weaknesses of a child is collected based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child). The influence of assessment strategies was however not clear-cut, as different strategies were suitable for different learning activities. A mixture of these strategies was found to be in use depending on what was being assessed. Based on the findings, it has been recommended that intervention measures should be taken to provide a guideline of preschoolers' assessment strategies based on developmental milestones. There should be a general guide formulated out of research to act as a reference for preschool teachers in their work. This will enhance assessment strategies employed by preschool teachers within Nairobi West District, and other pre schools which have similar characteristics.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Assessment, defined as gathering information in order to make informed instructional decisions, is an integral part of most early childhood programs (Meisels, 1995). Assessment is an ongoing process that includes collecting, synthesizing and interpreting information about pupils, the classroom and their instruction. Testing is one form of assessment that, appropriately applied, systematically measures skills such as literacy and numeracy. While it does not provide a complete picture, testing is an important tool, for both its efficiency and ability to measure prescribed bodies of knowledge (Coleman, Buysse, and Neitzel, 2006). Alternative or “authentic” forms of assessment can be culturally sensitive and pose an alternative to testing, but they require a larger investment in establishing criteria for judging development and evaluator training. Child assessment has value that goes well beyond measuring progress in children to evaluating programs, identifying staff development needs and planning future instruction.

Young children are difficult subjects to assess accurately because of their activity level and distractibility, shorter attention span, wariness of strangers, and inconsistent performance in unfamiliar environments (Benner, 1992). Other factors that may affect a child's performance include cultural differences and language barriers, parents not having books to read to their child and a child's lack of interaction with other children. Consequently, assessment of infants, toddlers, and young children requires sensitivity to the child's background, and knowledge of testing limitations and procedures with young children (Wortham, 1990; Benner, 1992).

Assessment of young children is crucial in meeting a variety of purposes (Goldstein and Sammons, 1997). It provides information with which caregivers and teachers can better understand individual children's developmental progress and status and how well they are learning, and it can inform care giving, instruction, and provision of needed services (Lord, 1980). It helps early childhood program staff determine how well they are meeting their objectives for the children they serve, and it informs program design and implementation. It provides some of the information needed for program accountability and contributes to advancing knowledge of child development.

For younger children, thinking about purpose is equally central. Done well, ongoing assessment can provide invaluable information to parents and educators about how children grow and develop (Goldstein, 2000). Developmentally appropriate assessment systems can provide information to highlight what children know and are able to do. Furthermore, the tools available for assessing young children and their environments have increased vastly in number and variety in recent years. Advances in child development research and demands from educators, evaluation researchers, and policy makers have converged to provide a dizzying array of assessment options—thus enhancing the urgency of providing some guidelines for deciding when and what to assess, choosing and using assessment tools, and interpreting assessment data.

Assessments for purposes other than screening and diagnosis have become more and more common for young children (Goldstein and Sammons, 1997, Goldstein, 2000) Some of these assessments are conducted to answer questions about the child (for example, monitoring progress during instruction or intervention). Other assessments are conducted to provide information

about classrooms and programs (for example, to evaluate a specific curriculum or type of program) or society in general (for example, to describe the school readiness of children entering kindergarten). Many of the assessments widely in use in educational settings are designed primarily to inform instruction by helping classroom personnel specify how children are learning and developing and where they could usefully adapt and adjust their instructional approaches. Assessment that is educationally oriented often takes school-age achievement as the ultimate target and thus is organized into domains that are highly relevant to preschool.

Curriculum standards define what children should know and be able to do in a particular activity area. Teachers can use these curriculum standards to assess what concepts need strengthening or re-teaching, or to identify when a new strategy is needed. Standards are organized by grade level to better define what children should know and be able to do at each grade level, and to facilitate developmentally appropriate teaching. When faced with high-stakes testing, teachers often feel pressured to teach material to students before they are ready to learn it, or in ways that are not age appropriate. Teacher training, discussions with colleagues, and networking can enable teachers to carefully reflect about each step along the way to mastery. Standards should provide enough information to help with assessment of student mastery. Functions of assessment include identifying current knowledge and skills of pupils; addressing and planning for the strengths and needs of pupils; evaluating student growth over time; promoting pupils motivation and objectivity; evaluating program effectiveness; enlightening parents of pupils progress; and promoting parent advocates.

Early childhood assessment is composed of three essential, interrelated components namely documentation (data collection), evaluation (comparison to a standard), and communication with family (sharing both progress and performance). In documentation, emphasis is placed on discovering what a child already knows and is able to do. Acknowledging student understanding promotes the child's sense of competence and provides teachers with clues about what and how to teach. It gives a much more accurate picture than assessing them in a contrived setting. For example, asking a child to write an answer to a mathematics problem may not show whether or not the child has problem solving skills or can add digits. The child may not understand the meaning of the problem, may have stayed up too late, or may be coming down with the flu. In contrast, daily observation as the child solves many kinds of problems enables the teacher to discover what he/she understands about addition and problem solving as well as other mathematical concepts.

Evaluation is the stage where assessment compares the gathered information of each learner to the standard. This step enables teachers to guide instruction, evaluate teaching strategies, track learner progress, and identify learners with special needs that require additional interventions or services. Although standards are designed to provide consistent expectations for all children, instruction must be molded to fit each child's individual strengths and needs. The insights gained from early assessment can serve as the basis for instruction. As teachers observe learners at work, they can modify the learning experiences offered to meet the individual needs of their pupils.

Kenyan perceive education as a key to success in life, facilitating social mobility and personal development (Nkinyangi, 1982). A number of theoretical perspectives focus on education's pivotal role in human growth and development (Mbugua-Murithi, 1997). The modernization

theorists contend that education transforms individual values, beliefs, and behaviors, which leads to development (Benavot, 1992). As a result, Kenya has seen a clamoring for and expansion of education at all levels including nursery schools, childcare centers, kindergartens, and preschools (Mutero, 2001; Mwiria, 1990).

Since independence in 1963 a massive expansion of early childhood care and education centers has been experienced throughout Kenya. Parents and local communities have continued to contribute significantly to the development of early childhood education programs in a variety of ways. They pay for their children's school fees and teacher salaries. In some preschools, parents initiate community-based meal and monitoring programs. Community members also have undertaken the responsibility of cultural transmission through language in very creative ways. For example, they collect stories, riddles, poems, and games that are edited and distributed by the respective programs in local dialects and English.

In 1984, the Ministry of Education established the National Center for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), a national endeavor aimed at harmonizing the growth, evaluation, and oversight of early childhood education. A year later, a network of sub-centers was established at district level called District Centers for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) (Gakuru, Riak, Ogula, Mugo, and Njenga, 1987). A variety of institutions are charged with the responsibility of training early childhood educators. These institutions fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Kenya Institute of Education and the Kenya Institute of Special Education. For logistical purposes, these institutions range from local training centers (the DICECE) to national training center (the NACECE) and local universities. The training

levels are organized in such a way so as to cater for the various needs of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) professionals, offering prospective teachers short courses, two-year diploma courses, a four-year bachelor's degree, and master's programs.

The main challenge facing early childhood care and education in Kenya today is that of harmonizing curriculum and teaching methodologies to help ease children's transition from kindergarten to the primary grades. Educators have criticized the emphasis on an exclusively academic curriculum versus a play-centered and developmentally appropriate curriculum in some preschools and kindergartens (Mutero, 2001). The increase in private and for-profit preschools, especially in the urban centers, has been prompted by the unofficial requirement that children entering primary school demonstrate school readiness skills typically developed in a kindergarten or preschool setting (Mbugua, 2004). However, these preschool settings vary in quality, from those that are well equipped with ample resources, including computers and indoor and outdoor play areas and equipment, to those that are in need of resources, especially in urban slums and rural areas.

There are approximately 215 preschools in Nairobi province with an enrolment of 8078 children and 205 teachers in total. In Nairobi West District, there are 78 preschools with an enrolment of 3412 children and a total of 88 preschool teachers (See Appendix IV). This scenario therefore poses serious challenges to the concept of assessment of academic achievement of preschoolers with most of the preschools adopting varieties of assessment methods for their learners. This apparent lack of standardized methodologies in assessment provides the motivation to study the existing methodologies and establish their effectiveness in assessing learning in preschools with particular reference to schools in Nairobi West District. The Nairobi West District presents a mix

of all the social classes incorporating the rich, middle and poor. This makes the study findings to be universal in their relevance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Parents are often interested in how their children perform. Traditional report cards and letter grades often don't provide a clear picture of student learning. The link between instruction, assessment, standards, and student portfolios is an essential one in making a successful assessment of learner progress. The preschool learner needs perhaps a more comprehensive assessment than learners in primary schools. This is because continuous evaluation is preferred to the more formal testing that is done at higher school levels. This study sought to identify the strategies employed by preschool teachers in assessing children's academic achievements in early childhood education in Nairobi West District.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies employed by preschool teachers to assess the academic achievement of pre school children in Nairobi West District..

1.4 Research Objectives

This study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the assessment strategies adopted by teachers in assessing preschool children in Nairobi West District
2. To establish the influence of teachers assessment strategies in enhancing learning in preschool in Nairobi West District

3. To establish the characteristics of assessment strategies employed by teachers in assessing the academic achievement of children in Nairobi West District.

