Play, a mechanism for developing peaceful behaviour among elementary school pupils for sustainable peace in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research work was aimed at investigating play, as a mechanism for developing peaceful behaviour among elementary school pupils for sustainable peace in Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to determine this, Ex-post facto research design was used. Some determinants of play such as; playing age preference of pupils, gender differences and willingness to play with opposite sex and pupils' home background were identified as variables for the study. The population of the study was 26,363. A total of 200 primary six pupils formed the sample for the study through which the data were obtained, using purposive sampling technique. The instruments were faced validated and reliability ascertained. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Movement Correlation Analysis (PPMCA) and Independent T-test at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed a significant relationship between playing age preference of pupils and their home background, between boys and girls exist no significant difference in their willingness to play with opposite sex.. The implication is that when pupils play together they develop peaceful behavior which will help the interact freely in their adult life leading to sustainable peace wherever they find themselves. Also, when pupils are allowed to play with their peers at home, they learn to tolerate others and develop peaceful behaviours. It was therefore recommended that Children should be allowed to play with their age mates and also with the ones of the same sex and opposite sex as this will help them to interact freely and also develop the social relationship that will bring about peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Play; peace; environment; peaceful behaviour; sustainable peace

1. Introduction

The school environment is a place where pupils of different tribes, cultures, social and home background come to learn. As children interact with one another through play, they learn various habits and practices which may develop in them the spirit of friendliness, such friendly spirit may result in lasting peace that would make the world as a whole and Nigeria in particular a better place to live.

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All over the world, peace is being advocated. Everyone wants to live in an environment where peace is experienced. Such peaceful environments can only be created through positive interaction and play amongst people. Such peaceful interaction can also create opportunity for people to get familiar with themselves, thereby preventing barriers which ordinarily will exist if there is no contact or interaction. Unfortunately, in recent times in Nigeria, the problem of Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country is creating a state of unrest and fear in people. This insurgent group which is against Western Education has created a situation where elementary school children find it difficult to go out and play. This is a serious problem because it causes fear in pupils thereby preventing them from interacting freely with other people.

Play in this study refers to children getting engaged in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than for serious or practical purpose. The term can also be seen as, acting in a manner such that one has fun. That is to be engaged in activities expressly for the purpose of recreation. Play Scrutiny Group as reported by Cardiff (2005) added that it is through play that children understand each other and make sense of the world around them. The author further said that children learn so much from play, it teaches them social skill such as sharing, taking turns, self-discipline and tolerance of others. As children play, their lives are enhanced and it helps them to develop as individuals. It also assists them in their emotional and intellectual development and mental health resilience which are core building blocks for their transition years.

Children generally love to play. Bruce and Meggitt (2002) opined that through play, children bring together and organize their ideas, feelings, relationships and their physical lives. It helps them to use what they know and to make sense of the world and people they meet. The authors further added that when children play, they can – rearrange their lives, - rehearse the future, - reflect on the past, be creative and imaginative, organize their learning for themselves, get their thoughts, feelings, relationships and physical bodies under their own control. The act of playing therefore gives children a sense of mastery and competence that helps them to face the world and cope with it. This is crucial for the development and good self-esteem and for becoming rounded personality. This as a matter of fact should be sustained.

Play among children can make them popular. According to Dodge and Price (1994), Lemerise and Arsenio (2000) play makes children to read accurately social situations. When children are engaged in physical play, they seem to be aware of the needs, motive and behaviors of their peers or age mates and of the effect of their own behavior. They are better able to identify outcomes of particular social initiative. For example, during play among children, there is pushing or hitting which can lead to retaliation. When children become aware of this, they play safely to avoid such confrontation which might likely lead to injury. Also, through play, children will learn to imbibe peaceful behavior that will help them to tolerate each other.

When children play, they acquire social skills and make friends as well as display high level of initiative; such play may also result in social competence in them and also bring about positive peer relationship, thereby resulting in peaceful co-existence.

The game of football for example, is a game that brings about unity. Children in the elementary school can decide to group themselves in different teams for the purpose of playing football. At this point, they forget about their tribe, religion or culture and unite as one. Such unity brings about lasting peace amongst them. In this study, three determinants of children's play have been identified. They include; Playing age preference of pupils, Gender differences and willingness to play with opposite sex, as well as pupils' home background and how these relate to sustainable peace. Hence the reason for this study.

2. Theoretical framework

The theory supporting this work is the theory of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). This theory according to Essa (1999) stressed the importance of the social environment to development. Vygotsky's ideas have gained greater prominence in recent years and have spurred considerable interest in Cross-cultural studies of child development and child rearing practices. The theory proposed that social interaction, especially dialog between children and adults is the mechanism through which specific cultural values, customs and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to another. This could imply that as children interact with one another through play; it can afford them the opportunity to learn other people 'cultural values, beliefs and customs.

This theory is also one of the social constructivist theory which says that play helps children to do things in advance of what they can manage in real life. This by implication means that children can plan their play strategy and in advance be able to cope with real life situation as well as develop ways of tolerating each other's weak points and strength bearing in mind their beliefs, values and customs.

