

Impact of Play Way Activities in Promoting Early Childhood Education and Its Implications for Effective Teaching and Learning in Bauchi State

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the Impact of Play-Way Activities in Promoting Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Its Implications for Effective Teaching and Learning in Bauchi State. Early childhood education is essential for the holistic development of a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities. Play activities are an integral part of ECE, as they provide children with opportunities to learn through exploration, discovery, and play. The study was conducted using a case study qualitative-method approach, with a sample of 10 early childhood educators, parents, and children in Bauchi state. Data was collected through survey, interview, and observations. The results provided insights into the types of play activities that are effective in promoting ECE, as well as the barriers and challenges faced by educators and parents in incorporating play activities into their teaching and caregiving practices. The findings of this research help to inform policymakers, educators, and parents on the importance of play-based learning in ECE and contribute to the development of effective strategies for promoting ECE in Bauchi state.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial stage in a child's development as it lays the foundation for future learning and success. In Bauchi state, like in many parts of Nigeria, access to ECE is limited and inadequate, leading to poor enrollment and drop-out rates. The inadequate infrastructure, limited access, and insufficient funding are some of the barriers limiting the growth of ECE in the state. Research shows that play-based learning can help improve the quality of ECE and its overall impact. Play activities provide opportunities for children to develop essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills, such as problem-solving, communication, empathy, and self-regulation. Play-based learning has been shown to promote creativity,

imagination, and critical thinking, which are essential skills in the 21st-century workforce.

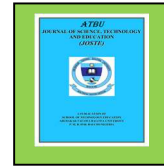
Despite the potential benefits, incorporating play-based learning in ECE can be challenging as some parents and educators prioritize academic outcomes. Therefore, this research seeks to address the gap in research on play-based learning in Bauchi state. The study will identify various play activities that are effective in promoting ECE in the state. By understanding the types of play activities used by parents and educators in ECE in Bauchi state, the research help identifies the best practices that can be leveraged for improving ECE quality. This research provided valuable insights that policymakers, educators, and parents can use to promote play-based learning and improve ECE in Bauchi state.

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There are several studies that support the use of play-based activities for promoting ECE. For example, a study conducted by Kim and Ko (2018) found that role-playing games were effective in promoting the social and emotional development of preschool children. Similarly, a study conducted by Shahzad et al. (2020) found that creative arts and crafts activities helped improve the cognitive development of young children. Another study conducted by Ali et al. (2016) found that music and movement activities were effective in promoting physical and emotional development in young children. Finally, a study conducted by Pyle and Bigelow (2020) found that outdoor play activities were effective in promoting physical, social, and emotional development in young children. Overall, there is strong evidence to support the use of play-based activities for promoting ECE. By incorporating these activities into the curriculum in Bauchi state, we can help children develop important skills and lay the foundation for future learning and success. The study observed that there are three main components that contribute to the promotion of ECE through play activities.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the first formal educational experience a child has before primary school. ECE is critical in setting the foundation for lifelong learning, academic success, and social-emotional development. The framework considers ECE as the primary outcome of the research project. Play activities are enjoyable, child-initiated activities that incorporate cognitive, physical, social and emotional domains of development. Play activities are essential for the development of a child's brain, cognitive, fine and gross motor, social, emotional, and language skills. In the conceptual framework, play activities are considered the interventions to promote ECE. Factors affecting play activities include socio-cultural factors, the teaching and learning environment, teachers' qualifications, training and experience, time allocated for play-based activities, and availability and quality of play materials. These factors were explored in the research project as moderating variables that can impact the effectiveness of promoting ECE through play activities.

Statement of the Problem

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a critical stage in a child's development, but adequate access to quality ECE is limited in Bauchi state, Nigeria. The inadequate infrastructure, limited access, and insufficient funding are some of the barriers limiting the growth of ECE in the state. Additionally, traditional teaching methods that do not effectively engage children in learning are still prevalent in ECE in Bauchi state. Furthermore, limited research is available on play-based learning in ECE in Bauchi state. It is unclear what types of play activities are being used by parents and educators, and how effective they are in promoting ECE. Therefore, there is a need to identify the effective play activities that can improve the quality of ECE in Bauchi state.