1.5 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What assessment strategies do teachers in Nairobi West District use to assess preschoolers?
2. What influence do these assessment strategies have towards the learning of preschoolers in Nairobi West District?
3. What are the characteristics of these assessment strategies employed by teachers in Nairobi West District?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of learner assessment is the only way available to educators to evaluate the progress made by learners in school. In preschool, this aspect of assessment is necessary since the child requires constant monitoring to evaluate their progress. The tracking of academic performance fulfills a number of purposes. Areas of achievement and failure in a learner's academic career need to be evaluated in order to foster improvement and make full use of the learning process. Results provide a framework for talking about how learners fair in school, and a constant standard to which all learners are held. Performance results also allow learners to be ranked and sorted on a scale that is numerically obvious, minimizing complaints by holding teachers and schools accountable for the components of each and every grade. This study looked into the relationship between assessment and performance with a view to examining the impact

of this assessment on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor of the preschool learners. It is hoped that the findings of this study will inform preschool teachers, curriculum developers, preschool administration and the government of this country on the significance of constant assessment of learner performance for purposes of influencing pedagogy and quality assurance in the provision of preschool education.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in the sense that even though preschool learner performance records informed it, it did not carry out statistical analysis of preschool learner performance data. The learner performance data was only used to corroborate assertions about the efficiency of assessment on performance. Also, this study is limited in its scope since it covered only Nairobi West District. So the findings and recommendations may only be applicable to pre schools with similar characteristics.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited in that it deals with strategies of assessment employed by pre school teachers in and outside the classroom area of learning. It is delimited too by their study populations, which are preschoolers and their teachers.

1.9 Basic Assumptions of the Study

This study was carried out with the following basic assumptions, that preschool learner assessment mechanisms are standardized procedures, assessment of student performance is

carried out in every school in the study sample and that all preschools experience similar factors such as socio- economic behaviours, health status and the nature of preschool administration.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

Academic achievement	In educational institutions, it is the measure of success or how well a student meets standards set out by the government and the institution itself.
Assessment	is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid classroom decision-making. It includes information gathered about pupils, instruction, and classroom climate.
Preschool	Preschool is an early childhood program in which children combine learning with play in a program run by professionally trained adults.
Preschooler	Children between the ages of three to six year.
Strategy	Is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose.
Teacher	A person whose job is teaching children between the ages of three to six years
Testing	is a formal, systematic procedure for gathering a sample of pupils' behavior.

1.11 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one presents the background to the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, study questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, basic assumptions of the study, definition of key terms, and organization of the study. Chapter two presents the review of related literature on strategies of assessment, child assessment strategies, characteristics of pre school assessment as well as the theoretical and the conceptual frameworks for the study. Chapter three presents the study methodology detailing the research design, target population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection instruments, validity and reliability, procedure for data collection and data analysis methods. Chapter four consists of presentation of research findings and discussions, where tabular presentation and narrative discussions of the data was done. Chapter five includes the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The study sets out to examine the strategies teachers' employ in assessing children's academic achievement in early childhood education. The literature review highlights various studies on assessment strategies employed by preschool teachers, their characteristics and how they enhance learning in preschools.

Issues on Assessment of Preschool Children

Assessment, differentiated from test administration and interpretation, is usually a comprehensive process of gathering information about a child across developmental areas. Benner (1992) reported several continuum along which assessments fall: (a) norm-referenced to criterion-referenced, product oriented to process oriented assessment; (b) formal to informal assessment, direct to indirect assessment; (c) standardized tests to handicap-accommodating tests; and (d) single-discipline approach to team approach. The present trend in preschool assessment is toward the latter perspective of each continuum with strengths being emphasized rather than deficits.

Thus, current trends in preschool assessment include a move away from a "single assessor" model to an environmental model, which is designed for the individual child. Through a team approach, children are evaluated with family members present, and factors of the home and social environment are taken into consideration. Because of the increased situation-specificity of

developmental tests, which can be administered by professionals other than practicing psychologists, their use is increasing (Niemeyer, 1994).

Informal, relaxed settings where the child can be as much at ease as possible are recommended when doing assessment (Bagnato and Neisworth, 1994). Assessing a child within the context of his or her community and the interacting social systems, and taking into account the family's needs, resources, and concerns affect both the evaluation and possible interventions. One of the most important developments in this area is Trans-disciplinary Play based Assessment (Linder, 1993), during which the child engages in play with a familiar person and a team observes the interactions of the child with the adult. The assessment is constructed so that the team can communicate with the play facilitator concerning unobserved skills (e.g., can the child stack three blocks). The combination of informal play-based assessment and more directed and structured activities provides greater opportunity for a high level of performance (Bagnato and Neisworth, 1994).

2.2. Assessment Strategies Employed by Preschool Teachers

According to Bittner (2003) in her book *Assessment in the Early Childhood Classroom*, there are several assessment strategies employed by preschool teachers in assessing academic achievement of their pupils. These include:

Performance Assessment strategy is where children are assessed as they participate in daily activities, write stories, solves problems, and draw illustrations. Teachers observe and take brief notes on student discussions and interactions. Teachers review student work, determine strengths and weaknesses, and keep track of progress over time.

Comprehensive Assessment strategy is where the range and scope of information and the type of data collected are based on the child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Teachers need information about the student's strengths and weaknesses in all areas to enhance their decision-making and guide their instruction strategies.

Standardized Tests Strategies are tests that compare students to a fixed standard or set criteria for measurement. Teachers plan how to prepare children to handle standardized tests successfully. Teachers recognize that the Criterion Reference Tests are based upon the core curriculum, and ensure that what they teaching matches with (but is not limited to) the curriculum goals evaluated by the tests. Teachers provide opportunities for children to practice and gain familiarity with the test format.

Self-Assessment Strategy is where self assessment enables children to reflect on their progress. Teachers can help students assess their understanding by asking questions such as "What can I do very well? What are my personal strengths and interests? What skills can I improve? What is one thing on which I really want to work?" Teachers help model self-directed learning as they help each student learn the language and process of setting, recording, and evaluating goals.

Examples of Authentic Assessment Strategies may include Observation of individual children or groups of children, Interviews with children or parents, Concept mapping of individual groups or children, Journals kept by learners or teachers, Performance Assessment tasks, Open-ended questions or problems, Drawings, Photos, Artwork, Portfolios, Narrative Descriptions, Audio tapes, Video tapes, Work samples from any content area showing growth and progress over time, and work samples with rubric for analysis (Meisels, Dorfman, & Steele, 1995).

2.3. Work Sampling System

The Work Sampling System (Meisels, Jablon, 1995) offers an exemplar of how performance assessment works in Head Start, early childhood, and the primary years (ages 3 to 11). This performance assessment system assesses and documents children's skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments as displayed across a wide variety of education domains and as manifested on multiple occasions. Work sampling is a curriculum-embedded assessment, rather than an "on demand" set of tests. It systematizes teacher observations by guiding those observations with specific criteria and well-defined procedures. It consists of three complementary components: (1) Developmental Guidelines and Checklists, (2) Portfolios, and (3) Summary Reports. Classroom-based and instructionally relevant, these components involve the child, the child's family, the teacher, and the school administration in the processes of assessment.

The Developmental Guidelines and Checklists are designed to assist teachers in observing and documenting individual children's growth and progress. They are intended to reflect common activities and expectations in classrooms that are structured around developmentally appropriate activities and are based on national, state, and local curriculum standards. Teachers should be able to complete the Checklists without testing their children (Meisels, Jablon, 1995; Bagnato and Neisworth, 1994). Each Checklist covers seven domains: (1) Personal and social development; (2) Language and literacy; (3) Mathematical thinking; (4) Scientific thinking; (5) Social studies; (6) The Arts; and (7) Physical development.

Each domain is divided into functional components, each of which contains performance indicators that represent important skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments. Guidelines accompanying the Checklists enhance the process of observation, make it more

reliable, and help ensure consistency by providing a rationale and illustrations for each performance indicator (Meisels, Jablon, 1995). The Checklists and Guidelines create a profile of children's individualized progress. Because of the common structure of the Checklists from preschool through grade 5, teachers can chart children's progress over a wide span of time and development and plan a curriculum that reflects individual growth and change.

Purposeful collections of children's work that illustrate their efforts, progress, and achievements, Portfolios are used in The Work Sampling System to provide rich documentation of each child's experiences throughout the year (Meisels, Jablon, 1995). Portfolio collection enables children to become involved with the process of selecting and judging their own work. Portfolio content should parallel classroom activities and lead to the development of new activities based on joint teacher-child assessment of the child's progress and interests.

The Work Sampling System is a relatively structured approach to Portfolio collection that relies on the identification and collection of two types of work: Core Items (representations of a particular area of learning within a domain that are selected three times a year); and Individualized Items (unique examples of a child's work that capture the child's interests and experiences and reflect integrated learning across domains). Collecting Portfolio items on multiple occasions allows the Portfolio to become a tool for documenting, analyzing, and summarizing the child's growth and development through the entire school year. Portfolios are powerful instructional tools. They offer children, teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers an opportunity to view the sweep and power of children's growth and development. Above all, they integrate instruction and assessment.

The final component of The Work Sampling System is the summary report, completed three times a year for each child. This report consists of a brief summary of the child's classroom performance and is based on teacher observations and on records teachers keep as part of The Work Sampling System. The report contains specific criteria for evaluating children's performance in each domain of learning and behavior that is emphasized in the classroom.