2.1. Literature review

Children may prefer to play with their age mates than playing with older people. Berk (2000) further reported that children clearly profit from same-age relationships. It is worth noting that children play is not without conflict. As such, from interaction with coequals, during play, they learn to cooperate and resolve conflicts that could arise.

Also, boys and girls show some differences in their social interaction and play (Trawick-Smith, 2006). Boys are usually more active and rough in their play and girls are quieter and more elaborate (Fagot and O'Brien, 1994). Again, Cervantes and Callahan (1998) added that boys are less compliant and more demanding when interacting with adults while girls tend to be more wary and timid in their play and more emotionally

expressive. These patterns of social interaction and play according to Turner and Gervai (1995), often called gender Stereotype behaviors are always found in all cultures and societies of the world.

In spite of the gender differences in play style, it is likely that most female elementary school pupils may still want to play with their male counterparts and vice versa. In the process of playing, disagreement may arise which could eventually be peacefully resolved. In other words, boys and girls can demonstrate compliance, roughness or rigid behaviour during play depending on their cultural values and expectations as well as playmate preference. With this, young school children can learn gender-typical social skills and play styles from play mates in the classroom or in school (Maccoby, 1999).

Maccoby in (1990a) had earlier said that hormones affect play styles, leading to rough, noisy movement among boys, and calm, gentle actions among girls. Then as children begin to interact with peers, they choose partners whose interest and behaviors are compatible with their own.

The home background of children also is one of the variables in this study that can determine the way they play. In some homes, sometimes, most parents restrict their children from playing with mates, forgetting that interaction amongst peers can result in lasting peace, while lack of it could cause the child to be aggressive and violent. In other words, children who are kept in isolation from other children may develop unacceptable behavior in the society in future.

Play according to Cardiff (2005), is often called the "work" of children, and children of any age, gender and home background can engage in play. Children can play on their own and also with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light- hearted or very serious. Play also amongst children can be unstructured and free. It could be with age mates and with their opposite or same sex counterparts. Whichever is the case, excessively strict supervision as well as programming by parents could spoil the true benefits and essence of play among children, hence the essence of this study.

2.2. Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to investigate play as a mechanism for developing peaceful behaviour among elementary school pupils for sustainable peace in Cross River State, Nigeria.

In specific terms, the study seeks to find out if:

1. The playing age preference of pupils relate to sustainable peace.
2. Boys and girls differ in their willingness to play together and how this relates to sustainable peace.
3. Pupils' home background in terms of play relate to sustainable peace.

Research Questions

Three research questions were asked to conduct the study.

1.   How does playing age preference of pupils bring about sustainable peace?

2.   How does the willingness of boys and girls to play together bring about sustainable peace?

3.   To what extent does pupils' home background in terms of play bring about sustainable peace?

Hypotheses

To guide the study, the following hypotheses were formulated.

1.   There is no significant relationship between playing age preference of pupils and sustainable peace

2.   Boys and girls do not significantly differ in their willingness to play together in order to bring about sustainable peace.

3.   There is no significant relationship between pupils' home background in terms of play and sustainable peace.

3. Method

This research work was aimed at investigating play, as a mechanism for developing peaceful behavior among elementary school pupils for sustainable peace in Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to determine this, Ex-post facto research design was adopted. Some determinants of play such as; playing age preference of pupils, gender differences and willingness to play with opposite sex and pupils' home background were identified as variables for the study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Movement Correlation Analysis (PPMCA) and Independent T-test at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument was face validated and reliability ascertained.

3.1. Population of the study

The population of the study comprise all the primary six pupils under State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). The total population for the study was 26,363 pupils across all the primary schools in the state.

3.2. Sampling procedure

The sampling procedure used for this study was purposive sampling technique. From the 18 Local Government Areas across, a total of 200 primary six pupils were sampled from 10 schools across the state.

3.3. Sample

In order to get the sample for the study, a total of 200 Primary six pupils formed the sample through which data were obtained. The pupils were given questionnaire on Play for sustainable peace to respond. They were made up of 100 males and 100 females. The sample is shown in the table that follows.

Distribution of sample by School

School	Males	Females	Total Number of Schools
School 1	10	10	20
School 2	10	10	20
School 3	10	10	20
School 4	10	10	20
School 5	10	10	20
School 6	10	10	20
School 7	10	10	20
School 8	10	10	20
School 9	10	10	20
School 10	10	10	20
Total	100	100	200

4. Results

The data collected for this study were analyzed at 0.05 level of significance based on the different hypotheses. This was followed by the discussion of findings. The results of the analyses is presented as following:

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between playing age preference of pupils and sustainable peace. Independent variable is playing age preference of pupils while the

independent variable is sustainable peace. Pearson product moment correlation (r) was used to analyze the data. The result presented in table 1

Table1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between playing age preference of pupils and sustainable peace.

Variable	X	SD	r
Playing age preference of pupils	23.42	3.47	
			.257*
Sustainable peace	23.96	3.47	

Significant at 0.05, df =198, critical r = 138

Result presented in table 1 indicated that the calculated r=value of .257 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis is rejected meaning that, there is a significant relationship between playing age preference of pupils and sustainable peace.

