The Pedagogic Role of Indigenous Play for Early-Grade Learners

Martin Chukwudi Ekeh[a]

a. Department of Childhood Education, Faculty of Education University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: mekeh@uj.ac.za

How to cite
Ekeh, M. C. (2024). The pedagogic role of indigenous play for early-grade learners. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 7(4), 73-88.
https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2024.41

ABSTRACT

Preserving cultural heritage, mainly through Indigenous play, is imperative for fostering the younger generation's comprehension of diverse cultural aspects. In the 21st century, shifts in the educational landscape have jeopardised early-grade learners' involvement in Indigenous play in Nigeria, jeopardising the nation's rich multicultural diversity. This research investigates the pedagogic significance of Indigenous play for early-grade learners in the Owerri education zone of Imo State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in the Owerri education zone of Imo State, Nigeria. The setting includes schools, homes, and communities where young learners traditionally engage in Indigenous play. Utilising qualitative methods and a narrative research design, the study explores factors contributing to the decline of Indigenous play through interviews, observations, and literature reviews. The findings reveal decreased Indigenous play, highlighting various game types and benefits crucial for children's physical, socio-emotional, and academic development. Safety concerns, parental emphasis on intellectual development, and social media and technology influence diminish opportunities for early-grade learners to engage in Indigenous play. The research underscores the critical role of Indigenous play, emphasising the adverse effects of its decline and advocating for a balanced education approach prioritising cognitive and affective development.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous play; early-grade learners; indigenous knowledge; curriculum integration; cultural game preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous play is one example of cultural heritage and values being preserved and handed down to the younger generation. The advent of the twenty-first century has exerted a notable influence on the educational landscape, particularly concerning the potential for early-grade learners to acquire a nuanced understanding of diverse cultural values through engagement with Indigenous forms of play (Ekeh et al., 2022; Hadebe-Ndlovu, 2022; Matafwali et al., 2023).

Engaging in Indigenous play allows learners to immerse themselves in the intricacies of their culture, including its values, customs, practices, and traditions, during their formative years (Ekeh et al., 2022; Hadebe-Ndlovu, 2022; Matafwali et al., 2023). Furthermore, participation in Indigenous play enables learners to freely utilise the local language, emulate their communities' cultural festivities and attire, and assume roles in preparing their communities' distinct culinary delights. Nigeria, a nation with multicultural diversity embedded in more than 250 ethnic groups and languages, is threatened by curriculum overload and social media, resulting in the fading of Indigenous play (Nwagbara, 2013; Osimen et al., 2013). Meanwhile, Indigenous play protects and promotes the nation's cultural diversity.

In this research, curriculum overload pertains to learners being inundated with academic tasks, leaving minimal time for recreational activities such as play. Parents continue to enrol their children in extracurricular classes even during holiday periods, typically designated for rest from academic pursuits (Nnamani, 2021). Consequently, children may lack sufficient opportunities to engage in Indigenous play, as the emphasis remains heavily skewed towards formal academic schooling, prioritising cognitive development over a balanced approach that nurtures affective and interpersonal growth. Although information communication technology (ICT), the internet, and social media signalled numerous indisputable benefits for learners, it has been observed that they threatened Indigenous play in the twenty-first century. This is primarily due to learners' access to the internet and information communication technology (ICT) devices (McShane & Grechyn, 2019). The prevalence of modern technological devices, including smart televisions, smartphones, iPads, laptops, and video games, appears to have displaced Indigenous forms of play (McShane & Grechyn, 2019; Oyedemi, 2021).

For example, Carr and Luken (2014) observed that traditional playgrounds in the United States, once hubs for Indigenous play among young learners, now often serve as areas for children to sit while teachers take a break from supervising them. For this reason, Carr and Luken (2014) suggested designing a playscape focused on nature as an alternative to proffer a solution to the traditional playground already in extinction. They argued the importance of traditional playgrounds, including learners learning academic concepts, engaging in physical activities, and investigating scientific principles. Frost (2012) observed a significant shift in children's play culture over the past fifty years, attributing it to technological advancements, increased cyber play, restrictions on free play, and parental safety concerns. This shift has led to deficits in children's social, cognitive, and emotional development and overall well-being. Additionally,

researchers have noted the influential role of social media in altering the traditional or Indigenous forms of play children once enjoyed.