The lack of understanding of the benefits of play-based learning is also a challenge. Some parents and educators prioritize academic outcomes over play-based learning, leading to a lack of engagement on the part of the children. Additionally, limited resources make it challenging to incorporate play-based learning effectively. Therefore, it is against this background that the researcher intends to investigate and seeks to address the challenges faced by Bauchi state in terms of promoting and enhancing ECE. The study will identify the types of play activities that are effective in promoting ECE, understand the barriers and challenges faced by parents and teachers in incorporating these activities into their teaching methods and develop strategies for promoting and enhancing the quality of ECE in Bauchi state. The findings of this research will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of play-based learning's potential benefits in ECE and provide insights into effective policies and strategies for promoting ECE in Bauchi state.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the main objective of this research is to identify play activities that are effective in promoting early childhood education (ECE) in Bauchi state, Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

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1. To identify the play activities used in ECE by parents and teachers in Bauchi state.
2. To assess the effectiveness of play-based learning in promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development in ECE.
3. To understand the challenges and barriers faced by parents and educators in incorporating play-based learning into their teaching and caregiving practices.
4. To develop strategies for promoting and enhancing play-based learning in ECE in Bauchi state.
5. To provide recommendations for policymakers, educators, and parents on the importance of play-based learning in ECE.

Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of the study;

1. What play activities are used in early childhood education (ECE) by parents and educators in Bauchi state?
2. How effective are play-based learning activities in promoting cognitive, social, and emotional development in ECE in Bauchi state?
3. What are the challenges and barriers faced by parents and educators in incorporating play-based learning into ECE in Bauchi state?
4. What strategies can be developed to promote and enhance play-based learning in ECE in Bauchi state?
5. What recommendations can be made to policymakers, educators, and parents in Bauchi state to improve access, quality, and affordability of ECE through play-based learning activities?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a case study qualitative method to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The population of the study consisted ECE teachers and parents of children aged 0-6 years in Bauchi State. Using a purposive sampling technique, 10 ECE teachers and 200 parents was selected to participate in the study. Structured questionnaires were administered to

the selected participants to gather quantitative data. Additionally, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with a subsample of 10 ECE teachers and 10 parents. Qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns. This research was conducted in line with ethical standards and principles. Participants give voluntary consent to participate in the study. The data collected was kept confidential, and personal identifying information was not used in the publication of any results. This research was limited to Bauchi State, Nigeria, and may not generalize to other locations. Additionally, the self-reported data from participants may be subject to response bias or social desirability bias. Qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes that emerged from the data. The themes were linked to the study objectives, which are to identify play activities that can promote early childhood education in Bauchi state. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, a pilot test was carried out on the data collection instruments. The questionnaires were pre-tested with a subsample of 10 ECE teachers and 10 parents, and their feedback will be used to improve the instruments. Additionally, inter-rater reliability and internal consistency was assessed. Overall, the method provides complementary data to enable a more in-depth understanding of play activities that promote early childhood education in Bauchi state. This method helps identify and analyze possible factors that might influence the adoption and implementation of play-based ECE programs in the state.

RESULTS

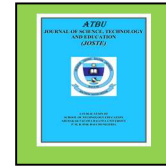
The results of this study were aligned with current research on beliefs on play-based instruction. Preschool teachers and elementary administrators have mixed beliefs. Pressure from state standards as well as stress of meeting all teaching requirements influenced how Preschool teachers responded. An academic shift where kindergarten has become more academically rigorous and teachers may have felt that

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preschoolers were not academically ready for Preschool.

The results showed agreement on student-centered statements among all participants. Play-based instruction and student-center instruction overlap. Many preschool classrooms are specially geared towards play-based instruction where play is the focus. This teaching method allows children to learn cooperatively with their peers, the teacher is a facilitator and guide to individuated learning, while allowing children to be directly involved in their own discovery and knowledge.

An influential scholar named Maria Montessori was an Italian educator who believed that play is “child’s work,” meaning that children are working when they are learning to eat with utensils. They are playing when they are provided the opportunity to create their own utensils out of a variety of materials (wood, glue, string, tape). In many preschool classrooms, center time is also called work time. When children are learning a variety of new skills, they are at work. When children are building knowledge, values, and additional skill sets this is considered work. According to Elkind (2023), play truly becomes play when the activity of play has no other aim except for the sole pleasure of the activity. Researchers know that play builds stamina for future life skills. Play can also become a form of therapy for many young children, using materials for outlets when language skills are lacking. Using a toy to release feelings of frustration does not mean that the child will grow up to have anger issues rather that the child has found a productive way to express their emotion. These types of actions are not considered play because the actions have a deliberate goal where real play does not have any goals attached to the action.