The Summary Report is a means of translating the rich information from Developmental Checklists and Portfolios into a more easily understood and interpreted document for parents, teachers, and administrators. Summary reports are designed to replace report cards. They consist of performance and progress ratings in each domain, and teachers' reflections and comments about the child's development, based on the evidence accumulated in the Checklists and Portfolios.

Tests are powerful only if we attach high stakes to them and relinquish our judgment about how to educate children (Meisels, 1992). Some tests are less informative than others, and some are hopelessly biased, narrow, or unrealistic; but any test can be misused, just as any idea can be distorted. Work Sampling is a powerful substitute for group-administered achievement tests. Research about The Work Sampling System shows that it provides teachers with reliable and valid data about children's school performance (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, and Fails, 2008) and with a great deal of information and evidence about children's activities and development that can be used to enhance instruction and to report to children's parents. It is based on teachers' perceptions of their children in actual classroom situations. It simultaneously informs, expands, and structures those perceptions while involving children and parents in the learning process. The

Guidelines and Checklists provide detailed, observation-based information about the child's skills, accomplishments, knowledge, and behavior. The Portfolios highlight qualitative aspects of children's work (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, and Fails, 2008). The Summary Reports help record, summarize, and aggregate information on children's overall educational progress.

Performance assessment, of which The Work Sampling System is an example, allows teachers to record what children can do in the context of their experience. When children's experience is rich and diverse, invites them to display their initiative, and engages their curiosity, and then performance assessment promises to help us learn about children as we watch them learn about their world Meisels, Samuel (1993).

According to Linder (1993), the evaluation of the preschool child requires information gathering and a series of individually administered assessments and behavioral observations. The individual evaluation must include a physical examination, a social history, a psychological, and an observation of the child in his or her natural setting and other appropriate assessments and evaluations. She identifies the components of the individual evaluation to include Social History (interpersonal, familiar and environmental factors, which influence a child's general adaptation to the learning environment) Physical Examination, Psychological Evaluation and Observation of a child in a natural setting (Linder, 1993). Bagnato and Neisworth, (1994) identified other appropriate assessments or evaluations as follows: Cognitive Evaluation, Language and Communication, Adaptive Behavior, Social, Emotional, Gross Motor, Fine Motor, - Functional Behavior.

Child Assessment Strategies

Standardized tests are used to obtain information on whether a programme is achieving its desired outcomes (Wiggins, 1992). They are considered objective, time- and cost-efficient, and suitable for making quantitative comparisons. Testing can provide valid data when used appropriately and matched to developmental levels. Moreover, tests can act as teaching tools by providing a window into what children already know and where they need more time, practice, and/or help to improve (Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Creating a valid assessment for young children is a difficult task. It must be meaningful and authentic, evaluate a valid sample of information learned, be based on performance standards that are genuine benchmarks, avoid arbitrary cut-off scores or norms, and have authentic scoring (Epstein, 1999). The context for the test should be rich, realistic, and enticing (Wiggins, 1992). It is therefore incumbent upon the creators of assessment tools to design instruments that—unlike artificial drills—resemble natural performance. If these conditions are met, young children are more likely to recognize what is being asked of them, thus increasing the reliability and validity of the results.

Authentic assessments engage children in tasks that are personally meaningful, take place in real life contexts, and are grounded in naturally occurring instructional activities (Wolf, Bixby, Glenn & Gardener, 1991). They offer multiple ways of evaluating students' learning, as well as their motivation, achievement, and attitudes. This type of assessment is consistent with the goals, curriculum, and instructional practices of the classroom or program with which it is associated (McLaughlin and Vogt, 1997; Paris and Ayres, 1994). Authentic assessments do not rely on

unrealistic or arbitrary time constraints, nor do they emphasize instant recall or depend on lucky guesses. Progress toward mastery is the key, and content is mastered as a means, not as an end (Wiggins, 1989).

To document accomplishments, assessments must be designed to be longitudinal, to sample the baseline, the increment, and the preserved levels of change that follow from instruction (Wolf, Bixby, Glenn and Gardener, 1991). Alternative assessment can be more expensive than testing. Like their counterparts in testing, authentic measures must meet psychometric standards of demonstrated reliability and validity. Their use, especially on a widespread scale, requires adequate resources. Alternative child assessment procedures that can meet the criteria of reliability and validity include observations, portfolios, and ratings of children by teachers and parents. These are described below.

In assessing young children, the principal alternative to testing is systematic observation of children's activities in their day-to-day settings. Observation fits an interactive style of curriculum, in which give-and-take between teacher and child is the norm. (Epstein, et al (2004). Although careful observation requires effort, the approach has high ecological validity and intrudes minimally into what children are doing. Children's activities naturally integrate all dimensions of their development—intellectual, motivational, social, physical, aesthetic, and so on. Such an approach permits children to engage in activities anytime and anywhere that teachers can see them. It defines categories of acceptable answers rather than single right answers. It expects the teacher to set the framework for children to initiate their own activities. It embraces a broad definition of child development that includes not only language and mathematics, but also

initiative, social relations, physical skills, and the arts. It empowers teachers by recognizing their judgment as essential to accurate assessment. (Epstein, et al (2004).

One of the most fitting ways to undertake authentic, meaningful evaluation is through the use of a well-constructed portfolio system. Arter and Spandel (1991) define a portfolio as a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in (a) given area(s). This collection must include student participation in selection of portfolio content, the guidelines for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection (p. 36). Portfolios describe both a place (the physical space where they are stored) and a process. The process provides richer information than standardized tests, involves multiple sources and methods of data collection, and occurs over a representative period of time (Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose, and Hansford, 1997).

Portfolios have additional value. They encourage two- and three-way collaboration between students, teachers, and parents; promote ownership and motivation; integrate assessment with instruction and learning; and establish a quantitative and qualitative record of progress over time (Paris and Ayres, 1994; Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer, 1991; Wolf & Siu-Runyan, 1996; Valencia, 1990). "Portfolios encourage teachers and students to focus on important student outcomes, provide parents and the community with credible evidence of student achievement, and inform policy and practice at every level of the educational system" (Herman and Winters, 1994, p. 48).

The purposes for which portfolios are used are as variable as the programs that use them (Graves and Sunstein, 1993; Valencia, 1990; Wolf & Siu-Runyan, 1996). In some programs, they are simply a place to store best work that has been graded in a traditional manner. In others, they are used to create longitudinal systems to demonstrate the process leading to the products and to design evaluative rubrics for program accountability. Portfolios are most commonly thought of as alternative assessments in elementary and secondary schools.

Teacher ratings are a way to organize teacher perceptions of children's development into scales for which reliability and validity can be assessed (Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993). Children's grades on report cards are the most common type of teacher rating system. When completed objectively, report-card grades are tied to students' performance on indicators with delineated scoring criteria, such as examinations or projects evaluated according to explicitly defined criteria. In these ways, teacher ratings can be specifically related to other types of child assessments including scores on standardized tests or other validated assessment tools, concrete and specific behavioral descriptions (for example, frequency of participation in group activities, ability to recognize the letters in one's name), or global assessments of children's traits (e.g., cooperative, sociable, hard-working). Research shows that teacher ratings can have considerable short- and long-term predictive validity throughout later school years and even into adulthood (Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993).

Parent Ratings

Parent ratings are a way to organize parent perceptions of children's development into scales for which reliability and validity can be assessed (Zill, Connell, McKey, O'Brien, 2001). Soliciting

parent ratings is an excellent way for teachers to involve them as partners in the assessment of their children's performance. The very process of completing scales can inform parents about the kinds of behaviors and milestones that are important in young children's development. It also encourages parents to observe and listen to their children as they gather the data needed to rate their performance. (Epstein et al, 2004).

2.4. Characteristics of Preschool Assessment

In identifying appropriate interventions at the preschool level, there is less focus on testing and more on evaluating the individual child. The American Association for Higher Learning (1992) identifies some of the more important characteristics to include:

2.4.1 Criterion Referenced and Process Oriented

Criterion-referenced tests allow each child to be assessed as an individual. Comparing the child with developmental milestones and selecting areas to reinforce allows interventions to be specifically tailored to a child. Attention is given to the process of the interactions (i.e., whether the assessment is being conducted in a way that optimizes the child's demonstration of abilities).

2.4.2 Informal, Indirect, and Naturalistic Evaluations

Informal, relaxed settings where the child can be as much at ease as possible are recommended when doing assessment. Assessing a child within the context of his or her community and the interacting social systems, and taking into account the family's needs, resources, and concerns affect both the evaluation and possible interventions. One of the most important developments in this area is Trans-disciplinary Play based Assessment (Linder, 1993), during which the child

engages in play with a familiar person and the interactions of the child with the adult are observed by a team. The assessment is constructed so that the team can communicate with the play facilitator concerning unobserved skills (for example, can the child stack three blocks?). The combination of informal play-based assessment and more directed and structured activities provides greater opportunity for a high level of performance (Bagnato and Neisworth, 1994).

2.4.3 Handicap Accommodating Assessments

Standardized assessment procedures present problems when a child has a handicap that impedes test performance even though the area being examined is not related to the handicap. Attention is being directed toward developing assessment procedures that accommodate for handicaps and provide a more accurate evaluation of the child.

