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Utilization of dramatic play for quality holistic development of Nigerian child

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Abstract

Dramatic play is the spontaneous imaginative role playing, taking place in early years during self-selected activity periods. This paper is an attempt to look into the utilization of dramatic play for realization of quality holistic development of Nigerian child. The research design was descriptive survey. Two research questions guided the study. A population of 50 Nursery School teachers from 10 nursery schools constituted the sample population of the study. The instrument for data collection was A-20 researchers-developed questionnaire duly validated by experts in childhood education for the teachers. Mean values was used in answering the research questions. The researchers concluded that since play is children's language, the use of dramatic play should be encouraged in the nursery schools. Findings revealed that dramatic play enhances quality holistic development of the nursery school child. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended among others that dramatic play should be employed by teachers for teaching the preschoolers as stated in the National policy on education and that government should integrate dramatic play in early childhood curriculum and enforce its implementation via active supervision of nursery schools.

Keywords: Dramatic play, holistic, quality, child, development

1. Introduction

Play and movement are the primary vehicle by which young children learn. For the preschool child (3-6 years old), movement is at the very centre of his life. The play experience of the young child serve as the primary vehicle by which he/she learns about himself and his environment. During the preschool years, young children greatly expand their knowledge, understanding and abilities. They explore and discover their world through experiences using their sense of touch, sight, smell, hearing, taste and the child's discovery of the environment could be done through play. Play is a universal language which every child understands, it is seen as a positive tool for holistic development in young children. Children love to play and learn a lot through play. It is such a significant factor in children's learning that the National Policy on Education 2004 categorically stated that government should ensure that the main method of teaching at the early childhood level should be through play.

Play has been given different definitions by different authors. Play is a perfect activity for normal development and growth of children in all aspects of life. It is especially useful in the all-round development of the child in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning^[1] According to^[2] play is a specific behaviour involving divergent thinking usually used to describe the activities of children from babyhood until the early teenage years. They also argue that play is something in which humans of all ages, from diverse cultures engage in, although the purpose for and the type of play may be different across ages and culture.

A commonly held belief among those in Early Childhood Education is that play is the most important activity of young children because it is during play that children are at their most competent form. Children learn best not when they are told but when they can act on their environment and construct knowledge for themselves. It gives children fun, joy and help in developing the child's personality, realization of their potentials and to experience the satisfaction of success. Children have other forms of play such as hide and seek, art, running, climbing building and others but dramatic play provides distinctive, lasting benefits for total development of the child.

Dramatic play can be defined as a type of play where children accept assigned roles, and then act out. It can be seen as a term that refers to everyday make-believe games that kids naturally enjoy^[3]. Dramatic play occurs when children adopt roles and use make believe transformations to act out stories. In dramatic play, children bring existing skills and act of dramatic play in turn enhances these existing skills. The skill-set that develops through dramatic play are role playing,

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use of materials, pretending, attention span, social skills and communication. Children say what they feel and feel what they say. They unashamedly use erroneous conceptions and unintentional puns.

In dramatic play experience, children integrate emotions, thinking and motivation to establish natural connections critical to effective brain functioning^[4]. When they engage in dramatic play, they use imagination and imitation which require complex cognitive or intellectual processes. The understanding that they have built through dramatic play experience are symbolized by things, action plots and behaviours.

Dramatic play gives children opportunities to explore, talk to each other and solve problems. When children take on imaginary roles, it is often referred to as dramatic play which supports development of the whole child because it involves the mind and body^[5]. In joint make believe/socio-dramatic play, children act out and respond to one another's feelings. Example, children gain control of fear arousing experience when they act doctor^[6].

Recent research on emergent literacy, has revealed that dramatic play can make important contributions to children early reading and writing development. The development of cognitive skills, including dispositions for learning, (such as curiosity and persistence) memory and thinking skills and language and literacy skills have strong links to play^[2]. They also agree that dramatic play is an integral part of a well-rounded preschool programme as it is healthy for early childhood development.

Dramatic play can help the educator of young children meet the co-curricular goals and build the children developing literacy skills. It allows children to experiment with purpose for literacy they have seen at home, to recognize that different tasks require texts to produce a wide variety of texts and to act out stories they have heard. By assuming this role, the child can switch from falling out of control to being in charge of the situation.

Through dramatic play, children learn to assert themselves in a way to build their competence in later adult roles. The ability to experiment with different roles, problem solving and conflict resolution while promoting abstract thinking, helps the child's ability to develop, thereby contributing greatly to the holistic development of young children.