Children who were placed in the heavily focused academic class with less play 47% of those students needed additional supports while the other play based classrooms only 6% needed additional supports. Students who attended the highly academic focus class were also more likely to commit felonies 34% versus 9% who attend play-based classrooms. Of the highly academic classroom 27% of the students were more likely to

be suspended from work. It continues to increase causing, educators to shift their classroom focus to higher academic achievement. The pressure to exceed these learning standards has had an impact on educators and how they are able to fit play into their daily classroom schedule. Play is more often an activity that is teacher scheduled than an integrated daily routine. Teachers are faced with day-to-day tensions, expectations and standards as well as required daily implementation of curriculum. This study revealed that the children from the play-based kindergarten classrooms excelled over those in the highly academic driven classrooms in creativity, oral expressions, and industry. This study prompted a shift to switch back to the play- based classrooms (Almon, 2023).

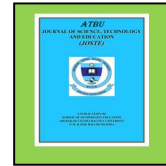
The availability of time and space for play is decreasing due to the increasing use of technology. According to studies conducted by Pathways, Social changes and new technologies have greatly affected the way children play and the amount of free time they are given. Children’s playtime continues to decrease because of these new technologies; thirty percent of all American kindergarteners no longer have recess time. Children between the years of 8 to10 are spending eight plus hours a day engaging on a variety of different media devices; seventy-one percent of children have technology available in their bedrooms. Researchers have found that children under the age of thirteen spend less than thirty minutes outside a week. Only twenty percent of all homes are located within a half-mile of a park, and ninety-four percent of parents’ express safety concerns with their child playing outside (Pathway, 2017). Between 2021 and 2023, the amount of time children spent playing dropped by twenty-five percent. During this time period, children ages 3-11 lost twelve hours of free time and spent more time at school, completing homework, and shopping with parents. Teachers must also have a realistic view on how play should look in their classrooms. In order for teachers to become effective play-based teachers, it is important for each teacher to connect with their own experiences with play.

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The study observed with a group of preschool teacher's exact number unknown, asking the preschool teachers to relate their personal play experiences to students play experiences then and now. The researchers asked teachers to recall their memories of play as a child, perceptions of children play today and compare their own childhood experiences as well as their classroom perspectives. Groups of teachers were interviewed during this study. Many of the teachers believed that children's play today is no different from the play that they experienced. They believed that the play is expressive and may look different during a variety of situations. All teachers need to understand the value of play. All children want and need play.

The results of this study support previous research that Preschool teachers feel pressures to solely focus on academic goals which has led many kindergarten classrooms to limit and eliminate play (Lynch, 2015). Many kindergarten teachers shared that they valued play-based instruction, but due to the pressures of the required state standards as well as meeting additional requirements many kindergarten teachers felt this method could not be used in their classroom. Preschool has become more academically rigorous and teachers feel additional pressures to prepare children for required standardized testing (Bowdon, 2015). Many kindergarten classrooms have eliminated play. The focus has shifted from developmentally appropriate play to focusing on academic proficiency. With pressure from state and district to have 80% of students be proficient. Current research has proven that play is learning, and has multiple effects on early development. Play lets children engage in extended interactions that build oral language, imagination, critical thinking, and social skills. And, recent evidence suggests that, at least for some skills, playful learning is more effective for producing student learning than direct instruction.

Parents begin to compare themselves to other parents, stories from magazines and begin to raise their child's expectations even higher. Over recent years the admission process into college has become much more rigorous, many

parents begin to feel that their child is not prepared enough; many parents feel pressure to help their child exceed their potential. The decrease in free play can also be explained by children being entertained by television, computer games and video games. Passive entertainment is not productive and can have many harmful effects (Ginsburg, 2017). There is a variety of solutions for parents to use to make sure that their child is receiving time for unstructured play. It is very important for parents to feel supported and accepted when making suggestions to not follow media influences about their child. It is important for parents to research the benefits of both structured and unstructured playtimes. Continued additional research is being conducted about the importance of play and the direct impact on academic growth, exposure to social situations as well as exploring their environment.

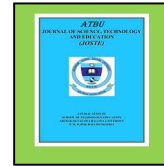
Creative Curriculum is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum designed to help educators at all levels of experience plan and implement a developmentally appropriate, content rich program for children with diverse backgrounds and skill levels (Bickart, Burts, Berke, & Heroman, 2020). The assessment is an authentic, ongoing observational system for assessing children from birth through kindergarten; new updates extend objectives to third grade. It encourages teachers to observe children in the context of everyday experiences, and is an effective way to learn what children know and can do in a classroom setting. The preschool Curriculum is based on the principles of active learning and support of a child's positive interactions with adults and peers. Longitudinal studies show that the Preschool Curriculum promotes children's development and provides lasting benefits into adulthood. Dickinson and Tabors conducted a study that followed seventy-four children from low-income homes from the age three through middle school. The study showed the relationship between the child's uses of language during play experiences (Almon, 2023). Curriculum is a comprehensive model that addresses all areas of development through eight content areas and fifty-eight key developmental indicators (KDIs) the skills and behaviors at each

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stage of development that pave the way for school and adult success. Each KDI is connected to and reinforced by scaffolding strategies to support and gently extend children's learning.