Indigenous play in Nigeria is rapidly declining in rural areas and vanishing in urban centres. While it's undeniable that social media plays a crucial role in fostering global connectivity, its prevalence has deprived young learners of the advantages associated with Indigenous play. For example, in the eastern part of Nigeria, where the first author grew up, I learned critical life skills through an Indigenous play called "ji odu". The game's rule was that upon an agreement to be part of the play, no group member answered more than five (5) calls from any group member. Should a member breach this rule, they would be tasked with roasting and seasoning the local delicacy known as "ji odu" (roasted yam) for the group member who exceeded the allotted number of calls. The beneficiary must eat "ji odu" using both hands, preventing any piece from falling while other participants distract him/her to make a piece fall. This game taught us to keep to agreements and sharpened our listening skills and focus. It also taught communication, collaboration, sharing, and caring for one another while learning to prepare the delicacy of "ji odu", which is one of our local dishes.

Unfortunately, Indigenous games such as "ji odu" are facing extinction, potentially due to learners' excessive screen time watching TV, playing video games, and listening to online stories (McShane & Grechyn, 2019). Moreover, the prevalence of social media has contributed to young learners becoming more individualistic, withdrawn, and self-centred, hindering their ability to interact effectively within their communities. This trend challenges nurturing well-rounded children capable of seamlessly adapting to rural and urban environments. Contrastingly, Indigenous play in previous years fostered the development of well-rounded, balanced young learners who were equipped to navigate their immediate surroundings and beyond (Daru et al., 2019).

The decline of Indigenous play in urban areas, coupled with the predominant focus of parents and schools on academic development at the expense of affective and interpersonal growth, is concerning (Akpan, 2017; Osiesi, 2020). This trend exacerbates the inability of learners to derive the numerous values associated with Indigenous play. Consequently, the occurrence of Indigenous play among young learners, whether at school or home, has become minimal. Moreover, the regimented lifestyle of young learners, wherein academic activities extend into their leisure time, further diminishes opportunities for play. This is exacerbated during vacations, as parents often enrol their children in extramural classes, perpetuating continuous academic instruction (Adamu & Dikko, 2017; Nnamani, 2021). The researchers embarked on an investigation into the significance of Indigenous play for early-grade learners. In light of these observations, the researchers explored the role of Indigenous play for early-grade learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood development worldwide, progressing through various stages to its most complex form (Hennessey, 2016; Metin Aslan, 2024; Moore, 2017). Defined as a voluntary activity facilitating learning, play enables children to make discoveries, connect ideas, and interact imaginatively with their environment (Hennessey, 2016). It encompasses diverse types, each contributing uniquely to children's growth. For instance, children aged three (3) months to five (5) years typically engage in unoccupied, solitary, sensory, pretend, parallel, associative, nature-based, fantasy, imaginative, object-oriented, and cooperative play (Moore, 2017; Van Hoorn et al., 2014). Meanwhile, those aged six (6) to nine (9) years lean toward competitive, constructive, dramatic, physical, symbolic, exploratory, role-playing, ritual, practice, expressive, mastery, digital, deep, music and art, Indigenous, and free play (Beisly & Moffitt, 2024; Moore, 2017; Van Hoorn et al., 2014).

Of particular interest in this study are Indigenous and free play. Free play without adult intervention fosters imagination, creativity, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and independence, all vital lifelong skills (El Mawas & Muntean, 2018; Castellar et al., (2014)). Its inhibition can lead to emotional, social, and psychological imbalances (Gray, 2017), often stemming from concerns about playground security, inadequate equipment, strict curricula limiting recess time, and the allure of technology games (Lauer, 2011; Ong, 2020). Deprivation of free play not only affects children's well-being but also hampers the continuation of Indigenous play, which typically originates from free play activities (Ekeh et al., 2022), exacerbating children's adaptation and socialisation challenges.

Indigenous play embodies culturally embedded recreational activities, reflecting a community's values, beliefs, and norms (Ekeh et al., 2022). For instance, the Mi'kmaq dice-and-bowl game, rooted in counting skills and chance, predates European colonisation in Atlantic Canada (Joseph, 2019), while Nguni stick-fighting in Zululand prepared teenage boys for warriorhood (Alegi, 2004; Nxumalo et al. 2015). Despite the significance of such games, their extinction looms due to limited opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer (Bogopa, 2012), emphasising the urgent need to preserve and promote Indigenous play for holistic childhood development.

In the South-Western region of Nigeria, some notable Indigenous plays include *Àló Àpámò* (Riddles). *Àló Àpámò* is a form of brain teaser which is presented in a question form for learners to decipher the meaning and give an accurate answer to the riddle (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012). This game developed learners' imagination, creativity, and critical thinking skills and preserved the people's cultural beliefs embedded in the riddle (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012; Castellar et al. (2014). Next, *Dájú Dánú* (Tongue twisters), which is also known as *"Okwu ntabire"* in South-Eastern Nigeria, is a typical Indigenous game for children's speech training and language competence (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012). This Indigenous game serves to preserve Indigenous languages by teaching children the tone marks associated with local language

pronunciation. Children develop language skills, creativity, imagination, and problem-solving abilities through activities like tongue twisters, enhancing their communication and vocabulary.