Dramatic play has some educational purposes/ values. It fosters creativity of thoughts, imagination, strategies for problems solving and the development of divergent thinking ability. Some of the key components of holistic development including characteristic of how children demonstrate each area. These areas of growth are interrelated and independent. Growth in one area reinforces and promotes growth in the other areas^[4].

- **Intellectual Development:** Concerns the emerging powers of knowing, reasoning and understanding. For the child, play does not only facilitates the development of social competencies, but also promotes the learning of pre-academic skills and concepts.
- **Language Skills:** Children construct emergency language and literacy skills as they develop in all areas. Dramatic play stimulates language innovation by introducing new words. It motivates language use and practice, develops linguistic awareness and expands content and concept knowledge. It helps children to understand symbolic representations found in prints, books, and reading like behaviours.

- **Physical Development:** Physically active play is released to the development of physical skills and increased health benefits of improved metabolism and energy expenditure/increase in skills such as gross and fine motor development, fitness, strength and coordination. It promotes overall physical development and stimulates neural connections which is a foundational aspect of growth and well-being.
- **Creativity Development:** Dramatic play encourages original thoughts, words and deeds, it helps the children to find new ways to do things. It encourages creativity and helps children learn concepts like cause and effect, quantities or spatial relationships.
- **Social Development:** Involves the emerging social skills and personal self-confidence important in well-being and social involvement. The child tries out numerous social roles and increases his dept of understanding of many other roles. He begins integrating the roles of society and the full range of feelings is expressed and experienced as the child plays with others in dramatic play. He learns such skills such as sharing, taking turns, cooperation, negotiation, impulse control, delay, gratification, and how to deal with disappointments. The child learns to interact with other children.
- **Emotional Development:** Through dramatic play, the child increases in self-esteem, pride and accomplishment, feelings of safety, and protection, development of sense of self and individuality, and feelings of purpose. Experts agree that dramatic play is an integral part of a well-rounded preschool program as it is healthy for early child pre-school program as development. Therefore children should be allowed to live out their world through dramatic play. They learn to express their joy and sorrows and feeling of love to one another.
- **Thinking Skills:** Dramatic play provides the child with variety of problems to solve. The child thinks about the role to play during the dramatic play and through this the child develops the thinking skill. Thinking skills such as flexibility, divergence, problem solving and perspective thinking are present when pre-school children play. The role the child plays helps the child to think on the actions to take, through that the thinking skill is developed.
- **Attention Span:** Early ventures into the field of dramatic play may only last for few minutes, but as children grow, develop and experience more, they will be able to incorporate additional actions and words, which will lengthen the time they engage in such activities, through this they learn to endure things.

Some other researchers in Nigeria^[1, 7] and literature reviewed has shown that dramatic play has been found to be one of the important aspects of young children's life for an all-round development. Therefore, the problem of this study is to investigate how dramatic play can be utilized for quality holistic development of the preschool child. Dramatic play will reposition Nigerian educational system to meet with foreign standard where dramatic play is used to harness the holistic development of the child^[8]. Dramatic play is an integral part of developmental learning process by allowing children to develop skills in such areas as abstract thinking, literacy, mathematics and social studies^[9]. It was noted by¹⁰ that dramatic play engages children capacities for constructing meaning, framing stories and making sense of their worlds in ways that enrich the children and it incorporates physical,

cognitive, social, emotional and moral characteristics as well as spontaneity and improvisation. The purpose of this study therefore is to bring out the benefits of dramatic play in the total/holistic development of the Preschool child. This study should bring how dramatic play will enhance cognitive development and other aspects of the child development.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. In what ways does dramatic play enhance the cognitive development of the child?
2. How can dramatic play enhance the holistic development of the child?

3. Method

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The area of study was Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu state. All the Nursery School teachers 477 from 396 private nursery schools in Nsukka LGA constituted the population of the study. Simple random sampling technique with balloting with replacement was used to select 50 teachers and 10 schools as sample for the study. A 20 item researchers – developed instrument titled utilization of dramatic play for Quality holistic. Child development (UDPQWCD) structured on four point rating scales of strongly Agree (SA, 4 points) Agree (A, 3 points), Disagree (D, 2 points) and strongly Disagree (SD, 1 points). The instrument was validated by three (3) experts in the department of early childhood and Primary Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Cronbach coefficient was used to test the reliability of the instrument which yielded 0.79 value. This was considered high enough for the study. The questionnaire was distributed by the researchers. Respondents were to tick against the column that applies to them. Data collected was analyzed using weighted mean. Decision rule of 2.50 and above were accepted as positive while mean scores below 2.50 were rejected as negative.