2.4.4 Multi-Disciplinary/Trans-Disciplinary Approach

Because single discipline evaluations provide a "snapshot" from a limited perspective, assessments involving more than one discipline are recommended. Options include multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary assessments. Multi-disciplinary teams are based on the medical model where many disciplines evaluate individually and provide reports to a central figure. Inter-disciplinary team members assess the child individually and then convene to discuss findings and form joint recommendations. With a trans-disciplinary team, representation of all disciplines that are needed for a child (e.g., occupational therapy, speech therapy, medical doctor, nutritionist) are present, and the child is observed and discussed by all at the same time, thus providing an evaluation of the total child.

2.5. Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.5.1 Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains

Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains - Cognitive, Affective, Psychomotor Domains - was initially published in 1956 under the leadership of American academic and educational expert Dr Benjamin Bloom (Bloom, 1956). 'Bloom's Taxonomy' was originally created in and for an academic context, (when Benjamin Bloom chaired a committee of educational psychologists, based in American education, whose aim was to develop a system of categories of learning behaviour to assist in the design and assessment of educational learning.

Interestingly, at the outset, Bloom believed that education should focus on 'mastery' of subjects and the promotion of higher forms of thinking, rather than a utilitarian approach to simply transferring facts. Bloom demonstrated decades ago that most teaching tended to be focused on fact-transfer and information recall - the lowest level of training - rather than true meaningful personal development, and this remains a central challenge for educators and trainers in modern times.

Various people suggested detail for the third 'Psychomotor Domain', which explains why this domain detail varies in different representations of the complete Bloom Taxonomy. The three most popularly referenced versions of the Psychomotor Domain seem to be those of Dave (1967/70), Simpson (1966/72), and Harrow (1972). Bloom's Taxonomy has therefore since 1956 provided a basis for ideas which have been used (and developed) around the world by academics, educators, teachers and trainers, for the preparation of learning evaluation materials, and also provided the platform for the complete 'Bloom's Taxonomy' (including the detail for the third 'Psychomotor Domain') as we see it today. Collectively these concepts which make up the whole Bloom Taxonomy continue to be useful and very relevant to the planning and design of: school,

college and university education, adult and corporate training courses, teaching and lesson plans, and learning materials; they also serve as a template for the evaluation of: training, teaching, learning and development, within every aspect of education and industry.

Bloom's Taxonomy underpins the classical 'Knowledge, Attitude, Skills' structure of learning method and evaluation, and aside from the even simpler Kirkpatrick learning evaluation model, Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains remains the most widely used system of its kind in education particularly, and also industry and corporate training. It's easy to see why, because it is such a simple, clear and effective model, both for explanation and application of learning objectives, teaching and training methods, and measurement of learning outcomes.

Bloom's Taxonomy provides an excellent structure for planning, designing, assessing and evaluating training and learning effectiveness. The model also serves as a sort of checklist, by which you can ensure that training is planned to deliver all the necessary development for students, trainees or learners, and a template by which you can assess the validity and coverage of any existing training, be it a course, a curriculum, or an entire training and development programme for a large organization. Bloom's Taxonomy model is in three parts, or 'overlapping domains'. Again, Bloom used rather academic language, but the meanings are simple to understand: Cognitive domain (intellectual capability, that is knowledge, or 'think'); Affective domain (feelings, emotions and behaviour, i.e. attitude, or 'feel'); Psychomotor domain (manual and physical skills, that is skills, or 'do').

In each of the three domains Bloom's Taxonomy is based on the premise that the categories are ordered in degree of difficulty. An important premise of Bloom's Taxonomy is that each category (or 'level') must be mastered before progressing to the next. As such the categories within each domain are levels of learning development, and these levels increase in difficulty.

The simple matrix structure enables a checklist or template to be constructed for the design of learning programmes, training courses, lesson plans, and others Effective learning - especially in organizations, where training is to be converted into organizational results - should arguably cover all the levels of each of the domains, where relevant to the situation and the learner.

The learner should benefit from development of knowledge and intellect (Cognitive Domain); attitude and beliefs (Affective Domain); and the ability to put physical and bodily skills into effect - to act (Psychomotor Domain). Here's a really simple adapted 'at-a-glance' representation of Bloom's Taxonomy. The definitions are intended to be simple modern day language, to assist explanation and understanding. It's helpful at this point to consider also the 'conscious competence' learning stages model, which provides a useful perspective for all three domains, and the concept of developing competence by stages in sequence.

Bloom came up with three learning domains which have been presented in the Table 2.1 below;

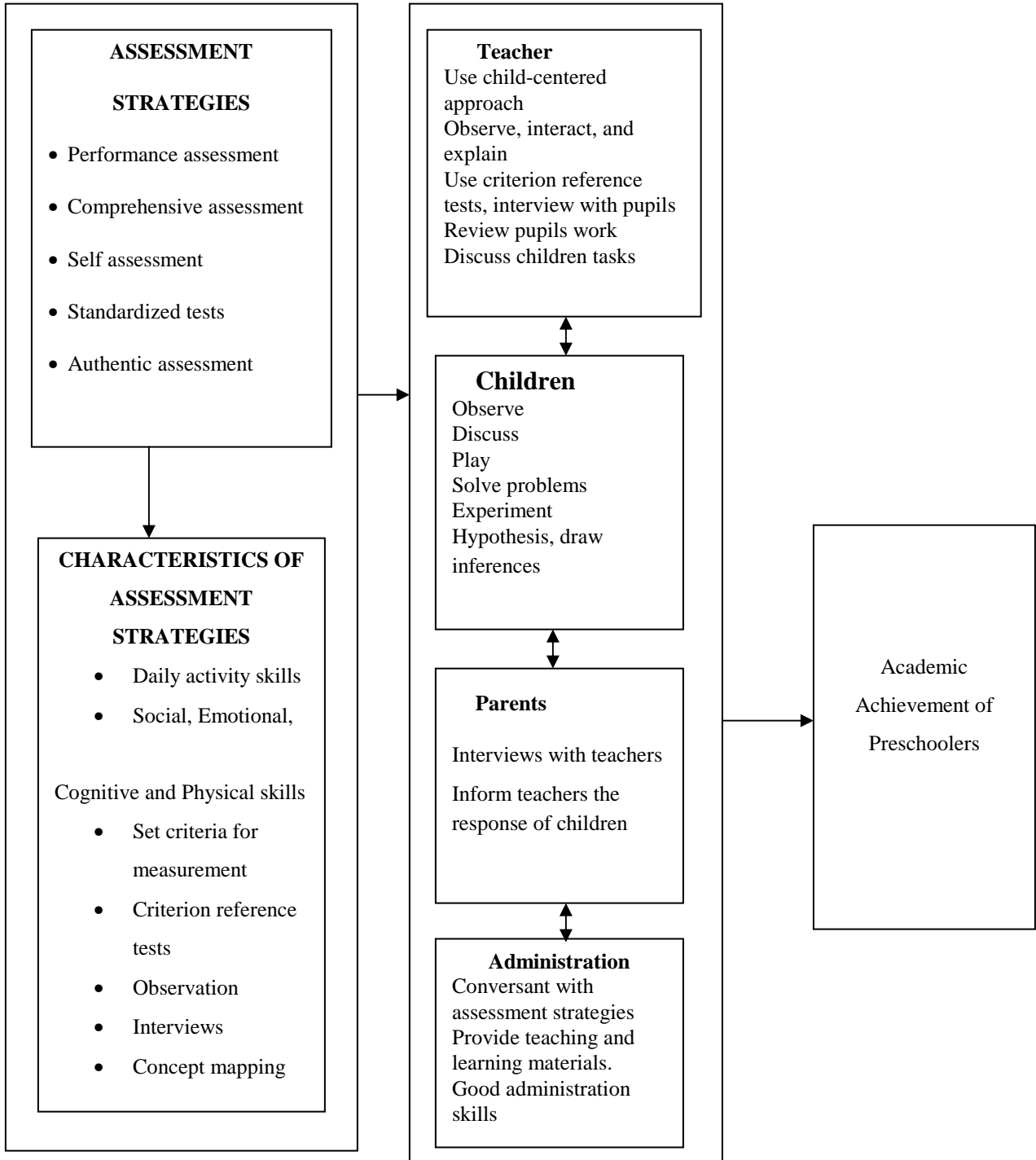
Table 2.2: Blooms Taxonomy of Learning Domains

Cognitive (Knowledge)	Affective (Attitude)	Psychomotor (Skills)
Recall data	Receive (awareness)	Imitation (copy)
Understand	Respond (react)	Manipulation (follow instructions)
Apply (use)	Value (understand and act)	Develop Precision
Analyze (structure/elements)	Organize personal value system	Articulation (combine, integrate related skills)
Synthesize (create/build)	Internalize value system (adopt behaviour)	Naturalization (automate, become expert)
Evaluate (assess, judge in relational terms)		

In the table above Cognitive Domain, levels 5 and 6, Synthesis and Evaluation, were subsequently inverted by Anderson and Krathwhol (2001). Anderson and Krathwhol also developed a complex two-dimensional extension of the Bloom Taxonomy. This is why you will see different versions of this Cognitive Domain model.

2.6. Conceptual Framework of the study

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework on assessment strategies employed by teachers and their influence on academic achievement of preschool children.