Despite Indigenous play's significant benefits for children, its integration into home and school environments appears to be overlooked. In contrast to the past, when children had unrestricted access to various natural settings, allowing for exploration and interaction with the environment, modern children experience more structured and supervised lives, resulting in limited opportunities for free play (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012, p. 147).

Further examination reveals that the decline of Indigenous play stems from children's confinement indoors, a result of physical barriers like fences and tall buildings absent in the past (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012; Nxumalo et al., 2015). Parents' heightened safety concerns, prompted by fears of crime and abduction, also limit children's outdoor play within their neighbourhoods (Salami & Oyaremi, 2012). Despite these challenges, the review underscores the vital role of Indigenous play in early-grade learners' development, emphasising the importance of preserving cultural heritage and facilitating continuous learning (Nxumalo et al. 2015). Motivated by this, the researchers in this article aim to investigate the significance of Indigenous play for early-grade learners and propose measures to mitigate its potential extinction.

Theoretical framework

The sociocultural theory of learning, widely recognised in education, posits that learning is an active process involving the co-construction of knowledge (Drew, 2019; Nagel, 2012). According to this theory, learning occurs through social interaction, wherein individuals engage in dialogue and collaboration to construct understanding (Drew, 2019). Scholars contend that social interaction serves as the initial conduit for learning, with individuals subsequently internalising acquired knowledge, thereby shaping their social behaviour (Nagel, 2012). Within this framework, learning is mediated by social and cultural interactions, as learners engage with peers, teachers, family, and their environment (Bates, 2019). Cultural influences play a significant role, as learning is situated within the context of learners' cultural backgrounds and environments (Bates, 2019; Yende, 2024).

The process of individual internalisation is pivotal, as it involves integrating socially acquired knowledge into one's belief system, resulting in lasting behavioural changes (Nagel, 2012). In the context of this study, the sociocultural theory suggests that Indigenous play operates at both the social interaction and individual internalisation levels. Through play, learners engage with peers and adults who transmit cultural norms and values, which are subsequently internalised, shaping their behaviours and contributing to preserving culture over time.

METHODS

The researchers attempted to give an overall plan and strategies employed in this study by outlining the procedure that guided the study's conduct under the following research subheading.

Research objectives

The researchers set out to explore the role of Indigenous play for early-grade learners. In accomplishing this task, the researchers sought to determine (a) the types of Indigenous plays played in the past and (b) how curriculum overload and social media impact early-grade learners' Indigenous play.

Research approach and design

In this study, the researchers adopted a descriptive qualitative research approach to understand the role of Indigenous play for early-grade learners. Furthermore, the research adopted a narrative research design because the study aimed to collect and analyse personal stories, experiences, and meanings leading to the extinction of Indigenous play in our society.

Sampling of research participants

The participants of the research were purposively sampled to include three (3) grandparents (GPP) between the ages of 65 and above, two (2) early-grade teachers (EGT) who teach learners aged 7-9, and two (2) parents (YLP) whose children are an early-grade learner aged 7-9. The reason for including the age limits for the inclusion of the participants is to enable the researchers to obtain in-depth data on the research phenomenon. Specifically, grandparents over 65 can provide insights into their experiences with Indigenous play during their upbringing and the associated benefits. Teachers instructing children aged 7-9 can offer perspectives on Indigenous play within their educational settings and the extent of student participation. Additionally, parents of children in this age group can describe their observations regarding their children's engagement in Indigenous play, or lack thereof, and provide information on alternative types of play in which their children are involved.

Research site

The research site, which includes the community where the grandparent participants (GPP) reside and the school where the teachers of learners aged 7-9 attend, is situated in Owerri West Local government area of Imo state, Nigeria. Owerri West Local Government Area was selected based on its status as a developing suburban area within Imo State, Nigeria. Notably, Indigenous play appears to be diminishing in this locality, making it an apt setting for the study to investigate the decline of traditional play activities.

Data collection methods

Data was collected through an open-ended semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in English and Igbo to allow participants to freely express their thoughts about the research. Their responses were audio-recorded and transcribed to capture and prepare the information for data analysis. The grandparent participants responded in Igbo, a language in

which the author is fluent. Hence, the first author translated their responses into English when reporting.

