

REPOSITIONING ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: THE CHILDREN THEATRE APPROACH

UCHE EMOEFE KEN EKIUGBO ¹ and MERCY ADESOLA FASIKU ²

^{1, 2} (PhD), Department of Social Science Education, College of Education Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Email: ¹ ekiugbo.uche@bouesti.edu.ng, ² fasiku.mercy@bouesti.edu.ng

Abstract

The general purpose of this study was to carry out an experiment on how play which is generally regarded as children theatre approach could be used as instructional tool to reposition the teaching of social studies in elementary schools. The role of play in providing opportunities for the expression of creativity imagination, self-confidence, and self-efficacy and for the development of physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills, conforms with the objectives of social studies education in Nigerian schools. Infact an objective of social studies education at the elementary school level is for children to explore and experience the world around them, experiment with new ideas ,roles and experiences and in so doing learn to better understand and construct their own social position within the world and thus become responsible citizens in the future. The right of every child today in Nigeria is challenged by forces including unconducive environment, violence, insecurity, limited resources, child labour and exploitation practices which stand at variance with what social studies stand for. It is believed that this study would be of benefit to all the stakeholders, teachers and pupils in Nigerian social studies classroom. Attempt was made to review the place of play for the overall development of the child with a view to suggesting ways of improving the quality for teaching and learning of social studies. Quasi experimental design with pre and post test, non randomized and non-equivalent test was adopted for data collection. Two schools were purposely sampled. The samples was categorized into one experimental and one control in different schools of twenty pupils each. Data collected were analyzed using the percentage, mean, standard deviation and analysis of co variance (ANCOVA) to test the three formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that the academic performances in Social studies was low before treatment (28.79) but higher after treatment (71.74) irrespective of gender. The paper recommends that teachers of Social studies at the elementary schools should be complaint with the modern trend recognizing the pupils' factors as the starting point for teaching and curriculum implementations. Teachers should modify their methodology to accommodate the role of play which despite the proved benefits derived from engaging in it has been remarkably reduced for some children. Recommendations is made on how play should be infused in childrens' lives by creating the optimal developmental milieu.

Keywords: Children theatre approach, Social studies education, Methodology, Play and outdoor activities

INTRODUCTION

Play is essential for the overall development of the child and contributes to cognitive, physical, social and environmental wellbeing of the child. Play is generally regarded as the children theatre approach to the study of any subject in the curriculum of the school. Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development (Frost 1989). Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears, while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult care givers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competences that lead to enhanced

confidence and resiliency they will need to face future challenges (Hurwitz 2002, Barnett 1990, Isad 2002) Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflict and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest and ultimately engage fully in the passion they wish to pursue. In contrast to passive entertainment, play build active healthy bodies. In fact, it has been suggested that encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increase physical activity levels in children, which is an important strategy in the resolution of obesity (Burnette and Whitake 2005). Play is a simple joy that is a cherished part of childhood.

The interactions that occur through play tell children that adults are fully paying attention to them and help to build an enduring relationship (Cabrera and Lamb 2014). Parents who have the opportunity to glimpse into their childrens' world learn to communicate more effectively with their children and are given another setting to offer gentle, nurturing guidance. Less verbal children may be able to express their views, experiences and even frustrations through play, allowing their parents an opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of their prospective. Simply put, play offers parents a wonderful opportunity to engage fully with their children.

Play is integral to the academic environment. It ensures that the school setting attends to the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive development. It has been shown to help children adjust to the school settings and even enhance children learning readiness, learning behavior and problem solving skills. Social emotional learning is best Integrated with academic learning. It is concerning if some of the forces that enhance children ability to learn are elevated at the expense of others. Play and unscheduled time that allow for peer interactions are important component of social emotional learning (Elias and Arnold, 2006). Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High commission for human rights as the right to every child (United Nations committee on the rights of the child 2013). It emphasizes the role of play in providing opportunities for the expression of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy and for the development of physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills. It further highlight that through play, children explore and experience the world around them, experiment with new ideas, roles and experiences and in doing so, learn to better understand and construct their social position within the world (Awopetu and Ossom 2018).

Despite the numerous benefits derived from play for both children, parents, caregivers, schools, time for free pay has been markedly reduced for 21st century children. Too often the centrality of play in childrens' lives is misunderstood and ignored and perceived as deficit time better filled by adults directed purposeful activities (Bodrova 2008).

A careful look at the Nigerian situation would reveal that majority of schools in the county have the right of children to play challenged by forces including unconducive environment, violence and insecurity, limited resources, child labor and exploitation practices. It seems that even these children who are fortunate enough to have abundant available resources may not be receiving the full benefits of play. Most of the children are being raised in an increasingly hurried and pressured style that may limit the protective benefits they would have gained from

child driven play (Folorunsho and Yahaya 2019) It is important to understand that every child deserves the opportunity to develop his or her unique potentials. Therefore, child advocates must consider all factors that interfere with optimal development and press for circumstances that allow each child to fully reap the advantages associated with play.