From the figure 2.2 the framework indicates the relationship between the assessment strategies, the characteristics of these strategies, the work of the teacher, child and the parent, the role played by the preschool administration in the process of assessment and their influence on preschoolers' academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies teachers' employ in assessing preschool children and their influence on learner performance. This chapter consists of the research design that the study adopted as well as the study population used in the study and how it was sampled. The instruments that were used in the study are also given in this chapter in addition to the data collection procedure. The procedure that was used in data analysis is also given in brief.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods designed, survey research design was used in this study. It merely seeks information on people's thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, and opinions. It also involves large numbers of people. Survey research design enabled the researcher answer the research questions. Survey research design was applicable in the study because it made it possible to get opinions from many participants in a wide area.

3.3 Target Population

The study population comprised of all the 78 preschools, teachers and preschoolers in Nairobi West district of Nairobi Province.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study adopted a random sampling procedure in sample preschools in Nairobi West District. The study identified respondents from the available public and private preschools in the district.

The identification of schools in the sample was carried out per educational zone in the district. There are three educational zones in Nairobi West District namely Kibera zone, Langata Zone and Karen Zone. This study selected a random sample of 30% of the public and 30% of the private preschools in each zone, through random selection. Table 3.2 shows the number of public and private preschools in the three educational zones of Nairobi West District.

Table 3.2: Study Sample

Zone	Public schools	Sampled	Private school	Sampled
	Total		Total	
Kibera	12	4	15	5
Langata	15	5	12	4
Karen	9	3	15	5
Total	36	12	42	14

Table 3.2 indicates that 12 public preschools and 14 private preschools in Nairobi West District formed the sample. This brought the total sample to 26 preschools in the district. In each of these schools, one preschool teacher formed the sample for teacher respondents for the study. These totalled to 26 teachers who were in the sample.

3.5 Research Instruments

This study used questionnaire, interview and learner analysis guide as the data collection instruments. Observation of selected lessons in a few schools was also done.

3.6 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research instrument that gathers data over a large sample. The researcher used it as it allows for anonymity of respondents and uniformity of questions thus allowing comparability. The questionnaire allows the researcher to be able to solicit the same information from the spectrum of respondents (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The questionnaire for this study was structured so that it may elicit similar responses from the target group of respondents. It contained two parts: the first with closed questions to provide demographic data about the preschool teachers, and the second with open questions to elicit opinions of the respondents on the influence of assessment on children's performance. The questionnaire was issued to the preschool teachers in the 26 sampled schools in Nairobi West District.

3.7 Interviews Schedule

An interview is a conversation between two or more people, interviewer and the interviewee, where questions are asked by interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee. A research interview is a structured social interaction between a researcher and a subject who is identified as a potential source of information, in which the interviewer initiates and controls the exchange to obtain quantifiable and comparable information relevant to an emerging stated hypothesis.

Interviews are an essential tool in following up on areas of curiosity during research (Jackson, 1990). Interviews allow the researcher to access information that may not be given in a questionnaire. Since the interview is a one on one session, the researcher was able to access extra linguistic aspects of the interaction. This study conducted structured interviews with teachers in the sample. The process involved the researcher asking each respondent the same question in the same way (Wengraf, 2001). Interviews are flexible, personal and sensitive information can be

shared and higher yields of responses are expected. The interview schedule for this study was developed using the study objectives. It had nine questions which were to be posed to the respondents.

3.8 Observation Schedule

The study used observation to identify some of the behavioural tendencies that were displayed by learners particularly in the core subject areas where activity work were taught and assessed. An observation schedule was designed to identify specific areas of interest to the study. It was developed in such a way that it had the physical context of the lesson, curriculum topic, learner attainment grade and the gender. There after there was a space for the researcher to comment on how the lesson was depending on what was intended to be observed in that particular activity area.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

An instrument is valid only to the extent that its scores permits appropriate inferences to be made about a group of people for specific purposes (Wolf, 2005). Researchers make inferences from measurement results about how much of the variable being measured is present. Validity refers to the extent to which these inferences are sound. A researcher's interpretation of a score is valid if it yields accurate conclusions about the variable. In order to validate the instruments, the instruments were subjected to expert judgement and made sure they were constructed using the research questions to ensure the items are consistent in collecting the required data. For reliability the researcher did pilot the instruments. After piloting the researcher modified the instruments.

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Primary data for this study was collected through questionnaire and oral interview. The questionnaire was administered upon all the teachers in the study sample. The researcher personally served the questionnaires to the respondents. The researcher briefed the respondents on the need to answer the questions as honestly as possible. She also assured the respondents of confidentiality of the information they provide on the questionnaire. Data for the study was also collected through a structured interview. The interview consisted of similar questions asked to all respondents. The study administered the interview to 70% (18) of the sample through a random selection of three quarters of the teachers in the sample.

The researcher attended some of the lessons in the sample schools to observe the assessment strategies employed by teachers. This was done in collaboration with the class teachers. A structured observation grid was used to observe lessons in activity areas. This recorded the physical context of the lesson, curriculum topic, information on student attainment and gender. This was intended to check on assessment strategies employed by teachers in assessing preschooler's academic achievement. The mode of instruction would also show different characteristics of assessment strategies and their influence on academic achievement of preschool children.

3.11 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis involves examining what has been collected and making deductions and inferences (Kombo and Tromp, 2006, Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). This study employed descriptive statistics and some inferential statistics to analyse the data obtained. The data was coded and presented in descriptive statistics, which involves the collection, organization and analysis of all

data relating to some population or sample under study. The data enabled the researcher to make conclusion on whether the assessment strategies employed by preschool teachers are effective or not. This data was also useful in exploring way of enhancing the assessment strategies used within preschools in Nairobi West District. Tabular Analysis Facing was be used to present the findings. The coded data is presented using charts and tables to reflect frequency and percentage responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings and interpretations followed by discussions on the findings. The purpose of the study was to identify the strategies employed by preschool teachers to assess the academic performance of their pupils. The objectives of this study were to identify the assessment strategies adopted by preschool teachers, establish the characteristics of these assessment strategies in preschools and how they enhance learning in preschools in Nairobi West District. This chapter focused on data analysis, presentation, interpretation and discussions of the findings. The researcher made use of frequency tables, charts and percentages to present data.

4.1.1 The Response Rate

The researcher targeted a sample of 26 questionnaire respondents and 18 interview respondents out of which 19 and 18 responses were obtained for questionnaires and interviews respectively. This represented a response rate of 73% for the questionnaire and 100% for interview schedule. According to Babbie (2002), any response of 50% and above is adequate for analysis thus this was even better.

4.2 Findings on Demographic Characteristics of Pre school Teachers in Nairobi West District.

Findings on demographic characteristics of the respondents was necessary in finding out its influence on assessment strategies. The areas covered in this section included age, highest academic qualification, professional qualification and teaching experience of pre-school teachers.

The researcher sought to establish the age bracket of the pre-school teachers in Nairobi West District.

Table 4.1: Age of pre-school teachers in Nairobi West District

Age bracket (Yrs)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
26-30	6	31.6	31.6
31-35	4	21.1	52.6
36-40	5	26.3	78.9
41 and above	4	21.1	100.0
Total	19	100.0	

From Table 4.1, it can be seen that a good number of respondents 31.6% said they were in the age bracket 26-30 years. Those in the age brackets 31-35 and above 41 years were 21.1% each. Preschool teachers under the age bracket of 36-40 years were at 26.3%.

In an effort to find the highest academic qualification of pre school teachers, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate.

Table 4.2: Highest Academic Qualification of Pre School Teachers in Nairobi West District

Highest Academic qualification	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
KCSE	9	47.4	47.4
Diploma	7	36.8	84.2
B.Ed	3	15.8	100.0
Total	19	100.0	

In relation to the highest academic qualification, majority of preschool teachers (47.4%) had KCSE certificate as their highest academic qualification. Those with diploma were found to be 36.8% while preschool teachers with bachelor of education degree were found to be 15.8%. The findings are presented in Table 4.2.

In an effort to get the preschool teachers professional qualifications, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate their professional qualification.

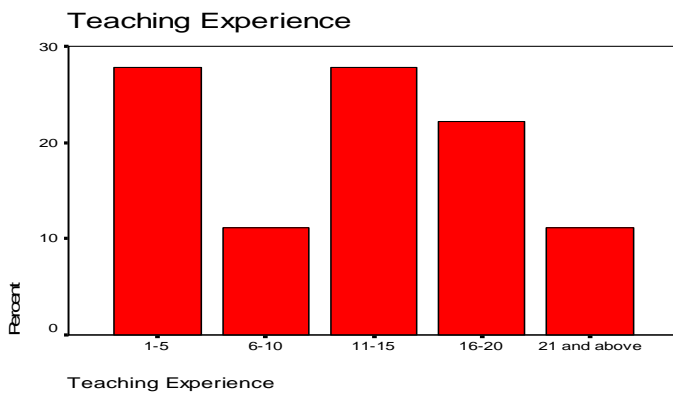
Table 4.3: Professional Qualifications of Preschool Teachers in Nairobi West District

Professional qualifications	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Certificate in ECE	8	42.1	47.1
Diploma in ECE	5	26.3	76.5
B.Ed in ECE	4	21.1	100.0
Total	17	89.5	

From the table 4.3, it can be seen that majority of the preschool teachers (42.1%) had a certificate in ECE. Only 26.31% had a diploma in ECE, and 21.1% had a BED in ECE. The remaining 10.5% did not respond. These findings are summarized in the Table 4.3.