Trustworthiness and research limitations

The researchers ensured the integrity of the study by subjecting the interview questions to peer debriefing and validating participants' responses through member checking. This rigorous process aimed to enhance the research findings' appropriateness, trustworthiness, validity, and credibility. Due to the quest for an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon, the research limited the participants to seven (7). The data collected from these participants is insufficient to make a generalised inference on the study and thus is a limitation. The research context also poses itself as a limitation for the study. Whereas the transferability of the research could seamlessly fit in similar research contexts, especially in the African rural context, there are other research contexts in which the transferability of the study may be a challenge.

Data analysis

The data analysis followed thematic data analysis procedures, beginning with the data transcription. Subsequently, researchers familiarised themselves with the data, assigned primary codes, and identified overarching themes emerging from the coded interviews.

Ethics consideration

The researchers ensured the confidentiality of participants by using pseudonyms such as GPP (Grand Parent Participants), YLP (Young Learners' Parents), and EGT (Early-grade Teachers) to represent participants. Before their involvement in the research, participants provided informed consent, following ethics clearance from the University of Johannesburg ethics committee. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing repercussions.

DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION OF THEMES

The thematic data analysis revealed four overarching themes. Firstly, participants shared memories of Indigenous games enjoyed during childhood, detailing their experiences playing them. Secondly, the benefits of Indigenous games to participants emerged as a prominent theme, highlighting the advantages of engaging in these traditional activities. Thirdly, factors impacting Indigenous games in recent years were identified as a significant theme, shedding light on challenges affecting the continuation of these games. Lastly, the theme of preserving Indigenous games for future generations underscored the importance of safeguarding these cultural traditions for posterity.

Indigenous games participants enjoyed in their childhood

The data confirms that participants enjoyed many Indigenous games during their childhood. This confirmation is evident in the participants' responses; thus, GPP 1, GPP 3, and YPP 2 mentioned ichu oro, itu-uga, and jumping, while YPP 1 mentioned soccer and okwe rubber (local darts). GPP 1, EGT 1 and GPP 2 noted that they enjoyed running and dancing (avu udu). Similarly, GPP 3 stated that he participated in nchoro. In their response, GPP 1, GPP 2 and YPP 2 explained that

they partook in ji odu, storytelling and card games, respectively. Additionally, GPP 1, YPP 1and YPP 2 mentioned that they participated in playing swell (a swell is a form of Indigenous games in the research context).

Specifically, EGT 1 said that:

> *We built houses with sand. Hahaha, we backed toys using rappers and cooked. We also constructed kites using plastics and rope to fly them. We also cut out cassava leaves and their stems to build hand fans. We also used the worn-out car tyres to play, especially the running play. We also did the Tales by Moonlight. We gathered at night, and the older adults told us stories. We learned many lessons from these stories, especially those old stories".*

EGT 2, however, said, "*I enjoyed making a basket with palm fronds.* Describing how they engaged in playing some of these games, GPP 1 noted:

> *The nkuda game begins with an agreement between my game partner and me. Once the deal is accepted, the fun begins. The instructions for the game are straightforward: hold your precious items very carefully to avoid your opposing partner knocking them down or snatching them from you. Once the opposing game partner knocks down the items from his game partner, the items become his, and if he is also careless with the same items, the original owner could still knock them down and repossess them.*

GPP 3 mentioned that ichu oro was done during the moonlight at night, according to her:

> *In those days, we assembled at a playground in our large ancestral compound from where we started off the ichu oro. Every member of the oro group is expected to arrive successfully at the playground centre from where the game began without being caught. From the playground, all participating game members will hide while the chaser hangs out to ensure he or she catches one member of the oro game member. The chaser meant to catch any group member will shout once, "I am coming ooo". On hearing that, each member of the playgroup will try hard not to be caught by the chaser, and if the chaser catches any member of the group, he becomes the one to chase other members.*

Regarding okwe rubber (local dart), YPP 1 stated:

> *We used to gather the rubber seeds together, make a circle round about them and give a long distance for the players to target the rubber seeds as if they were playing darts. As you target and hit the rubber seeds, you win the number of rubber seeds that go beyond the marked circle line. For instance, if the circled rubber seed is twenty (20) and you hit the target to get ten (10) out of the rubber seeds, it means you've won half of the game. Should your opponent miss his target, and you hit and get at it again, you've won.*

Similarly, YPP 2, in her response, said that in playing the uga game as girls, they danced to the rhythm of the clap of their hands and used their legs to determine the winner of the game.

