

Role of Play in the Development of Children Between 1 to 6 Years in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State

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Abstract

This study examined the role of play in the development of children between 1 to 6 years in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State. Two specific purposes and two research questions guided the study. Survey research design was used for the study. A total population of 2,849 people comprising 2,808 pupils and 41 care givers were used for the study. The sample for the study was 200 comprising 159 pupils and 41 teachers. The sample size was selected using random sampling techniques. Data were collected with the use of questionnaire. Data were analyzed using percentages. The results showed that the different types of play include social play, associative play, dramatic play, cooperative play among others. The results also showed that play promotes social behavior, language development, creativity, and cognitive development. The study concluded that play is one of the brains behind academic achievement in early years because children learn a lot as they play. The study recommended that caregivers, school head teachers as well as classroom teachers should engage children to different types of play.

Keywords: *Role of play, Development, Children*

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Background to the Study

Early childhood education is a branch of education that relates to the teaching of children (formally and informally) from birth up to the age of eight. Early childhood Education is the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Education is of great importance to early child development through the following ways; it builds the spirit of teamwork and creates a sense of discipline in children, it also, helps in growth as well as development of the nation.

Child development can be described as a sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth to the beginning of adulthood. The term development in its most general psychological sense refers to orderly changes that occur in human beings between conception to death. Child development incorporates physical growth as well as intellectual, language, emotional and social development. Child development involves the biological, psychological and emotional change that occurs in human beings between birth and the end of adolescence. Play has a significant role in child development.

Parson (2011), described play as a range of intentional motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment. In the words of Gay (2013), he opined that play is the act of passionately engaging in the surrounding world through exploration, manipulation, physical exuberance, experimentation and pretence, either alone or with others. He goes on further to explain that play is a basic human drive which is essential to human development. Play can also be seen as an activity performed for its own sake. Play is essential because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional upbringing of the child.

A child is a young person within the stage of birth till puberty. Ogbonnaya, Anowai, Ezeaku, and Ugwu (2021), stated that a child is a human being under the age of 18 years. Anyakoha (2015), defined child as somebody who depends on others for the provision of daily food, clothing and shelter. A child needs different things for survival which includes food, clothing, shelter, sleep, and removal of waste, freedom from fear and love, safety environment among others. A child at this period is helpless as he or she cannot provide his or her basic needs. Children need appropriate care and safety environment for play so as to facilitate their optimal development.

Play is very important for a child during the early childhood years. Play encourages greater independence; it fosters cognitive growth of a child. It is essential to healthy brain development (Shute 2009; Elkind 2007; Vygotsky 2016 and Ginsburg 2007). It strengthens and increases neural connection in the brain. Through play, children build imagination and creativity and it also helps children understand the world around them. Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination and emotional strength. At a very early age, children interact and engage in the world around them through play.

Children need appropriate care and safety environment for play so as to facilitate their optimal development. According to United Nations Convention on the Right of the child (CRC) (2016), child care is the responsibility of parents and guidance, teachers, and any other person under whose protection the child is. However, due to the present economic situation in Nigeria where both parents work for extended periods outside the homes with little or no time to spend with their children, most parents enroll their children to crèche and childcare centers. The children stay outside the home for a long period. Hence, they depend more on crèche and daycare centers for their upbringing.

A day care is a supervised care center often outside the home for children. Azonuche and Anyakoha (2018) described day care as an institution where children whose parents are engaged in work or business outside the home are kept for care until their parents come back to their homes. Tombowua (2013), reported that day care is a semi-formal education arrangement outside home where young children are trained through exposing them to different types and forms of play. Often times, most Day Care deprive the children of play. Most children are either deprived of play or not fully exposed to the right type and forms of play that will bring about the required changes in their overall development by their parents, care givers, crèche or day care center. Children from Oguta Local Government area are inclusive and there are a lot of children, Day Care Centers and kindergartens in the area. Hence, the need to investigate on play and its' role on the development of children between 1-6 years.

Statement of the Problem

Miss-conception of play has resulted to deprivation of children play materials in pre-primary setting (Shute, 2009). A good number of Day Care Centers prefer formal learning environment where more of reading and writing is mostly adopted. Most teachers and parents see play as a waste of time. As a result, children are deprived of play both in school and in their neighborhood. Not exposing children to enough play at their early stage of their development can affect the child adversely. Play deprivation hinders the child's development. Negative effects resulting from play deprivation are numerous, thus, many children are deprived of appropriate play at their early developmental stage.