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Summary of Findings

1. The study revealed that play-based instruction and student-center instruction overlap. Many preschool classrooms are specially geared towards play-based instruction where play is the focus.
2. The study also revealed that play truly becomes play when the activity of play has no other aim except for the sole pleasure of the activity.
3. The study observed that play also becomes a form of therapy for children, using materials for outlets when language skills are lacking.
4. Children who were placed in the heavily focused class with less play 47% of those students needed additional supports while the other play based classrooms only 6% needed additional supports.
5. The study revealed that the children from the play-based preschool classrooms excelled over those in the highly academic driven classrooms in creativity, oral expressions, and industry.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of this study revealed that the children taught basic science process skills using play way method acquired the basic science

process skills more than those taught with conventional method. Thus, there is a significant difference in the mean scores of children taught basic science process skills using play-way method and those taught using conventional method. This finding is in line with Abiodun (2024) and Aneke (2016) who reported the effectiveness of the play-way method in teaching children basic science process skills and other skills. Moreover, the finding corroborates with Peters (2022) and Abiodun (2024) who demonstrated that game play and play way approach has improved children's achievement in science related subjects like Mathematics.

It is taken that instruction using play-way method enhances children's acquisition of the basic science process skills than children taught using conventional method. Thus, availability and utilization of play materials will promote children's observation, communication, measurement, classification, and inference and prediction skills. One may therefore say that the play method of instruction will be the better way to facilitate children's acquisition of basic science process skills, especially due to the fact that this method is characterized by active children's involvement, thereby engaging the innate potentials of the children and maximizing acquisition of the basic science process skills. Therefore, incorporation of play-way as a teaching method would enhance children's acquisition of basic science process skills.

In this section, the researchers presented findings from question 1, "the question", the first point is, what is the impact of play-based learning on the development of children in mobile early childhood care and education centres? Through daily play, young children gain valuable life experiences in various roles that will encourage growth and ultimately translate into adulthood. Research states that play is essential to developing key abilities, including social, behavioural, language, and cognitive.

Playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to keep active, stay well and be happy (Wood, 2023). King and Delfabbro (2024) and Kim, Namkoong, Ku and Kim (2018) defined a 'game' as an activity that is governed by rules.

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Crawford (1984) then classified a 'game' by the factors of representation, interaction, conflict, and safety. Most games, e.g., board games and sports games, are designed with compliance to the aforementioned conditions. These games possess their own systems and rules; players react against the response or action given by another player. Additionally, games encourage competition between players, and the winner is rewarded at the end of the game. However, some games, notably imaginary ones, may not comprise rules or competition and need no company to play. These kinds of games require only an object (toys) or particular skill (imaginative ability). Therefore, it is hard to give a universal definition to the term 'game'. The games and their impact on learning playing games can not only fill up additional time, but can also lead to changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills (Ifenthaler, Eseryel, & Ge, 2022). Various research nowadays discusses the impact of games on learning. An organisation scheme of learning outcomes that covered the aspects of cognitive, affective, and motor skills was proposed (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993).

As games develop at a fast pace, Wouters, van der Spek, and van Oostendorp (2019) suggest that collaboration and social skills should also be considered as learning outcomes of games. All of these learning outcomes can be further deconstructed into more specific skills. Thus, one of the interests of this study is to explore the subcategory of the learning outcomes (i.e. problem-solving skills, behaviour changes, and motor skills, social skills, to provide a clear, direct, and comprehensive view of the impact of games on learning. By understanding the potential of games in learning, educators, researchers, and game developers can make careful plans to utilise games for learning. Play takes many forms everyone knows 'play' when they see it – on streets, in villages, on playgrounds, and in classrooms. People from every culture, economic background, and community engagement in play since their earliest years. Yet play can be hard to define. However, researchers and theorists agree on the key characteristics of playful experiences, as seen in an important aspect of play: children's

agency and control over the experience. Organisation refers to children's initiative, decision making, and self-preference in play.

In learning mobile centres, learning activities are intentionally framed in the form of play and as an expected part of the children's social realm (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2020). Playful learning also provides a way to incorporate emotions while maintaining attention on the everyday situation of the children. Moving in and out of imaginary situations is another essential definition for this learning situation (Hakkalainen & Bredikyte, 2018). As Vygotsky (2016) explained, the concept of an imaginary setting is not an unexpected fact in a children's life; its first consequence is the children's emancipation from situational constraints. Consequently, the same moving in and out of imaginary situations from story-telling enables the children to move between abstract concepts and concrete situations (Vadeboncoeur, Perone, & Panina-Beard, 2016). Some of the theoretical considerations taken into account for a play-based learning situation are continual shared thinking, double move, and a dialectical view of learning.

