

# The Impact of Play Technique on Language and Social development in Early Childhood Education

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## Abstract

This study examined the impact of play technique of teaching and learning on the language and social development of preschool children in early childhood settings in Lagos state of Nigeria. Two research questions formulated from the objectives of the study guided the study. Data was collected from the sample of 100 teachers selected from 10 pre-primary schools in the six education districts of Lagos state using questionnaire. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made among which was that early childhood educators should use appropriate teaching styles that are child-learning oriented to help in developing appropriate language and social values in the children.

## Introduction

A child however needs to be guided, and exposed to relevant experiences at the appropriate time in life moving from the simple to the complex. Ample literature with empirical findings demonstrated that there exists a strong casual relationship between foundation stage of education of young children and their social development and language competence both in secondary and tertiary levels. Biechler(2006) believes that early childhood education should be emphasized because of its nature in laying a solid foundation for the best time for learning. Hence early childhood period is the best time for learning and it is the most important period of one's life and as such language and social development of the child should be inculcated using the appropriate teaching methodology of play. Arnold (2004) supported that Early Childhood Care and Development is an investment that offers outstanding returns both in human and financial terms. This philosophical base for nursery education dovetails into the philosophy of Nigerian education which among other things, is based on educating and raising up the individual into a sound and effective citizen with equal educational opportunities for all and it is suggested that this should start from the cradle(Anyanwu,2000).

## Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria

The Federal government of Nigeria and UNICEF, in the spirit of the Jomtien Declaration and Declaration and the UNESCO Education for All EFA Goal 1, have pursued the objectives stated in these documents, through a well-articulated Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCE) programme. This is in recognition of the fact that early childhood care and educational stimulation is the basic foundation for lifelong learning and meaningful human development from birth to the time of entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal setting. Although the federal government of Nigeria is not directly involved in the provision of services for children, however private efforts are encouraged to do so (UNESCO Report Nigeria, 2003). About 80% of day care centres are privately owned by communities and religious organizations. The same figure goes for pre-primary institutions and only about 10% were owned by the federal government, state government and local government areas(LGAs), but these often charge high fees putting such facilities beyond the reach of all (Ajayi,2008). Although there are recent primary schools that now have a compulsory one-year pre-primary before entry into primary school. Survey report of National Steering Group (2005:14) revealed that the number of pupils in nursery and primary schools for the 2004/2005 academic year in the nine(9) states surveyed was 125,609 and 2,131,600, respectively. The number of teachers at these levels of education in those states are 3,371 and 55,356 for nursery and primary schools, respectively. The federal government in 2006 organized a teacher development with 22,734 ECCE practitioners and however rated the training as moderate. Even the Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004) labeled ECCE as pre-primary education given to children aged 3 to 5 plus years prior to their entering primary school. These are some of the evidences that depict the importance attached to early childhood education by the government. Yet many parents in Nigeria do not believe and value pre-primary school education due to their assertion that they display a great deal of distrust, poor quality, high cost and the notion that the child must be close to the warmth of the mother before primary school age.

### **Language and Social Development in Early Childhood through Play Technique**

Language was defined by Judd (1938) cited in Makinde (1980) as a means of arousing and establishing associations which expands personal thinking so that the mental life of an individual becomes a part of mental life of a group. It is a vehicle for building relationship through communication of thoughts, oral, written or through body movements. Language also helps to maintain and retain cultural heritages which protect self-identities. It is in recognition of this that the Nigerian government considers language to be in the interest of national unity and stipulates that each child should learn one of the three major languages, other than his own mother tongue (FGN, 1997, revised 1998, 2004). Therefore, language development should be developed in children in the early years to promote social interaction, peaceful environment and national unity. This should be done using the pedagogic philosophy of play to supplement the social psychology of social interaction to yield the result of appropriate language and social development in children in their early years.

Children learn through dynamic social interaction with other adults and other children in their environment and develop their imaginations and creativity through play. Akinbote (2010) supported that all aspects of a child's growth and development particularly from birth till about six years is very crucial because this is when lifelong habits of thought, physical expression, social and emotional responsiveness are formulated. Merrel, Tymms and Jones (2007) found out that students who participate in a high quality early childhood education programme make better transition from home to school and from school to community and ultimately, gain lasting benefits as socially responsible adults; it helps children to learn; experiences in the early years of life are more influential on the development of the brain than at any other time in life. Early brain development has a profound impact on a person's learning, social interaction, emotional maturity and language development and competence. Children also learn how to be friendly, share and cooperate with others. They develop the ability to act with confidence and they gain independence. All these should be easily achieved with the proper play technique that suits and interests the children. Hence the assertion of Akinbote (2010) that pre-primary education is not a luxury but an avenue for helping children to have a holistic development that could have a lifelong impact on their language and social development is very crucial. Maggi (2005) supported that three domains of child development physical, social emotional, and language/cognitive are affected by family in terms of stimulation, support and nurture of all three areas of development.