Hypothesis 2.

Boys and girls do not significantly differ in their willingness to play in order to bring about sustainable peace. The independent variable is gender (sex) categorized into boys and girls in play, while the dependent variable is sustainable peace. Independent t-test statistical analysis was used to compare the mean values of the variables. Summary of the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Independent t-test statistical analysis of the difference between boys and girls in their willingness to play with opposite sex for sustainable peace:

Variable	N	X	SD	t
Boys	100	23.98	3.11	
				.113*
Girls	100	23.93	3.16	

Not significant at 0.05, df=198, critical t=.138

Result presented in table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of .133 is less than the critical t-value of .138 at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis is not rejected but retained and so, boys and girls do not significantly differ in their willingness to play with opposite sex for sustainable peace.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between pupils' home background in terms of pay and sustainable peace. The independent variable is pupils' home background while the dependent variable is sustainable peace. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used to analyze data. The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation(r) Analysis of the relationship between pupils' home background in terms of play and sustainable peace.

Variable	X	SD	r
Pupils' home background	22.90	3.54	
			.234*
Sustainable peace	23.96	3.12	

Significant at 0.05, df =198, critical r = 138

Result presented in table 3 disclosed that the calculated r-value of .234 is higher than the t-value of .138 at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and so, there is a significance relationship between pupils' home background in terms of play and sustainable peace.

5. Discussion of findings

The result of the first hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between playing age preference of pupils and sustainable peace. The implication of this result is that children prefer to play with their age mates than playing with older people. This is because at this stage, all they think about is fun and nothing else. This finding is in line with Ladd & Coleman (1997) and Mize &Ladd, (1990) who found that children who take initiative in play are better able to sustain peer interaction. This can become part of them and make them to co-exist peacefully with one another. In other words, playfulness of young children with their age mates can cause them to be delightful and never think of evil or harming each other, thereby creating a sustainable peaceful and chaos free environment. The finding is further supportive of Berk, (2004) who added that when children play with their age mates, mutual trust is established. This is because each child counts on the other for support and assistance. Berk, in (2000) had also earlier reported that children interact differently with same-age youngsters. In several studies, the author further reported that the oldest school-age children in mixed-age settings prefer same-age companions, perhaps because they have more compatible interest and experience cooperative interaction. While younger children's interaction and play with same age partners is also more intense and harmonious, but on the contrary they often turn to older peers because of their superior knowledge and exciting play ideas. From interaction with coequals, during play, they learn to cooperate and resolve conflicts, and they also develop important moral notions of reciprocity and justice.

The second hypothesis revealed that boys and girls do not significantly differ in their willingness to play with opposite sex for sustainable peace. This result implies that boys and girls show strong willingness to play with their opposite sex counterparts. In other words, the same way a girl will play with a fellow girl is the same way that same girl will play with a boy and vice versa. That is, despite their sex difference, pupils still exhibit

willingness to play with their opposite sex. This means that when boys and girls play with their opposite sex counterpart, they learn behavior pattern which can help them accommodate each other and live peacefully.

This finding is contrary to Frost, Wortham & Reifel (2010) who reported that a child's gender identity emerges early in life and when gender identity is established, the nature of play changes. The authors further added that children's identification of whether they are boys or girls will result in playing more with other children of their gender. Also, Maccoby (1988) found out that children who engage in gender-specific play tend to play more with same-gender peers and play less with opposite-gender peers.

The result of the third hypothesis indicated that there is a significant relationship between pupils' home background in terms of play and sustainable peace. This result lends credence to Delluccia- Reinstein (2014) who reported that the various environments that children counter in day-to-day life have impact on their overall behavior and attitude.

A child who lives in an environment that is hostile can be prevented from going out to play by the parents. This is because when a child lives in a hostile environment, that child can imbibe the behavior of hostility. Such environment does not create room for peace. That is, parents can foster play through their willingness to give children opportunity to play as a result of the environment they find themselves.

Berk (2000) reported that when children live in some distance from one another and cannot gather on their own, the parents act as social planners and "booking agents", scheduling play at home, taking them to community settings such as the library or pool, and enrolling them in organized activities. Such child find it difficult to interact with other children talk less of playing with them. This can make them become hostile and develop questionable characters that could result in chaos.

6. Conclusion

The call for sustainable peace in Nigeria is most welcome and necessary especially in this era of Boko Haram insurgency which is destroying the peace of our country. The authors believed that social interaction among children in the primary school through play is very significant in bringing lasting friendship. The researchers therefore, concluded that when children engaged in useful play among themselves, barriers of ethnicity, culture, religion and race could be eliminated thereby fostering peace and unity for sustainable peace in Nigeria.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Children should be allowed to play with their age mates, as this will help them to interact freely and also develop a social and peaceful relationship.
2. Children should be encouraged to play with both same sex and opposite sex. This will help them to learn gender difference and be able to cope with them.
3. Parents should encourage children to interact with other children in the immediate environment so that they can learn how to co-exist peacefully with one another.

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