



Exploring the
Intersection between
Young Children's
Play and
Development in
Nigeria

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Introduction: Play

- Play is a powerful tool for fostering holistic development (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2015; Ginsburg et al., 2007; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005)
- Play plays a valuable role in enculturation and is an expression of a child's culture (Hynn, 1998)
- Play is important in African indigenous societies to provide opportunities for children to rehearse and assume cultural practices (Serpell & Nsamenang, 2015)

Introduction: Play in Early Childhood Education

- Early childhood education needs to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogies (Marfo & Biersteker, 2010)
- Play is a key teaching method for early childhood education according to Nigeria's *National Policy on Education* (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013)
- Play methods are rarely incorporated into Nigerian early childhood programs in practice
- One reason may be due to little research being conducted on play in Nigeria and how it can be adapted to foster holistic development

Purpose of Study

- Objectives
 - Describe common types of play amongst Nigerian children
 - Identify how these types of play can be adapted to foster learning and development in early childhood education
- Research Question
 - What are common types of play amongst Nigerian children?

Methods

- Research Design
 - Qualitative design using retrospective reports of play
- Instrument
 - Focus group discussion reflecting on types of play in childhood

Participants

- 17 University students enrolled in early childhood education
 - 11 females and 6 males
 - Growing up: 3 in rural areas, 3 in semi-rural, and 11 in urban communities
 - All were from ethnic groups indigenous to southern and central Nigeria
 - All but one grew up in the North Central Nigeria

Results

Type of Play	Frequency
Games with Rules	
Physical Games	35
Cognitive Games	9
Imitation Play	
Action Imitation	13
Role Imitation	11
Object Imitation	5
Physical Play	10
Construction Play	9
Musical Play	4 (Plus 2)
Other	4
Total	100

Physical Play

- Physical Games with Rules and Physical Play accounted for 45% of responses
- **Physical Games:** Rules are set for a game that consists mostly of moving the body (N=35)
 - *"I remember one play...We used to lie down on the floor then we will be rolling. Then if you don't roll fast, the person behind you will cross over you. And any one that cross over you like this that mean that person have 1 point...Then the person who has the highest now be the winner."*
 - Football, hide and seek
 - Fine motor games: Flipping bottle caps with fingers
- **Physical play:** Move body without specific rules or competition (N=10)
 - Jump rope, Wrestling, Running

Cognitive Games with Rules

- N=9
- Ayo and *Dara*: Mancala
- Picking and guessing numbers
- Only 1 game was a formal board game: Ludo
 - The other games were played with local materials such as seeds and bottle caps

Imitation Play

- Imitation Play accounted for 29% of play activities
 - **Action Imitation:** Imitating the actions of others (N=13)
 - Cooking (N=5) and Armed Robbers and Cops (N=4)
 - **Role Imitation:** Imitating social roles(N=11)
 - Family (N=6), Teacher (N=2), Doctor (N=2)
 - *"It's like an event or festival...celebrating one of their old women like that. So, at the museum...you have seen a staircase like that about 100 [stairs] or so. The old woman's house is at the highest peak of the staircase, yeah so they celebrate that. So we tried to imitate that. And then we assign roles, one would be the old woman. Then some will be the staircases. Then [we dress up in] the traditional wears [attire]. We cut branches of leaves and then make crowns...everyone has a particular role to play."*
 - **Object Imitation:** Pretending one object is something different (N=5)
 - Leaves for money, Banana leaf into a local doll

Other Play

- **Construction Play:** Building objects (N=9)
 - Houses from sand or maize stalks
 - Cars from tin or maize stalks
 - Kites from plastic bags
 - Musical instruments out of sticks or bamboo
 - Pots out of clay
- **Musical Play:** Singing, clapping, dancing (N=4 + 2)
 - Double-categorized musical play: Imitating mothers singing in church
- **Other Play** (N=4)
 - Storytelling
 - Work tasks that were fun
 - Searching for snails or palm fronds
 - Agreements to share food with friends

Materials Used for Play

- Only 2 play activities mentioned purchased toy materials
 - Ludo, Toy doll
 - Of 5 mentions of football, 1 explicitly said the ball was made of local materials
- All other play used either local materials or no materials at all (e.g., clapping games)
 - Local materials: Plastic bottles, bottle caps, rubber slippers, tins, tires, maize stalks, sticks, clay, plastic bags, seeds, rope, etc.
- Some play also used “stolen” materials e.g., food ingredients snatched from their mother’s kitchen

Implications for Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

- Young children's ability to improvise with local materials should be adapted to promoting play in ECE programs that are under-resourced
 - Fosters creativity and innovative thinking among children
- The high rate of imitation play shows that young Nigerian children effectively learn by observation
 - Imitation play should be creatively adapted to promote holistic development in ECE programs

Implications for Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

- Games with rules that include numbers and counting should be integrated into the mathematics curriculum
- Construction play should be incorporated to foster engineering thinking skills for STEM development

Suggestions for Future Research

- Since local materials featured so strongly in young children's play, the types of play will likely be different in other areas of Nigeria with different environments
 - More research should be conducted in the North and South of Nigeria to identify common types of play in these regions
- The retrospective reports identified play common 10 to 15 years ago
 - More research should be conducted on types of play common today

Conclusion

- Young Nigerian children engaged primarily in physical play and imitation play
- Young children made use of local materials in play
- These types of play can be incorporated into early childhood education to foster holistic development and meet the policy recommendation for play methods