The researcher was also interested in establishing the teaching experience of preschool teachers. These findings are summarized in the Figure 4.1 below

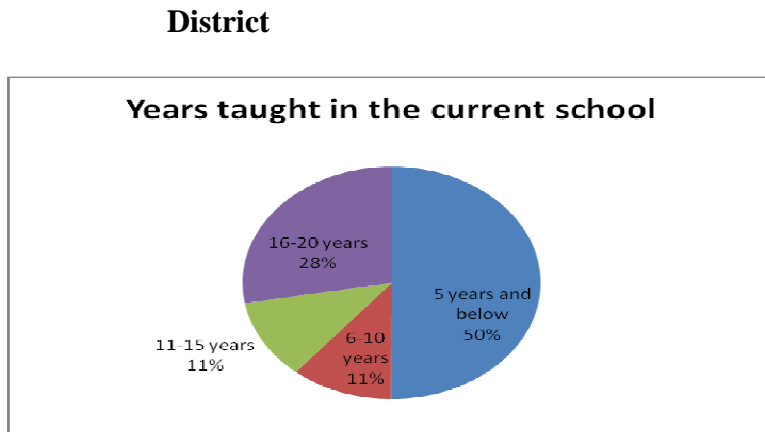
Figure 4.1: Teaching Experience of Preschool Teachers in Nairobi West District



From the figure 4.1, it can be seen that majority of the preschool teachers (57.9%) had more than 10 years and above of experience. Only 36.8% of the respondents had an experience of 10 years and below while 5.3% did not respond to the question.

The researcher also sought to know the duration of time taught in the current school. These findings are summarised in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure: 4.2 Years taught by pre school teachers in their current school in Nairobi West



The half of the respondents (50%) had taught in the current school for 5 years and below. Those that had taught for 6-10 years and 11-15 years were 11% each with preschool teachers who had taught in current school for 16-20 years at 28%.

From the findings on demographic data, it is clear that on professional training background; most of the respondents had an ECE certificate. Their teaching experience ranged between 3-6 years. Majority of teachers had taught in their current school for six years and above. Based on these findings, it may be argued that teachers were qualified and had adequate experience in assessment strategies in the pre-school.

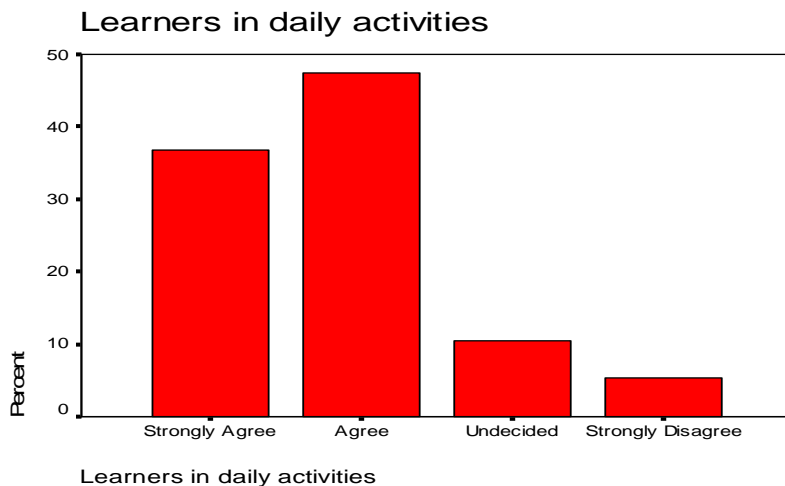
4.3 Findings on Assessment Strategies Adopted by Preschool Teachers in Nairobi West

District

With an aim of identifying the assessment strategies adopted by preschool teachers in Nairobi West District, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements. The statements included; Learners were assessed as they participated in daily activities; Information on strengths and weaknesses of a child was collected based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child; Assessment tests were done to compare learners to a fixed standard or set criteria for measurement; Teachers enabled children to reflect on their progress by asking them questions to assess their understanding; Observation of individual children or group was done to assess the achievement of children in different activity areas; The above statements enabled holistic assessment of pre-schoolers.

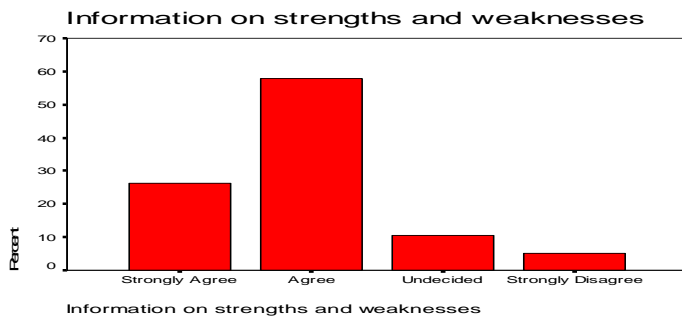
The researcher sought to find out the extent to which the respondents agreed with statements on characteristics of assessment strategies. The summary of these findings are presented in the figure 4.3

Figure 4.3: Assessing Learners in Daily Activities in Nairobi West District



Majority of the respondents indicated that learners were assessed as they participated in daily activities with 36.8% of the respondents indicating that they strongly agreed while 47.4% indicating that they agreed. Those that indicated that they strongly disagreed were 10.5% while 5.3% were undecided. The figure below summarises how the respondents felt on the assessment of learners using the information on the strength and weakness of the learners. The summaries of these findings are presented in the Figure 4.4.

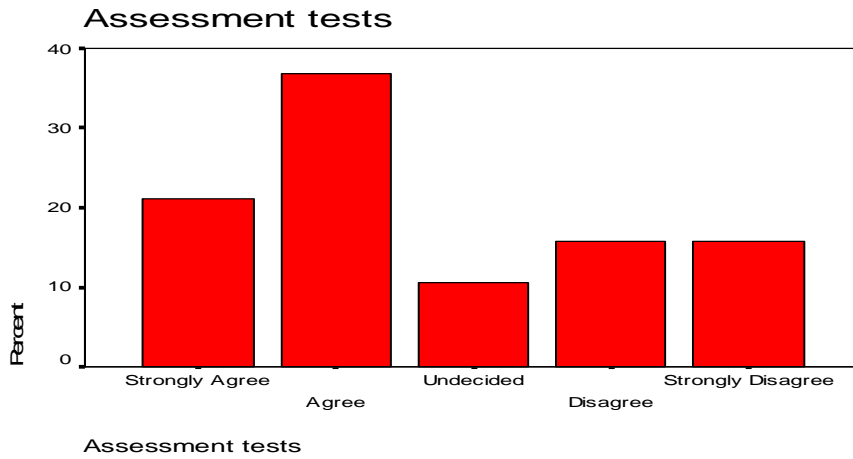
Figure 4.4: Assessing learners on Information of Strengths and Weaknesses of the Learners in Nairobi West District



Those who indicated that they favored information on strengths and weaknesses of a child being collected based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child were the majority at 84.2%. Those undecided were 10.5% while those that disagreed were 5.3%.

The figure below summarizes how respondents felt about the standardized tests given to the preschoolers.

Figure 4.5: Assessing Learners using Standardized Tests in Nairobi West District



On standardized tests done to compare learners to fixed standard or set criteria for measurement, 57.9% agreed, 31.6% disagreed while 10.5% were undecided.

The figure below shows how the teachers responded to the statement on asking children questions for their assessment. The summaries of these findings are presented in the Figure 4.6.

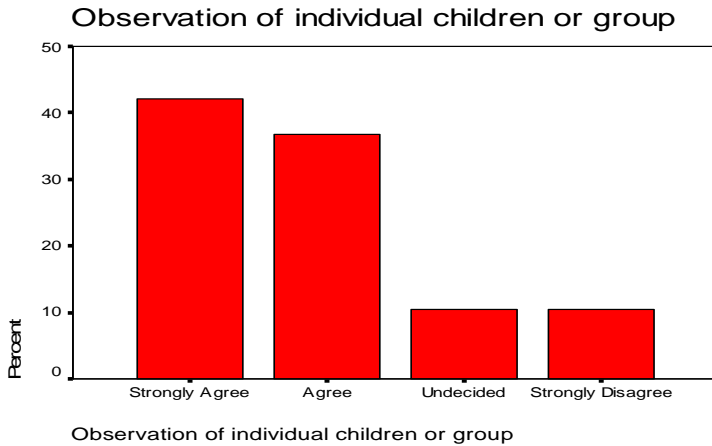
Figure 4.6: Assessing by Teachers asking Questions to the Preschool Children in Nairobi West District



Teachers who enabled children to reflect on their progress by asking them questions to assess their understanding were 68.4% and those that did not were 21.1% while 5.3% were undecided.

The summary of the findings on observation of individual children or group is presented in the Figure 4.7.