Joseph (2019) alluded that Mi'kmaq dice-and-bowl, an ancient game, taught learners counting skills while blending it with a chance. Salami and Oyaremi (2012) noted that *Àló Àpámò as one of the Indigenous games, was famous* in South-Western Nigeria. Alegi (2004)

corroborated that donga or dlala 'nduku (play Nguni stick-fight) was a well-known Indigenous play in Zululand, South Africa. As earlier mentioned by Ekeh et al. (2022), Indigenous games mirror the sociocultural ways young people learn in addition to their behaviour modification. Some of the games mentioned by the participants corroborate with the ideology of Moore (2017), Van Hoorn, Monighan-Nourot, Scales, and Alward (2014), who noted that children aged 6-9 are most likely to engage in competitive, constructive, dramatic, physical plays among others. These pieces of literature affirm the responses of the participants as stated above.

Importance of Indigenous Games to Children's Learning and Development

From the participants' responses, it was evident that there were numerous benefits associated with Indigenous games. According to GPP 1, she derived joy from the ichu oro game. Also, she learnt to be patient and tolerant, which helped her develop her muscles and stamina as well as help her calculate accurately. She avowed that ichu oro became a determinant factor in knowing who could wrestle and stand firm on the ground. Similarly, GPP2 asserted that Indigenous play was an enjoyable experience for her:

> *Once it was playtime, I wouldn't come home to do any other domestic work until I was satisfied with playing. Storytelling for us was magical as it united us and fostered love, togetherness, friendship and warmth. I also think it helped our memories because without understanding and recalling the story's storyline, you cannot tell it.*

According to EGT 2, being fast and accurate with any task and handling different tasks simultaneously with little or no mistakes were among the benefits he gained from Indigenous games.

In affirmation, YPP 1 acclaimed that Indigenous play helped to develop their critical thinking and sense of accuracy, thus:

> *To calculate accurately to target the rubber seeds, you need to position your hand correctly to hit the target. For table soccer, you will need to think critically about how to play it to enable you to win the games.*

Correspondingly, GPP 3 alluded, *"From nchoro, I learned how to do addition and subtraction in mathematics"*. He further revealed that nchoro was helpful to him in learning calculations because the same seeds he used in playing nchoro were what he used in learning maths in school.

In corroboration of the participant voices, Salami and Oyaremi (2012) divulged that games are a veritable tool for developing learners' creativity, critical thinking, and imagination. In affirmation, El Mawas & Muntean (2018) corroborated that play generally develops children's sense of imagination, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, creativity, and independence. Similarly, Hennessey (2016) alluded that children experiment, connect, discover and interact efficiently through play. On the other hand, Akpan (2017) and Osiesi (2020) noted that it is worrisome that Indigenous play is disappearing from our society due to parents' emphasis on children's cognitive development. Researchers are of the view that parents should intentionally sustain the benefits derived from Indigenous play.

Factors impacting Indigenous games in recent years

The study uncovered some elements mitigating Indigenous games in recent years. Some of the features identified are insecurity, trust, and safety. On separate accounts, GPP 1 voiced;

> *For instance, in our time, we never thought of harming ourselves during the ichu oro games, but today, young boys may want to rape your daughter through that game, and insecurity has also contributed to the diminishing of those moonlight games because we now go to bed early than it was when I was growing up.*

GPP 3 disclosed;

> *Although we could fight one another, once we had such conflicts, we resolved them quickly and moved on. Our fights were not aimed at inflicting injury on anyone. But these days, children deliberately inflict pain and injury when they have conflicts and disagreements.*

EGT 1 expounded that "*the idea of children being wicked in injuring their peers at any slightest provocation makes parents find it difficult to let their children play.*"

Lack of time, discrimination, and lack of teacher supervision are other mitigating factors inhibiting Indigenous games nowadays. GPP 2 recalled her grandchild asking her to tell her old-time stories but said,

> *Because of lack of time, I'd tell a little and stop at that".* She further reiterated that *"the present generation desires to be more Western-inclined than what we do here in the village. Unfortunately, our local schools don't even teach children stories anymore.*

GPP 3 stressed that *"nobody monitors the teachers"*; hence, Indigenous games are fading even in schools. At the same time, discrimination among parents stifles children's interactions among themselves. YPP 1 noted, *"Our children don't mix up with other children at home as we did during our time because everyone lives in their flats, and parents wouldn't want their children to play with other children in the neighbourhood".*

> The participants also consider academic imbalance and early exposure to technological gadgets impacting Indigenous games. YPP 1 mentioned, "*My child doesn't find time to play with his peers after school because of homework, except for indoor games with his sibling.*" When asked what kind of indoor games her children engage in, she alluded, *"Most times, they watch cartoons with storylines and begin to act it out. Unfortunately, the cartoons have Western content, so they imbibe Western content.*" In corroboration, YPP 2, referring to her children, stated,