### **Language learning in Children using Play Technique Ideology**

Early childhood education is underpinned by a long established ideology which emphasizes the central role of play in early learning and language development. This is based predominantly on ideological, philosophical and educational principles derived from the work of Montessori, Isaac and Steiner, amongst others (Bruce, 2003). The ideological base described a framework of general principles about childhood, children and how they should be educated, which have had an enduring influence on the child's education. According to Anning (2001), children need to play and in doing so, reveal their ongoing needs, which then shape the curriculum of language offered. This is tailored to individual interest which the teacher supports, maintaining respect for the children's intentions, hence a direct relationship between play and language learning is assumed. Play technique is considered to be an educationally powerful process that language learning will spontaneously occur even if an adult is not present. However, this central belief in the value of play to young children's language learning is not borne out by empirical evidence and, in spite of continued endorsements; its place in the curriculum remains problematic (Anning, 2001).

### **Objective of study.**

The objectives of this study are:-

To examine the if play technique has any effect on language development in the early childhood years

To ascertain whether play teaching method has any impact on the social development of the child

### **Research hypotheses**

There will be significant effect of play on language development of pupils at early childhood education

There will be significant effect of play technique on social development of pupils at early childhood education

**Methodology**-The study used descriptive survey in order to assess the opinions of the selected respondents through the use of questionnaire..

### **Research questions guiding this study are:**

Do teachers perceive play technique as having any impact on language development of early childhood pupils?

Does play technique have any impact on the social development of the early childhood pupils?

### Population and Sampling of the study-

The study comprises all early childhood caregivers in Lagos state that were randomly selected from the six education districts in Lagos State. A total of 100(one hundred) respondents were randomly selected and were used for this study. They were made up of 50 males and 50 female early childhood teachers selected from ten (10) pre- primary schools in the six local education districts in Lagos state, Nigeria.

### Research Instrument

Instrument for data collection was questionnaire on The Impact of Play technique on Language and Social development in Early Childhood Education. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was designed to collect the respondents' bio-data, while section B was designed in Likert Scale format to elicit the needed information from the respondents for the purpose of generating answers to the research questions and hypothesis. The instrument was validated by the experts/professor in ECCE and Language Education. Questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents in each school used by the researchers. Efforts were made to collect them the same day to get return of the entire questionnaire and authenticate self response and spontaneity by respondents and to avoid people helping them to answer the questions. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and the hypothesis tested at the level of 0.05 of significance.

**Table 1 Impact of play on language and social development of pupils at early childhood**

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
1	Pre-primary school pupils who are exposed to play are well behaved with good social skills	37 (37%)	43 (43%)	10 (10%)	10 (10%)	100
2	Children who are exposed to play socialize better than those who were not.	65 (65%)	9 (9%)	15 (15%)	11 (11%)	100
3	Exposing child to play enhances their language development	40 (40%)	42 (42%)	7 (7%)	11 (11%)	100
4	Children enjoy the company of their friends during play	42 (42%)	47 (47%)	4 (4%)	11 (11%)	100
5	Pre-primary school pupils are physically fit because of regular exercises and good physical education	54 (54%)	14 (14%)	27 (27%)	5 (5%)	100
6	Children who are exposed to play technique are more willing to speak than those who are not	34 (34%)	38 (38%)	8 (8%)	20(20%)	100
7	Children are capable of exhibiting great language competence when exposed to play as teaching technique	35 (35%)	23 (23%)	15 (15%)	27 (27%)	100
8	Play is a major factor that helps the child to perform self expression through language	25 (25%)	31 (31%)	35 (35%)	9 (9%)	100

From the table above, 37 (37%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 43 (43%) agreed that pre – primary school pupils who are exposed to play technique are well behaved with good social skills, while 10 (10%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Also, 65 (65%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 9 (9%) agreed that children who are exposed to play socialize better than those who did not, while 15 (15%) strongly disagreed and 11(11%) disagreed with the statement. Again,42 (42%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 47 (47%) agreed

that children enjoy the company of their friends, while 4 (4%) strongly disagreed and 11 (11%) disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, 54 (54%) strongly agreed and 14 (14%) agreed that pre-primary school pupils are physically fit because of regular exercises and good physical education, while 27 (27%) strongly disagreed and 5 (5%) disagreed with the statement.