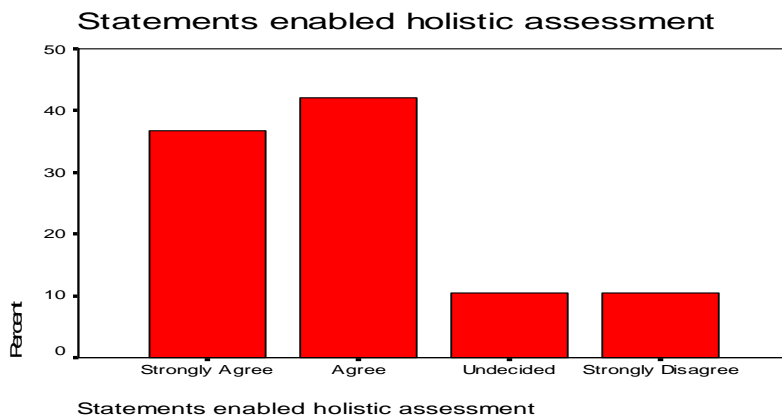
Figure 4.7: Assessing by Observation of Individual Children or Group in Nairobi West District



Preschool teachers who used observation of individual children or groups to assess the achievement of children in different activity areas were 78.9% and those that did not and undecided were 10.5% and 10.6% respectively.

The summary of the respondents on the assessing of statements that enable holistic assessment of Pre School children are presented in the Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Assessing by Statements that Enabled Holistic Assessment of Preschool Children in Nairobi West District



Preschool teachers who indicated that all the statements had enabled holistic assessment of preschoolers were 78.9% and those disagreeing and undecided were 10.5% each.

The above data on identification of assessment strategies, the preschool teachers indicated that they give work and mark to see whether there is any progress in the children. Some of the preschool teachers however indicated that they did an assessment every Friday to monitor progress. Teachers favoured the assessment of learners as they participated in daily activities and an assessment strategy where information on strengths and weaknesses of a child is collected based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child. This is in line with Bloom's Taxonomy model that emphasizes three domains namely cognitive domain (intellectual capability, that is knowledge, or 'think'); affective domain (feelings, emotions and behaviour, that is attitude, or 'feel'); psychomotor domain (manual and physical skills, that is skills, or 'do'). At their stage of development the learners tend to lean more on physical skills learning and hence their assessment should also lean on that aspect.

However, preschool teachers expressed concern that there were different ages mixed making assessments difficult. Most teachers described the results of the assessments as informative as they helped them monitor progress of individual learners and accord individual assistance where necessary. The assessments also were described as a major criterion to choose learners who moved to the next level. The information got out of assessments also helped suit the teaching and learning methods in line with the needs of the learners.

On the ways to improve assessment of preschoolers, the teachers indicated that more staff was critical for appropriate child teacher ratio. They also said that T/L materials should be provided and learners of different ages to be grouped differently to ease learning. Some teachers indicated

that those learners who excelled should be motivated and also highlighted the need for seminars and workshops on pre-schoolers assessment.

4.4 Findings on the Influence of Assessment Strategies Employed by Pre school Teachers in Nairobi West District

In an effort to establish the influence of the assessment strategies used by preschool teachers, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate the strategies they used more often, less often, do not use at all, and the one that has been effective. The assessment strategies included performance assessment, comprehensive assessment, standardized tests, self-assessment, and authentic assessment strategies.

The strategy that was found to be in use more often was performance assessment with 55.6% followed by comprehensive test with 22.2%. Standardized tests and self-assessment scored 11.1% each while none of the preschool teachers indicated authentic assessment as used more often. These findings are presented in the Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Strategies of Assessment used more often by Pre School Teachers in Nairobi West District

Assessment strategies	Frequency	Percent
Comprehensive	4	22.2
Standardized test	2	11.1
Performance assessment	10	55.6
Self assessment	2	11.1
Total	18	100.0

The strategy that was found to be in use more often was performance assessment with 55.6% followed by comprehensive test with 22.2%. Standardized tests and self-assessment scored 11.1% each while none of the preschool teachers indicated authentic assessment as used more often. These findings are presented in the Table 4.4.

Table 4.5: Strategies of Assessment used less often by Pre School Teachers in Nairobi West District

Strategies of assessment	Frequency	Percentage
Comprehensive	1	5.6
Standardized test	9	50.0
Performance assessment	1	5.6
Self assessment	3	16.7
Authentic assessment	4	22.2
Total	19	100

On strategies used less often 50% of the respondents indicated standardized tests, 22.2% indicated authentic assessment, 16.7% indicated self assessment while performance assessment and comprehensive assessment were 5.6% each. These findings are presented in the Table 4.5.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the strategies that they do not use at all. Table 4.6 presents the findings.

Table 4.6: Strategies of Assessment that were not used at all by Pre School Teachers in Nairobi West District

Assessment strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Standardized test	2	22.2
Self assessment	2	22.2
Authentic assessment	5	55.6
Total	9	100

Majority of the respondents 55.6% indicated that they do not use authentic assessment.

Standardized tests and self-assessment are not used by 22.2% of the respondents each.

The respondents were asked to indicate the strategy that had been effective. These findings are presented in the Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Strategies of Assessment that were Found to be Effective in Nairobi West District

Strategies of assessment	Frequency	Percentage
Comprehensive	5	27.8
Standardized test	1	5.6
Performance assessment	7	38.9
Self assessment	4	22.2
Authentic assessment	1	5.6
Total	9	100

Majority 38.9% of the respondents indicated that performance assessment had been effective. It was followed by comprehensive assessment at 27.8% and self-assessment at 22.2% while standardized test and authentic assessment scored 5.6% each.

Based on these findings of the study, performance assessment strategy was found to be effective. The effectiveness of the assessment strategies however was not clear-cut as different strategies were suited for different learning activities. A mixture of these strategies was found to be in use depending on what was being assessed. The standardized tests strategy was found to be used less often given that most of the teachers preferred it at the end of the term. These strategies therefore may be complementary such that performance assessment strategy was used frequently to monitor progress in the short term while standardized tests could be used to assess learning in the long run.

The effective assessment strategies were found to be those that focused on process of interaction with the learners rather than those that emphasized a basic standard to gauge learners. In the process of interaction the teachers could identify and nurture capabilities of the learners more efficiently. Equally, in interaction process the teachers capable to pin point weaknesses in learners and intervened to see improvement.

4.5 Characteristics of Assessment Strategies Employed by Pre School Teachers in Nairobi

West District

In an endeavor to describe characteristics of the assessment strategies used, the researcher asked the respondents to indicate how a set of characteristics best described the assessment strategies they used. The findings are presented in the Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Teachers Assessing by Observation of Individual Children or Group in Nairobi West District

Observation	Frequency	Percentage
More often	14	77.8
Often	4	22.2
Total	18	100

One of the characteristics was observation of individual children or groups of children where 77.8% of the respondents indicated that it is more often. The others 22.2% of the respondents indicated that observation of individual children or groups of children were often.

The table below shows how the respondents rated the statement on interview with children or parents. These findings are presented in the Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Teachers Assessing through Interview with Children or Parents in Nairobi West District

Interview	Frequency	Percentage
Often	8	50
Rarely	8	50
Total	16	100

For interviews with children or parents the respondents indicated often and rarely equally at 50% each. The table below shows how concept mapping was rated by the respondents. Table 4.10 presents these findings.

Table 4.10: Teachers Assessing Through Concept Mapping of Children in Nairobi West District

Concept mapping	Frequency	Percentage
More often	2	11.8
Often	6	35.3
Rarely	5	29.4
Never	4	23.5
Total	17	100

On concept mapping, the responses varied with majority of the respondents 35.3% indicating often followed by rarely at 29.4%. Those who indicated never were 23.5% while those that indicated very often were 11.8%.

Table 4.11: Teachers Assessing through Journals kept by Learners or Teachers in Nairobi West District

Journals	Frequency	Percentage
More often	3	16.7
Often	10	55.6
Rarely	2	11.1
Never	3	16.7
Total	18	100

On the journals kept by learners or teachers, majority of the respondents 55.6% indicated often while very often and never scored 16.7% each. Those that indicated that journals kept by learners or teachers are rare were 11.1%. The findings are presented in the Table 4.11.

Table 4.12: Teachers Assessing through Performance Assessment Tasks given to Children in Nairobi West District

Performance assessment	Frequency	Percentage
More often	10	55.6
Often	6	33.3
Rarely	2	11.1
Total	18	100

On performance assessment tasks, majority of the respondents 55.6% indicated that it is very often while 33.3% said it is often. Those that indicated it is rare were 11.1%. The findings are summarized in the Table 4.12.

Table 4.23: Open-ended Questions or Problems used by Pre School Teachers in Assessing Children in Nairobi West District

Open ended questions	Frequency	Percentage
More often	4	23.5
Often	9	52.9
Rarely	4	23.5
Total	17	100

The other characteristic was open-ended questions or problems. Majority of the respondents 52.9% indicated that it is often while those who indicated very often and rare were 23.5% each. These findings are presented in the Table 4.13.

Table 4.14: Portfolio-Collection used by Pre School Teachers in Assessing

Children in Nairobi West District

Portfolio-collection	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	3	16.7
Often	8	44.4
Rarely	6	33.3
Never	1	5.6
Total	18	100

Portfolios-collection and assessment of individual work was found to be often by 44.4% of the respondents while 33.3% said it is rare. Only 16.7% said it is very often while 5.6% indicated never. These findings are presented in the Table 4.14.