> *On a school day, they don't have time for play; they may only find little time for play on the weekends. Besides the numerous homework they give them, the day is usually over before they get home on school days.*

EGT 1 said, *"The school has abolished certain things, and those Indigenous things are now obsolete. They no longer allow children to engage in those plays freely; what they do now are teaching-learning activities".* EGT 1 continued, saying,

Academic activities have shrunk children's time for play. This is because parents come accusing us of not covering the scheme of work for their children, thus leading to teachers trying to cover up their syllabus at the expense of play.

Nwagbara (2013) and Osimen, Akinyemi, and Samuel (2013) identified curriculum overload and the influence of social media as significant threats to the practice of Indigenous play. This study's findings resonate with those of Nnamani (2021), who observed that learners increasingly forego leisure and playtime during holidays due to parental insistence on attending extramural academic classes. Similarly, Adamu and Dikko (2017) expressed concern over the regimented lifestyles of contemporary learners, attributing this phenomenon to the proliferation of educational activities both during and after school hours. The participants' perspectives align with existing literature on the factors impeding the continuity of Indigenous games in recent times.

Preserving Indigenous Games for Posterity

Creating time and a peaceful atmosphere, vacationing to rural areas, and reviewing early-grade curricula to incorporate Indigenous play were among participants' submissions concerning preserving Indigenous games for posterity.

GPP 3 noted, *"You can see that we live a communal life without peace; such games will not strive"*. YPP 1 mentioned, *"However, when we travel for vacation to our village in the rural area, they learn a bit of these games from their peers in the villages"*. In response to the preservation of Indigenous games, EGT 2 asserted, *"As for curriculum overload, I think it should be reviewed to incorporate Indigenous games in schools again"*.

Interestingly, GPP 1 emphasised the use of storytelling to preserve Indigenous play. She noted, *"Usually, the older ones tell the stories while the young ones listen. Our parents had time to also share some stories with us, especially during the moonlight".* She explained that every child was involved in storytelling because *"we assign those who will tell their stories, making everyone want to know at least a story"*. In an instance, GPP 1 shared two Indigenous storylines about the tortoise and squirrel in her Owerri dialect and noted that she has never forgotten it, even in her old age.

nnabe lee ngoloma,

chiri mpuru oka ato ngoloma,

chije onu zo yaa ngoloma,

okuko biaduruni ngoloma, ya turu otu taa ngoloma,

nwa ya biaduruni ngoloma, yaturu otu taa ngoloma,

anurum tikotiko ngoloma,

anam ebere uwa akwa ngoloma,

ihem huru n'eligwe ngoloma …hahahahaha

Interpretation: The storyline implies that there was a famine in the land of the animals, and the tortoise thought it wise to lure the chickens and their chicks through bate (corn seeds). As the

chicken and their chicks kept eating the corn seeds, not knowing it was a trap set by the tortoise, they got caught, ending their lives; hence, they served as food to the tortoise.

> *anyi ejema ndu, nduyaya duyaya duya…*
>
> *osa ama na akwu nduyaya duyaya duya…*
>
> *uzeh ama na akwu, nduyaya duyaya duya…*
>
> *erekpu repu amaghi n'akwu, nduyaya duyaya duya…*
>
> *onye mara n'okwe ekwe la onwu nduyaya duyaya duya…*

Interpretation: This story meant that the animals went hunting, and in the process of hunting, squirrel "O" and squirrel "U" jumped into their nest while the mole could not jump because of being overweight. Any animal trapped is already sentenced to death, which implies food to the hunters.