In most places, Oguta LGA inclusive, kindergarten and primary school teachers do not give much emphasis on play. Often times, they engage the children more on rhymes and how to write at the early stage of their development. This tends to have adverse effect on child up-bringing and all-round development of children.

Many researchers have written on play, Shute (2009) wrote on kindergarten test and importance of play on parenting, Aliza and Rahaty (2011) wrote on teaching and learning through play, also, Elkin (2007) researched on the power of play; learning what comes naturally; Wu (2011) and Wu (2014) studied Chinese and German teachers' conception of play and learning in children's' behavior and on practical and conceptual aspect of children's play in the Hong Kong and German Kindergartens in early years respectively. None has written on the role of play or any work concerning play in Oguta Local

Government Area in Imo State, Therefore, there is need to investigate play and its' role in the development of children between 1-6 years in Oguta LGA, Imo State.

Objective of the Study

The study aimed at examining play and its role in child development in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State. Specifically, the study intended to:

1. Identify different types of play important to the child's development.
2. Determine the role of play in child's development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the different types of play important to the child development?
2. What are the roles of play in the child's development?

Methodology

The design of the study is descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Oguta Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State. Oguta Local Government is one of the 27 Local Government Areas in Imo State. The LGA has many Day Care Centres and Nursery Schools. The population of the study was 2,849 people comprising of 2,808 children and 41 of teachers from the private Day Care Centers and Nursery Schools A sample size of 200 comprising 159 pupils and 41 teachers were used for the study. The area was first partitioned into four administrative areas to make sampling convenient. The administrative areas are Agwa, Akabor, Oguta and Oru. Twenty percent of the total number of schools (46) was selected giving 9 schools. Two schools were randomly selected from each of the administrative areas Agwa, Akabor, and Oru while 3 schools were selected from Oguta area. The instrument used for the data collection were questionnaires.

The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts, two from the Department of Early Childhood Education and one from the Department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management all in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. They critically examined the questionnaire items and the specific purposes of the study together with instrument of data analysis and made useful suggestions that improved the quality of the instrument. The questionnaires were personally distributed to the pupils who in turn gave it to their parent to fill the questionnaire and the teachers. The questionnaire was retrieved from them within two days and 93% return rate was obtained. Data were analyzed using percentage.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1: What are the different types of play that are important to child development?

N=200

S/N	Types of Play	Yes		No	
		FREQ.	%	FREQ.	%
1	Social play	196	98%	4	2%
2	Parallel play	104	52%	96	48%
3	Associative play	184	92%	16	8%
4	Fantasy play	136	68%	64	32%
5	Dramatic play	168	84%	32	16%
6	Cooperative play	184	92%	16	8%
7	Competitive play	184	92%	16	8%
8	Functional play	156	78%	44	22%
9	Physical play	172	86%	28	14%
10	Creative play	196	98%	4	2%
11	Manipulative play	88	44%	112	56%

Source: Field Survey 2022

In Table 1 above, 98% (196) of the respondents indicated that social play is one of the different types of play, while 2% (4) indicated no to the response that social play is not one of the different types of play. The study's finding agrees with the findings of Zosh, Hopkins, Jensen, Neale, Hirsh-Pasek, Solis, and White bread, D. (2017) who noted that social play is one the different types of play. On parallel play as one of the different types of play, 52% (104) agreed while 48% (96) disagreed. On associative play 92% (184) agreed while 8% (16) disagreed. Furthermore, 68% (136) of the respondents agreed that fantasy play is one of the different types of play while 32% (64) disagreed in their responses. On dramatic play 84% (168) of the respondents agreed while 16% (32) disagreed. The findings agreed with the findings of Thibodeau, Gilpin, Brown, Meyer (2016) who stated that dramatic play is one of different types of play. For Cooperate plays being important, 92% (184) of the respondents agreed while 8% (16) of the respondents disagreed with the above assertion. On competitive play 92% (184) of the respondents agreed while 8% (16) disagreed. In Table 1 above, 78% (156) of the respondents indicated that functional play is one of the different types of play, while 22% (44) indicated no to the response that functional play is one of the different types of play. For Physical play as being important, 86% (196) of the respondents agreed that Physical play is among the different types of play. On creative play as one of the different types of play 98% (196) agreed while 2% (4) disagreed. Concerning manipulative play, 44% (88) of the respondents indicated yes while 56% (112) of the respondents said no.