It is observed in Nigerian schools that children in most cases are given less time for free exploratory play as they are hurried to adapt into adult roles and prepare for their future at earlier ages. It is clear that organized activities have a developmental benefits for children especially in contrast to completely unsupervised time. Experience has shown that free child driven play known to benefit children is decreased. In contrast, most schools as observed are adopting a dangerous trend of pushing small children too hard and too fast, using learning concepts well beyond their age and capacities all in the name to grow intelligent pupils (Omoera 2013)

It appears that a current trend in Nigeria nowadays is to focus on the academic fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic and one of the practical effects of the trend is decreased time left during the school day for recess creative arts and physical activities (Omoera 2013). This trend may have implications for the social and emotional development of children. Also, many after school child care programs prioritize an extension of academics and homework competition over organized play, free play and physical activity. It is observed that the decrease in free play by children is as a result of being passively entertained through television, computer, video games and many other electrical gadgets. This entertainment is not protective and in fact has some harmful effects.

Experience has shown that Nigeria is experiencing insecurity because of the unbridled activities of armed robbers who strike horrors anytime, anywhere, without the police force being able to do anything about it. Kidnapping today has become the fastest means of making money in Nigeria. Politically motivated assassination, ethnic militia, child trafficking, Boko haram which has assumed a serious level of notoriety within the shortest possible time of its existence. Therefore, children can no longer play safely outside the homes and schools unless they are under close adult supervision and vigilance.

In spite of the situation above as experienced in Nigeria, the importance of play as a cherished part of child hood what offers important developmental benefits cannot be over emphasized. Ekiugbo 2023 opined that children be afforded ample, unscheduled, independent, no screen time to be creative, to reflect and to decompress. Awopetu 2019 emphasized that active child center play is a time tested way of producing healthy and fit children. She maintained that the benefit of true toys such as blocks and dolls with which children use their imagination fully, over passive toys that require limited imagination. Kadiri 2019 however maintained that though parents can be encouraged to optimize conditions for play in their homes, there must be broad societal responses that address poverty, social inequities and violence before one can advise parent to allow unsupervised play. In addition, experience has shown that children who grew up in poverty and whose parents could not afford enhanced and affordable child care services, become academic giants in Nigeria today.

Experience has shown that consensus is hardly possible in the issue of play in schools as determinants of good performance among pupils, because of how people view them differently. It is against this background that the researcher examined the place of play on pupil's achievement in social studies classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The study intends to find out the place of children theatre which is play, if there is any significant effect of its utilization on children performance in social studies specifically, the study intends to:

1. determine the effect of children theatre (play on pupils performance in elementary social studies).
2. find out if gender has significant effect on the performance of male and female pupils in elementary social studies.

Research Questions

- Is there any significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method prior to the experiment
- Is there any significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method after the experiment.
- Is there any significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of male and female pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method after the experiment.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

- There is no significant difference between the Social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method prior to the experiment?
- There is no significant difference between the Social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method after the experiment
- There is no significant difference between the Social studies achievement scores of male and female pupils taught using the children theatre approach (play method) to teaching and learning and those taught with lecture method after the experiment

Research Design

This study used the quasi experimental research design method, which involves parallel equivalent group design. The experimental group was exposed to treatment using the children

theatre method (play method) and related educational materials while the control group was not exposed to treatment similar to that used in the experimental.

The population of the study comprised all the primary two pupils in all the primary schools in Ekiti state. The sample was drawn from two schools. L.A primary school Ananye Ikere Ekiti and St Silas primary school, Oraye, Ise Ekiti. Twenty pupils were selected from each schools using simple random sampling technique. Twenty male and twenty female pupils were used as target group in both schools. Therefore a total of forty pupils were selected for the study. The primary school at Ikere Ekiti was the experimental school, while that at Ise Ekiti was the control.

The researcher administered a pretest on the pupils in the experimental and control group simultaneously before the study began. The experimental group was taught social studies concepts using what the researcher called the children theatre approach (play method) and the control group was taught using the lecture method. Two research assistants were employed to help teach the pupils in the control group, using only the chalkboard and recommended social studies textbooks, while another two research assistants were employed to teach the pupils using the play way method. Both groups were under the supervision of the researcher and the Head teachers. The researcher and the assistants also administered a post test on both groups, after six weeks period of intensive coaching. The post test was by an achievement multiple choice test. The retrieved data from the pretest and post test scores were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics for the analysis. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance by using Analysis of variance and Analysis of Co-variance.