Bogopa (2012) highlighted the diminishing transmission of Indigenous games to younger generations due to older individuals' failure to allocate time for passing down these traditions, contributing to the extinction of such games in South Africa. Consequently, prioritising the teaching of Indigenous games to young children emerges as a crucial strategy for their preservation. Moreover, McShane and Grechyn (2019) and Oyedemi (2021) underscored the displacement of Indigenous play by modern technological gadgets, emphasising the need for stakeholders to regulate children's screen time to safeguard Indigenous games. Similarly, concerns raised by Akpan (2017) and Osiesi (2020) regarding parents' emphasis on cognitive development at the expense of interpersonal skills highlight the importance of raising awareness among parents about the significant role Indigenous games play in holistic child development.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated the significance of Indigenous play, focusing on notable games such as ji odu, nkuda, swell, okwe rubber, and itu uga, among others, as reported by participants. Findings revealed diverse benefits associated with these games, encompassing physical, socio-emotional, and academic development, exemplified by cultivating traits like patience, tolerance, muscle development, stamina, and mathematical skills. Indigenous games often require participants to exhibit patience and tolerance as they navigate challenges and setbacks during gameplay. Research by Nxumalo et al. (2015) emphasises that Indigenous games promote patience and tolerance by encouraging players to persevere and remain resilient in the face of adversity. Many Indigenous games involve physical activities that contribute to muscle development and stamina. A study by Nxumalo et al. (2015) demonstrated that participation in traditional Indigenous games, such as wrestling or running-based games, improves muscle strength, endurance, and overall physical fitness. Indigenous games often incorporate mathematical concepts, requiring players to strategise, calculate, and make decisions based on numerical information. For instance, research by El Mawas and Muntean (2018) and Castellar et al. (2014) illustrates how games involving counting, measurement, and spatial reasoning

enhance mathematical skills among players, fostering numerical literacy and problem-solving abilities. Overall, the literature underscores the holistic benefits of Indigenous games beyond mere entertainment, highlighting their significant contributions to developing essential skills and competencies for personal growth and well-being.

Challenges to the continuity of Indigenous games were identified, including concerns over children's safety during play, parental pressures prioritising academic pursuits over recreational activities, early exposure to social media, and insufficient supervision of online activities. Moreover, older generations' limited capacity to transmit traditional games to younger individuals was noted.

In light of these findings, the researchers offer several recommendations. They propose that the Ministry of Education revise early-grade curricula to integrate Indigenous games as educational tools. Additionally, fostering peaceful co-existence within communities is underscored as crucial for sustaining these games, requiring concerted efforts from parents, community members, and society. Emphasising the importance of rural exposure for urban-dwelling families is advised to enable children to engage with Indigenous games and maintain connections with cultural roots. Storytelling emerges as a potent method for preserving Indigenous games, suggesting its utilisation by parents, caregivers, and educators.

CONCLUSION

Educators and caregivers concur on the profound impact of Indigenous games in shaping children's development, serving as conduits for transmitting societal values across generations. Educators further agree that Indigenous games provide holistic physical, socio-emotional, and academic development, enhancing curriculum inclusion, peaceful co-existence, and coherence. Although safety concerns, academic pressure, and the impact of social media are considered a challenge, older generations are encouraged to pass on Indigenous game traditions to younger ones. It was critically noted that storytelling is pivotal in preserving Indigenous games for future generations. Their sentiments reflect a growing apprehension regarding the encroachment of Western cultural influences, which pose a threat to cherished Indigenous ideologies in an increasingly interconnected global community. Recognising the imperative to safeguard these cultural assets, there is a call for scholarly inquiry and collaboration among education stakeholders to explore effective interventions to preserve Indigenous games. Consequently, researchers advocate for continued investigation into the integration of Indigenous games within early-grade pedagogy, seeking to enrich educational practices with culturally relevant and enriching experiences.

REFERENCES

Adamu, S. A. D. I. Q., and Dikko, S. (2017). The influence of family socio-economic status on the academic achievement of secondary school students in computer studies in Bauchi metropolis of Bauchi State Nigeria. *Impact: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, *5*(7), 123-142.

Akpan, I. F. (2017). Reflecting on the challenges on the attainment of MDGs in science education in Nigeria and the way forward. *Journal of Education and Policy Review, 9 (1), 48-55*

Alegi, P. (2004). Laduma! Soccer, politics and society in South Africa. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2012.0011

Bates, B. (2019). *Learning theories simplified and how to apply them to teaching*. London EC: Sage.

Beisly, A., & Moffitt, A. (2024). Mixing it Up: Exploring Fizzical-Science through Play. *Theory and Practice in Child Development, 4*(1), 108–117. https://doi.org/10.46303.tpicd.2024.7

Bogopa, D. L. (2012). The importance of Indigenous games: the selected cases of Indigenous games in South Africa. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, *11*(2), 245-256.

Carr, V., and Luken, E. (2014). Playscapes: a pedagogical paradigm for play and learning. *International Journal of Play*, *3*(1), 69-83. https://doi.org/10.108 0/2159493 7.2013.871965

Castellar, E., Looy, J., Szmalec, A., and Marez, L. (2014). Improving arithmetic skills through gameplay: Assessment of the effectiveness of an educational game in terms of cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Inf. Sci., 264, 19-31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ins.2013.09.030.

Daru, E. R., Looh, J. L., Ngienwih, C. T., and Ettah, A. A. (2019). Indigenous Play/Game and Developing Executive Functioning During Late Childhood.