In practice, these considerations entail that a learning situation cannot be analysed without analysing the result of the practitioner's pedagogical perspective or bias (Fleer & Pramling, 2015). Such is confirmed by the response from the first research question, where Mme Msimango (RP6) stated that when children play, that is where they learn and further teach each other the kinds of games they are playing. Such is seen in picture A below, which reveals children playing together whilst learning. The picture reveals the opportunity of using games and plays to promote learning in young children.

Malunga (RP1) Sizophonke knowing has roots in both biological/neurological construction, and social, cultural, and language based interactions (Doolittle & Camp, 2019). The knowledge is not objective truth. That is, internal knowledge does not match outdoor reality but is a viable model of experience from the practitioners' side, making sure that learners also understand outdoor play as learning. Cognitive and radical constructivism emphasizes all four of the previously mentioned

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epistemological tenets. These particular epistemological emphases lead to defining principles that maintain the social nature of knowledge (Marques, 2018) and the belief that knowledge is the result of social interaction and language usage, and, thus, is shared rather than distinct.

Research participant Nomalanga (RP3) stated that the learners in the picture reveal the opportunity of using games and play to promote learning in young children, or their early years. Also, the activity promotes learning Life Skills and understanding of clothes, which is under well-being. The content is learnt through pictures as it is aligned with the age relativeness of the children. The sitting arrangement also promotes learner interaction and communication, impacting creative thinking and cognitive skills development.

MmeMothiba(RP4), Knowing has roots in both biological/neurological construction, and social, cultural, and language-based interactions (Dewey, 2023; Garrison, 2017, 2018; Gergen, 2015; Maturana & Varela, 2022). Furthermore, Mmannah (RP8) agrees that as practitioners, the spaces are very important where learners get opportunities to play and interact with technology while learning and where also they can learn basic computer skills as we experiment with technology and e-learning platforms, this important question is being raised, but honestly, no one knows the significance of social learning Nomalanga (RP3).

Games are student-focused activities requiring the active involvement of learners. The opinion is that learners and practitioners change their roles and relations through games and are encouraged to take an active role in their learning process (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2021). As a result, games allow learners to direct their own learning. There is increasing scientific interest in life skills development through sports, but research lags behind applied efforts (Gould & Carson, 20018).

CONCLUSION

The research demonstrated that play is quite key in learners' development, especially in their cognitive skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and imagination at the ECCs.

Practitioners believed that the association between cognitive development and play was essential for getting learners ready for school, where they have acquired the skills for formal schooling. It posits that play gives learners the opportunity to practice problem-solving and decision-making abilities. The play can have a significant role in developing a child's creative abilities. Therefore, the development of creativity is also related to cognitive development because creative thinking contributes to problem-solving. The research only included eight participants from rural Free State therefore the results could not be generalized. The limitation of this research would be compromised because of the limited time available for researchers, especially because learners attend the mobile centres from morning to midday. This then limits the validity of certain aspects of the research, for example, in that community, how many learners' academic development is affected. Furthermore, only about eight research participants were used in this qualitative research; this may have affected the results because it is not a huge study. One major critique of the qualitative case study approach is its non-generalizability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

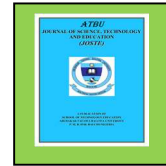
The researcher recommends further research and investigation into what is considered best instructional practices in an early childhood setting with a focus on play-based instruction. The researcher believes as an educator, it important to share with colleagues, administration, superintendents, and state level decision makers the educational impact that play has on early childhood development. The researcher feels that additional research could be done on what play should look like in a preschool, transitional kindergarten and kindergarten classroom. Preschools and all elementary teachers are required to meet state standards and regulations which put additional pressure on teachers and administrators to eliminate play, but what are the students missing out on because of this decision needs to be the focus. As a team, discussions need to include how required standards and curriculum can be altered and adjusted to include

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time for free play. The benefits of play for children are benefits that will follow them into adulthood. As educators, parents, and administrators we must advocate for the need of play for children in all early educational settings. It is important that all educators understand that when children are playing they are learning to become well-rounded students. Teachers must also have a realistic view on how play should look in their classrooms. In order for teachers to become effective play-based teachers, it is important for each teacher to connect with their own experiences with play. All teachers need to understand the value of play. All children want and need play.

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