RESULTS

Test of Hypotheses

There is no significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using children theatre approach (play method) and children taught with lecture method prior to the experiment.

Table 1: t test analysis of performance of children in social studies pre test

variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	tcal	tcal	Decision
Play Method	20	9.40	2.43	38	1.55	1.96	NS
Lecture Method	20	8.25	2.27				

$P < 0.05$ significance level, NS = Not Significant

Table 3 shows the result of analysis of performance of pupils in social studies pre test. The table revealed that mean score for pupils taught using play method (9.40) was greater than the mean score of pupils taught with lecture method (8.25) with a mean difference of (1.15). The test revealed that t calculated (1.55) was less than the critical t value (1.96) at 0.05 significant level. Hence, the null hypothesis was upheld. This means that there is no significant difference between the social studies achievement score of pupils taught using children theatre approach (play method) and those taught with lecture method prior to the experiment.

Hypothesis 2: there is no significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using children theatre approach (play method) and those taught with lecture method after the experiment.

Table 2: ANCOVA of performance of pupils taught social studies using play method and those taught with lecture method

Source	Type sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	435.344	2	217.672	25.944	.000	.584
Intercept	247.120	1	247.120	29.454	.000	.443
Pretest	309.319	1	309.319	36.867	.000	.497
Method	43.741	1	43.741	5.213	.028	.124
Error	310.431	37	8.390			
Total	17679.000	40				
Corrected total	745.775	39				

a_2 Squared = 0.583 (adjusted R square =0.561)

A one way between subject analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare the impact of two teaching methods on the performance of pupils in post test scores of social studies achievement test as shown in table 2 above.

After adjusting for pre test scores, there was a significant difference between the performance of pupils taught using using children theatre approach (play method) and those taught with lecture method $F(1,39) = 8.213, P < 0.05, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = 0.124$. Hence, the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and gain in achievement of experimental and control group

Group	N	x	Pretest	Posttest		Gain
			SD	x	SD	
Play method	20	9.40	2.43	22.35	4.17	12.95
Lecture method	20	8.25	2.27	18.80	3.90	10.55

Analysis in table 3 reveals that the control group (lecture method) and the experimental group (play method) got a score of 8.25 and 9.40 respectively in the pretest while they got a score 18.80 and 22.35 respectively in the post test. This shows that an increment of 10.55 for the control group and 12.95 for the experimental. Hence, the mean performance gain of students taught with play method was higher than those taught with lecture method.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of male and female pupils taught using children theatre approach (play method) and those taught with lecture method after the experiment.

Table 4: Two way ANCOVA of the effect of gender on social studies post test performance of pupils taught with (play method) and lecture method.

Source	Type sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	496.416	4	124.104	17.419	.000	.666
Intercept	229.068	1	229.068	32.152	.000	.479
Pretest	213.741	1	213.741	30.001	.000	.462
Method	46.923	1	46.923	6.586	.015	.158
Sex	58.178	1	58.178	8.166	.007	.189
Method X Gender	.966	1	.966	.136	.715	.004
Error	249.359	35	7.125			
Total	17697.000	40				
Corrected Total	745.775	39				

aR squared =0.666(Adjusted R square = 0.627)

The result in Table 4 above shows the effect of children gender on post test performance of children taught with play method and those taught with lecture method. The ANCOVA reveals that children gender have no effect on their performance in the posttest since $F(1,35)=0.136, p<0.05$, Partial $\eta^2=0.04$. Hence, the null hypothesis was upheld. This implies that there is no significant difference between the posttest scores of female and male children taught with play approach and those taught with lecture method.

Table 5: Mean and achievement gain of male and female children in experimental and control group

Group	Gender	N	Pretest	Posttest	-gain
Children Theatre method	Male	10	10.80	25.00	14.20
	Female	10	8.00	19.70	11.70
Lecture method	Male	10	7.80	19.70	11.90
	Female	10	8.70	17.90	9.20

Analysis in Table 5 reveals the influence of pupils' gender on the academic performance of social studies pupils. The table showed that male and female school pupils in the control group (lecture method) got the scores 7.80 and 17.90 respectively in the posttest. Similarly, male and female school pupils in the experimental group (play method) got a score of 10.80 and 8.00 respectively in the pre test while they got a score of 25.00 and 19.70 respectively in the posttest. This shows that there is an increment of 11.90(for male) and 9.20(for female) In the control group while there is an increment of 14.20(for male) and 11.70 (for female) in the experimental group. Hence, the mean performance gain of male and female pupils taught with the play method was higher than that of those taught with lecture method, but these increment was not due to the gender of the pupils.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study revealed that for the test of hypothesis 1, there was no significance difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the play method regarded as the children theatre approach and those taught with lecture method prior to the experiment. This means that pupils in both groups were at the same level of knowledge of the