Drew, C. (2019). S*ociocultural Theory of Learning in the Classroom* Helpful Professor. https://helpfulprofessor.com/sociocultural-theory-education/

Ekeh, M. C., Venketsamy, R., Thuketana, N. S., & Joubert, I. (2022). Play-based pedagogy for oral communication in early grade and preschool classrooms. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, *12*(1), 981. https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.4102 /sajce.v12 i1.981

El Mawas, N., and Muntean, C. H. (2018). Supporting lifelong learning through development of 21st-century skills. In *10th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies*. https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2018.1723

Frost, J. L. (2012). The changing culture of play. *International Journal of Play*, *1*(2), 117-130. https://doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2012.698461

Gray, P. (2017). What exactly is play, and why is it such a powerful vehicle for learning? *Topics in Language Disorders*, *37*(3), 217-228. https://doi.org/10.1097/tld.0000000000000130

Hadebe-Ndlovu, B. (2022). Teachers' experiences of Indigenous games in the early grades. South African Journal of Childhood Education. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.931.

Hennessey, P. (2016). Full–day kindergarten play-based learning: Promoting a common understanding. *Education and Early Childhood Development, April*, 1-76.

Joseph B., (2019, February 18). The role of Indigenous games in culture. Indigenous Cooperate Training Inc., https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/the-role-of-Indigenous-games-in-culture

Lauer, L. M. (2011). Play deprivation: is it happening in your school setting? *ERIC. eric.ed.gov.*

Matafwali, B., and Mofu, M. (2023). Exploring the feasibility of outdoor Indigenous games and songs to enhance play-based pedagogy in early childhood education. Journal of Childhood, Education & Society. https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638x.202343270.

McShane, I., & Grechyn, V. (2019). Public Wi-Fi provision by Australian local government authorities. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, *78*(4), 613-630. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12397

Metin Aslan, O. (2024). Playwork Practices' Impact on Pre-service Preschool Teachers' Understanding of Play and Insights into Pedagogy of Play. *Theory and Practice in Child Development, 4*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.46303.tpicd.2024.3

Moore, R. C. (2017). *Childhood's domain: Play and place in child development*. Routledge.

Nagel, M. (2012). Student learning. In R. Churchill, P. Ferguson, S. Godinho, N. Johnson, & A. Keddie. (Eds.). *Teaching making a difference* (Vol. 2, pp. 74-88). Milton, QLD: Wiley Publishing.

Nnamani, C. D. (2021). Influence of female teachers on child development in Enugu education zone of Enugu state Nigeria. *British International Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, *8*(10), 124-138.

Nwagbara, G. U. (2013). Indigenous language news and the marginalisation of some ethnic groups in the Nigerian broadcast media. *Studies of Tribes and Tribals*, *11*(2), 153-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/0972639x.2013.11886677

Nxumalo, S., Semple, S., and Longhurst, G. (2015). Effects of Zulu stick fighting on health-related physical fitness of prepubescent Zulu males. African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance, 21, 32-45.

Ong, I. (2020). Play and Flow: Harnessing Flow Through the Power of Play in Adult Learning. In *Diversifying Learner Experience* (pp. 137-155). Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-9861-6_8

Osiesi M.P. (2020). The importance of professional development programmes for primary school teachers in Nigeria. *International Journal on Integrated Education,*3, (X), 48-55 https://doi.org/10.31149/ijie.v3i10.677

Osimen, G. U., Akinyemi, B., and Samuel, A. T. (2013). Ethnicity and identity crisis: Challenge to national integration in Nigerian. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *16*(4), 79-86. https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-1647986

Oyedemi, T. D. (2021). Digital coloniality and 'Next Billion Users': the political economy of Google Station in Nigeria. *Information, Communication & Society*, *24*(3), 329-343. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2020.1804982

Salami, I. A., and Oyaremi, M. K. (2012). Teachers' knowledge, use and perception of the relevance of Yoruba Indigenous child's play to pre-primary and primary schools in Nigeria. *Education Research Journal*, *2*(5), 146-155.

Van Hoorn, J. L., Monighan-Nourot, P., Scales, B., & Alward, K. R. (2014). *Play at the centre of the curriculum*. Boston: Pearson.

Wood, E. A. (2014). Free choice and free play in early childhood education: Troubling the discourse. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *22*(1), 4-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2013.830562

Yende, S. (2024). Funding Opera in the Changing Landscape: Should Opera Be Funded or Accepted as a Fading Culture in South Africa?. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 9*(2), 156-175. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.30