Table 4.15: Narrative descriptions used by Pre School Teachers in Assessing

Children in Nairobi West District

Narrative description	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	5	27.8
Often	7	38.9
Rarely	6	33.3
Total	18	100

On narrative descriptions 38.9% of the respondents indicated it is often followed by 33.3% who said it is rare. Those that indicated that it is very often were 27.8%. The findings are presented in the Table 4.15.

The assessment strategies used were characterized by observation of individual children or groups of children, interviews with children or parents, journals kept by learners or teachers, performance assessment tasks, portfolios-collection and assessment of individual work, and narrative descriptions. These characteristics showed an endeavor to try identifying appropriate interventions at the preschool level where there is less focus on testing and more on evaluating the individual child. Attention is given to the process of the interactions (i.e., whether the assessment is being conducted in a way that optimizes the child's demonstration of abilities).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations made there-to.

5.2 Summary

This study sought to establish the assessment strategies that teachers in preschools in Nairobi West District use to assess preschoolers. The study found out that assessment of learners as they participate in daily activities (Performance assessment) and an assessment strategy where information on strengths and weaknesses of a child is collected based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child (Comprehensive assessment) are used by most pre-school teachers. On the characteristics of these assessment strategies used the study found that these assessment strategies were characterized by observation of individual children or groups of children, interviews with children or parents, journals kept by learners or teachers, performance assessment tasks, portfolios-collection and assessment of individual work, and narrative descriptions. On the impact that these assessment strategies have towards the learning of preschoolers, this study found that the assessment strategies have a major impact on the preschoolers as they determine and shape the approaches that the teachers use in the teaching and learning process. The results of the assessments inform the teachers whether their teaching methods are all right or they need to change anything. This in return will influence the kind of teaching that the teacher will provide to the preschoolers.

Performance assessment strategy was found to be effective. However, a mixture of these strategies was found to be in use depending on what was being assessed. There are interventions that the study found can be made to enhance the use of assessment strategies for preschoolers in Nairobi West District. These interventions include use of active assessment strategies that enhance learner content understanding and promote skills that will be beneficial to learners throughout their lives.

5.3 Conclusion

Recent years have seen a growing public interest in early childhood education. Along with that support has come the use of “high stakes” assessment to justify the expense and apportion the dollars. With so much at stake with the future of our nation’s children, it is imperative that we proceed correctly. Above all, we must guarantee that assessment reflects our highest educational goals for young children and neither restricts nor distorts the substance of their early learning. This brief sets forth the criteria for comprehensive and balanced assessment strategies that meet the need for accountability while respecting the well-being and development of young children. Such a system can include testing, provided it measures applicable knowledge and skills in a safe and child-affirming situation. It can also include informal assessments, provided they too meet psychometric standards of reliability and validity. Developing and implementing a balanced approach to assessment is not an easy or inexpensive undertaking. But because we value our children and respect those charged with their education, it is an investment worth making.

The study revealed the need to understand the motive of assessment strategies and make their best use in impacting learning to the children. Active assessment strategies that enhance learner

content understanding and promote skills that will be beneficial to learners throughout their lives have been highlighted as important in improving learning for preschoolers. Assessment strategies that encourage group work and life skills have also been found as very useful to the preschoolers. For an assessment strategy to be effective, the study found out that it has to be learner centred in its approach. The different assessment strategies were found to be in use depending on the context of assessment. Performance assessment, for instance, was found useful in short-term assessments while standardized assessment was found suitable for long term learning assessment. Owing to the significance of interaction process in learning, the assessment strategies used were characterized by observation of individual children or groups of children, interviews with children or parents, journals kept by learners or teachers, performance assessment tasks, portfolios-collection and assessment of individual work, and narrative descriptions. Assessment strategies should be thought with the stages of child development in mind to ensure that the impact they have on learners is positive and improvement oriented.

5.4 Recommendations

This study recommends that intervention measures should be taken to provide a guideline of preschoolers assessment strategies based on curriculum. There should be a general guide formulated out of research to act as a reference point for the preschool teachers in their work. The study also recommends that pre-schoolers be grouped based on their age to ease learning. The mixture in terms of age translates into different levels of development, which become problematic when it comes to preparations of assessment strategies. There is need for seminars and workshops for preschool teachers on the various assessment strategies available to ensure they are informed and can make prudent decisions depending on the situation. There is also need

for the learners and teachers to be provided with the requisite materials to improve learning and assessment strategies.

This study recommends that a further study be conducted on the relationship between child development stages and assessment strategies. This study will inform the grouping of learners as well as the teaching and assessment strategies. It recommends that measures included in an assessment be selected by qualified professionals to ensure that they are reliable, valid and appropriate for the children being assessed. The recommends that the Ministry should develop systems of analyses so that test scores are interpreted as part of a broader assessment that may include observations, portfolios, or ratings from teachers and/or parents. Policy makers should recommend that policy decisions to be on an evaluation of data that reflects all aspects of children's development – cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. All teachers and parents should be involved in the assessment process so that children's behaviours and abilities can be understood in various contexts and cooperative relationships among families and school staff can be fostered. There is need to provide training for early childhood teachers and administrators to understand and interpret standardized tests and other measures of learning and development. All those concerned with assessment should emphasize precautions specific to the assessment of young children.

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APPENDIX I:

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

This questionnaire is about assessment strategies used by teachers in assessing preschool children. The information you give will be kept confidential so answer it with honesty.

PART I

Tick where appropriate

Age 15-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 40 and above

Highest academic qualification

KCPE KCSE DIPLOMA B.ED Any other specify.....

Highest professional qualification

Certificate in ECE Or any other specify.....

Diploma in ECE Or any other specify.....

B.ED in ECE Or any other specify.....

Postgraduate in ECE Or any other Specify

Teaching experience: _____ Years

Number of years taught in current school _____ Years.

PART 2. Please tick the number that is the most appropriate to you

KEY SD-Strongly Disagree 5, D-Disagree 4, U-Undecided 3, A-Agree 2, SA-Strongly Agree 1

	SD	D	U	A	SA
Learners are assessed as they participate in daily activities	5	4	3	2	1
Information on strengths and weaknesses of a child is collected Based on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of a child	5	4	3	2	1
Assessment tests are done to compare learners to a fixed standard or set criteria for measurement	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers enable children to reflect on their progress by asking them questions to assess their understanding	5	4	3	2	1
Observation of individual children or group is done to assess the achievement of children in different activity areas	5	4	3	2	1

The above statements have enabled holistic assessment
of pre-schoolers

5 4 3 2 1

PART 3. In order to answer part 3 please refer to attached notes at the back

Tick where appropriate

QUESTIONS	ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES				
	Comprehensive	Standardized test	Performance assessment	Self assessment	Authentic assessment
1. Which of the strategies do you use more often?					
2. Which one of these strategies do you use less often?					
3. Which one of these strategies you do not use at all?					
4. Which one of these has been effective?					

PART 4. Rate your use of the following characteristics of assessment strategies.

Characteristics of assessment strategies	Very often	Often	Rarely	Never
Observation of individual children or groups of children Interviews with children or parents, Concept mapping of individual groups or children Journals kept by learners or teachers Performance Assessment tasks Open-ended questions or problems Portfolios-collection and assessment of individual work Narrative Descriptions				

Please refer to the below when answering part 3

Assessment strategies

Performance Assessment— Assessing of children as they participate in daily activities, write stories, solve problems, and draw illustrations.

Comprehensive Assessment— Assessment based on the child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. .

Standardized Tests— these are tests that compare students to a fixed standard or set criteria for measurement.

Self-Assessment— enables children to reflect on their progress. Teachers can assess the understanding of children by asking question.

Authentic Assessment Strategies may include Observation of individual children or groups of children, Interviews with children or parents, Concept mapping of individual groups or children, Journals kept by learners or teachers, Performance Assessment tasks, Open-ended questions or problems, Drawings, Photos, Artwork, Portfolios, Narrative Descriptions, Audio tapes, Video tapes, Work samples from any content area showing growth and progress over time, and work samples.

APPENDIX II:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

1. Tell me about your professional training background.
- 2 For how long have you been a teacher?
- 3 Tell me how you assess preschoolers in your school
- 4 Briefly describe your preparations for these assessments.
- 5 How do you carry out these assessments?
- 6 Do you find the results of the assessments informative?
- 7 How do the findings of you assessments inform your approach to teaching?
- 8 How do you use the information obtained from assessments to assist the learners?
- 9 What do you think can be done to improve assessment of preschoolers in Nairobi West District?

APPENDIX III

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Activity area

Date.....

Physical context	Curriculum topic	Learners attainment	Gender	
			Male	Female

Remarks.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX IV

NAIROBI PROVINCE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS

DISTRICT	NUMBER OF PRESCHOOLS	ENROLMENT	NO. OF TEACHERS
Nairobi West	64	1993	28
Nairobi East	75	3247	92
Nairobi South	76	2838	85
TOTAL	215	8078	205

The above table shows that there are 215 pre schools in Nairobi province. The enrolment is 8078 with a total of 205 pre school teachers.

NAIROBI WEST DISTRICT EDUCATIONAL ZONES

ZONE	NUMBER OF PRESCHOOLS	ENROLMENT	NO. OF TEACHERS
Lang'ata	27	1024	26
Kibera	27	1422	35
Karen	24	966	27
TOTAL	78	3412	88

The above table shows there is a total of 78 numbers of preschools. The enrolment is 3412 and 88 pre school teachers. (Researcher, 2009).