topics taught in social studies before the commencement of the experiment. This is not at variance with the submission of Awopetu and Ossom 2018 who maintained that children in most cases show the same level of understanding before treatment. The result of hypothesis 2 indicated that there was significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of pupils taught using the children theatre approach and the lecture method approach after the experiment. This shows that the teaching method has significant influence on academic achievement of pupils in social studies. The findings from hypothesis 2 corroborate the findings of Omoera 2013, who in her findings in one of her research observed the effect of treatment on the performance of children in test administered. The findings from hypothesis 3 indicated that there was no significant difference between the social studies achievement scores of male and female pupils taught using the play method regarded as children theatre approach and those taught with lecture method after the experiment, hence the differences that existed in the performances cannot be ascribed to pupil's gender. This corroborate the view of Ekiugbo 2020 who considered play as an important way to develop the brain. Frost (1989) maintained that play helps to develop neural structures which results in forming synaptic connection, creating significant number of neural links. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears and this is very healthy for the development of the brain.

Summary

The study was designed to find out the possibility of repositioning the elementary social studies in Nigeria schools using the play method which is generally regarded as the children theatre approach to learning. A sample of 40 pupils were selected from two schools and it was randomly divided into the groups in each school with these group receiving different treatments. The experimental group received treatment through the children theatre approach or method and the control group, the lecture method. Hypothesis 1 showed that there was no significant difference in achievement scores of both experimental and control, whereas the second hypothesis showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group in the two schools.

CONCLUSION

Play is a cherished part of children that offers children important developmental benefits and parents as well as school authorities the opportunity to fully engage with the children. However, multiple forces are interacting to effectively reduce many children ability to reap the benefits of this method of teaching. Although, no one can be sure what skills will be needed in the children's future, certain character traits will produce children capable of navigating an increasingly complex world as they grow older. These traits include confidence, competence or the ability to master the environment and a deep seated connectedness to and security that children need to thrive, besides being resilient, which is to remain optimistic and be able to rebound from adversity. Young children need the essential character traits of honesty, generosity, decency, tenacity and compassion. Children are most likely to gain all of those traits in the social studies class room, through the children theatre approach to teaching and learning. Social studies is an evitable instrument to cultivate all these in the child. Social studies if well

taught, using the right methodology and the right pedagogical climate provides the opportunities for the expression of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy and for the development of physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills which is what the Nigeria of today needs.

Recommendations

- Teachers should modify their methodology to accommodate the role of children theatre approach to teaching and learning paradox in Nigeria, which in spite of the proven benefits has been markedly reduced for the 21st century children.
- There is the need to educate communities about appropriate resources in their environments that foster play and healthy child development and have this information available to every stake holder
- Parents teachers association should support school authorities to organize playgrounds, beginning at an early pre-school
- There is the need to support children having an academic schedule that is appropriately challenging and extra-curricular exposure that offer appropriate balance. What is appropriate is to be determined individually for each child on the basis of their unique needs, skills and temperament, not on the basis of what may be overly pressurized or competitive community standards or a perceived need to gain admission to a higher class.

References

- 1) Awopetu A.V & Ossom, M.O (2018) Creating the playful environment in Nigerian pre schools. A study of selected early years educational institutions in the Akure metropolis Ondo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of contemporary. Issues in Education, Special Edition* 3 59 66
- 2) Bodrova, E (2008) Make believe play versus academic skills: A Vygotskian approach to today's delay of early childhood education. *European early childhood education research journal* 16(3), 357 369.
- 3) Burnett I.A. (1990) Developmental benefit of play for children. *Journal of Leisure Research* 22, 138 153.
- 4) Burdette, H.L.& Whitfaker R.C (2005) Resurrecting free play in young children. Looking beyond fitness and fatness to attention affiliation and affect. *Arch Rediate Adoles Med* 159, 46 50
- 5) Cabrera S.C & Lamb. A (2014) The culture of affluence, psychological cost of material wealth: Children development. 74, 1581 1593
- 6) Ekiugbo U.K. (2023) To be physically, emotionally and cognitively fit, *International Journal of Arts, Business and Science*. Vol. 6, issue 4. UK.
- 7) Elias, M.J & Arnold, H (2016) *The educators guide to emotional intelligent and academic achievement: social emotional learning in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, C.A corwin foess
- 8) Folorusho & Yahaya (2019) Play and the child's reaction : let them explore it for the gains. *Journal of African childhood education* 2, 42 47
- 9) Hurwitz, S.C (2002) To be successful, let them play. *Child education* 79, 101 102
- 10) Isao.I (2002) How much do we know about the importance of play in child development? *Child education* 78, 230 233
- 11) Omoera, S.O (2013) Repositioning early childhood education in Nigeria: the children theatre approach pre school education today. *Theory and practice*(7) 60 70