4. Result

The results were treated in accordance with the research questions.

Table 1: Teachers’ Mean Responses on ways dramatic play enhances cognitive development of the child.

S/N	Items	x	Decision
1	Dramatic play enhances effective problem solving.	3.27	Agree
2	It helps children to concentrate abstract symbols.	3.00	Agree
3	It helps children to think fast and succeed in school work.	2.21	Disagree
4	Facilitates literacy skills.	2.62	Agree
5	Gives opportunity to learn about social roles.	2.74	Agree
6	Teaches pre academic skills and concepts.	2.23	Disagree
7	Teaches taking turns to avoid monopoly in games.	2.76	Agree
8	Enables children to understand rules of social interactions.	2.77	Agree
9	Teaches accommodation of other children’s point of view.	3.00	Agree
10	Teaches children to cope with challenging situation.	2.71	Agree

The respondents agreed with items number, 1,2,4,5,6,7,8 and 10. They scored means of 3.27, 3,0, 2.62, 2.74, 3.00,2.76, and

2.71 respectively. Teachers disagreed with items number 3 and 9. They scored 2.21 and 2.23 respectively. Question 2: How can dramatic play enhance the holistic development of the child?

Table 2: Teachers Mean Responses on how dramatic play enhances the holistic development of the child.

S/N	ITEM	\bar{X}	DECISION
11	Dramatic play enhance physical development.	2.71	Agree
12	It develops language skills in children.	2.46	Agree
13	Creativity is developed by dramatic play.	2.54	Agree
14	Dramatic play encourages social relationships among children.	3.20	Agree
15	Emotional well-being is developed through dramatic play.	2.38	Agree
16	Dramatic play encourages critical thinking skills.	2.41	Agree
17	Attention span is enhanced by dramatic play.	2.76	Agree
18	Intellectual development is enhanced by dramatic play.	3.06	Agree
19	Dramatic play can be utilized for overall development of the child.	3.04	Agree

Results on the table 2 showed that the respondents agreed with all the items as different ways dramatic play enhances holistic child development.

5. Discussion

Dramatic play has some educational values and as such all areas of the child growth can be stimulated by dramatic play. Dramatic play fosters creativity of thoughts, imagination, and strategies for problem solving and the development of divergent thinking ability [4].

From the results, it was found that dramatic play enhances cognitive development by facilitating literacy skills, teaches accommodation, teaches children to cope with challenging situations, enables children to understand rules of social interactions. It also gives the child opportunity to learn about social roles. This finding is in tandem with the views of [6] who opine that dramatic play gives children opportunities to explore, talk to each other and solve problems. Research on emergent literacy, has revealed that dramatic play can make important contributions to children’s early reading and writing development and the development of their cognitive skills [2]. This finding fall in line with the NPE 2004 which categorically stated that the child should be taught in play way method at the basic level of education, pre-primary and primary. Therefore, teachers of nursery schools should use dramatic play for the holistic development of the child. Considering the values of dramatic play in early childhood education, dramatic play can provide a lot of benefits for the learners, if properly taught by the teachers. This is in line with the views of [8] that dramatic play will reposition Nigerian educational system to meet with foreign standard where dramatic play is used to harness the holistic development of the child.

The findings also revealed that dramatic play develops the physically, cognitive, social, emotional, development of literacy skills and host of other areas of human development. This corroborates with [9] who asserts that dramatic play is an integral part of developmental learning process by allowing children to develop skills in such areas as abstract thinking, literacy, mathematics and social studies. The finding is in

tandem with the findings of ^[10] who noted that dramatic play engages children capacities for constructing meaning, framing stories and making sense of their worlds in ways that enrich the children. Dramatic play incorporates physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral characteristics as well as spontaneity and improvisation. It yields complex learning and include social or meta-communicative skills such as language skill, perspective talking, representational thinking, problem solving, turn taking, and the ability to interpret environmental cues, while retaining autonomous child-directed focus. This is in line with ^[5] who observed that dramatic play is an important foundation for later academic learning and should be encouraged at the preschool and primary school levels.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, conclusions were drawn that since play is childrens language, there must be a balance between play and academic work, that is a combination of academic and social interactions for the child to achieve better and that dramatic play must be part of pre school curriculum.

7. Recommendations

- Early childhood teachers in training should offer a compulsory course on dramatic play.
- The government should integrate dramatic play in early childhood and primary school curriculum and promulgate a policy for the implementation.
- Government should play a more active role in promoting and supporting dramatic play implementation in schools through effective supervision of the nursery schools.

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