Similarly, 40 (40%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 42 (42%) agreed that exposing children to play technique enhances their language development, while 7 (7%) strongly disagreed and 11 (11%) disagreed with the statement. Also, 34 (34%) respondents strongly agreed and 38 (38%) agreed that children who are exposed to play technique are more willing to speak than those who are not, while 8 (8%) strongly disagreed and 20 (20%) disagreed with the statement. The table also shows that 35 (35%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 23 (23%) agreed that children are capable of exhibiting great language competence when exposed to play as teaching technique, while 15 (15%) strongly disagreed and 27 (27%) disagreed with the statement. Similarly, 25 (25%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 47 (47%) agreed that play technique is a major factor that helps the child to perform self expression through language, while 4 (4%) strongly disagreed and 11 (11%) disagreed with the statement.

Based on the results obtained at the end of the analysis, it was concluded that play technique is a very effective method and veritable tool in teaching children during their early childhood education. Again, to succeed in this an ever –more complex and technological world, our children need a solid foundation based on play. Lots of play at an early age enables the children to develop the wide, integrated foundation required for Language competence; social development and ultimately cognitive development for their future academic success.

### Hypothesis Testing

The first null hypothesis tested is there is no significant effect of play technique on language development of pupils at early childhood education. In testing this hypothesis, the Chi-square statistical tool was used and the result is presented as follows:

**Table 2** Chi –square analysis of Hypothesis one

	Chi-square cal.	Chi-square critical value	Sig. Level		
Effect of play technique on language development of pupils at early childhood education.	25.65	21.026	0.05		

Since the calculated value was 25.65 and greater than the chi –square critical value of 21.026 at 0.05 significance level of 12 degree of freedom. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis(Ho) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1) which states that there is a significant effect of play technique on language development of pupils at early childhood education.

The second null hypothesis tested is there is no significant effect of play technique on social development of pupils during the early childhood education. In testing this hypothesis, the chi-square statistical tool was used and the result is presented as follows:

**Table 3** Chi –square analysis of Hypothesis two

	Chi –square cal.value	Chi –square critical value	Significance Level	Df	Remark
Effect of play technique on social development of pupils at early childhood education	27.59	21.026	0.05	12	Significant

Since the chi-square calculated value was 27.59 and greater than the chi –square critical value of 21.026 at 0.05 significance level and 12 degree of freedom, this led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho) and acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (Hi) which states that there is a significant effect of play technique on social development of pupils at early childhood education.

## Discussion of Findings

The results of this study were discussed based on the hypotheses tested. From the tested hypothesis one, it was found that there is a significant effect of play technique on language development of pupils at early childhood education. This was supported by Anning(2001), who asserted that the child – centred ideology incorporates several fundamental tenets regarding play as a teaching method. Children need to and in doing so, reveal their ongoing needs which then will help to shape the curriculum offered. It is also in congruence with Jones (2003), who acknowledges that though play is not the only means by which the child comes to discover the world, but saw it as supremely the activity which brings him psychic equilibrium in the early years. Hence, the role of the educator would be mainly passive, providing an appropriate environment, but essentially leaving children to make their own choices and express their creative spirit.

From the tested hypothesis two, it was revealed that there is a significant effect of play on social development of pupils at early childhood education. This is in line with Merrill, Tymms and Jones(2007), who contended that by interacting with others in play setting, children learn social values which prompt them to express themselves, such as give and take, reciprocity, cooperation, and sharing. This was supported by Osanyin(2004), who opines that children learn through dynamic social interaction with other adults and other children in their environment and develop their imaginations and their creativity through play technique teaching method

**Recommendation** -: Recommendations are being made that teachers of early childhood education should of necessity adopt appropriate teaching styles that are child-learning oriented which should involve play technique. The school authorities should provide materials that encourage high-quality play, structuring environments, modeling play and introducing children to new play opportunities. Teachers should take advantage of the opportunities that play technique provides for observing children’s development and learning. Through such observations teachers can learn about child’s social interactions, cognitive and language abilities and competencies, motor skills, and emotional development. Children in the early childhood classrooms should have two classrooms –one for indoor activities and one for outdoor activities. The outdoor teaching and learning environment with play technique should be used as an extension of the indoor classroom. It should be a learning environment carefully planned as the indoor activity centres and should encourage motor and social skills as well as help children refine existing language development structures and also to construct new ones

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