Research Question 2: What is the role of play in child's development?

N=200

S/N	The Role of Play in Childs' development	YES		NO	
		FREQ.	%	FREQ.	%
1	Play encourages creativity	200	100%	0	0
2	Play helps in brain development	192	96%	8	4%
3	It helps in development of gross motor skill	164	82%	36	18%
4	It helps in language development	196	98%	4	2%
5	It helps in relaxation of tension.	196	98%	4	2%
6	It helps children to interact in the world around them.	196	98%	4	2%
7	It provides parents opportunity to interact with their children.	184	92%	16	8%
8	It helps in building active healthy bodies.	192	96%	8	4%
9	Play helps children in social development	198	99%	2	1%
10	It enhances cognitive self-regulatory behaviors in children	186	93%	14	7%

Source: Field Survey 2022

In table 2 above, it was observed that 100% (200) of the respondents agreed that play allowed children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive and emotional strength, while none of the respondents disagreed. The findings of the study support the assertions of Mottweiler and Taylor (2014), Wallace and Russ (2015), Carison, White and Davis-unger (2014) reported that play enhances reasoning skills creativity, problem solving and self-regulation skills. While 96% (192) of the respondents agreed that play was important to healthy brain development, the other 4% (8) of the respondents had an opposite view. This is in agreement with the findings of Pellis and Pellis (2009), and Pellis and Pellis (2007), Zosh, Whitebread, Neale, Jensen, Liu, Lynneeth, Hopkins, and Hirsh-Pasek (2017) who ascertained that play promotes brain development. Also, 82% (164) of the respondents agreed that play helped children to develop gross motor skills. On the other hand, 18% (36) of the respondents disagreed. Furthermore, 98% (196) of the respondents agreed that play exposed children in language development. The findings agreed with the findings of Corner, Kelly-vance, Ryalls and Friehe (2014), Mottweiler, and Taylor (2014); Read, James, and Weaver, A. (2017); Frank (2013) who noted that play enhances language development. 98% (196) of the respondents agreed that play helped to relax tension/anxiety while 2% (4) of the respondents disagreed. Also, on question item number 17, 98% (196) agreed to response that play allowed children interact with the world around them. While 2% (4) of the respondents disagreed with the response. Also, 92% (184) agreed that play offered parents a wonderful opportunity to engage their children fully, while 8% (16) of the respondents disagreed. Finally, 99% (198) of the respondents agreed that play helped to develop cognitive self-regulatory behaviour. Cognitive self-regulatory behaviour (Zachariou and Whitebread 2015; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, and Munro 2007; Barker, Semenov, Michaelson, Provan, Snyder, and Munakata, 2014; Bodrova, Germeroth, and

Leong 2013; Becker, McClelland, Loprinzi, and Trost 2014), social competency (Burrell, and Beard 2016; Hoffmann, and Russ, 2016) and motivation are enhanced in children through play (Sawyer 2017).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the different types of play that they are vital to children's growth and development include social play, associative play, fantasy play, dramatic play, cooperative play, competitive play functional play, physical play and creative play. Moreso, play promotes creativity, social behavior, language development, encouraged acquisition of skills, helps children develop sense of co-operation and team spirit. Therefore, play forms part of the bedrock for training and developing children by the parents, in Day Care and Nursery Schools in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made.

1. Nursery school proprietors/school managers should adopt professional practice of engaging children in different types of play and devote more time to play.
2. Parents and caregivers should understand the importance and the role of play in all round development of children.
3. Early Childhood Schools should provide regular training opportunities for caregivers to improve their skills in caring for children by exposing them to different types of play.
4. Government should provide educational program on basic play education by organizing radio, television shows and jingles to sensitize the people on the need of play.
5. Government should pay more attention to pre-school education especially with regards to adequate funding, supporting and providing adequate play materials in schools.

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