

## ASSESSMENT OF THE USE OF PLAY TEACHING STRATEGY FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN JALINGO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE.

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### Abstract

This study focused on the assessment of the use of play teaching strategy for skills development in early childhood education in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. It employed a descriptive survey design. The sample consists of fifty (50) early childhood teachers selected from 10 schools in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. A self developed and structured questionnaire was used for this study. The instrument was face and content validated by experts. A trial test was conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire using 30 students who were not part of the sample size. The 20 items summary yielded a reliability index of 0.75. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. While the hypotheses was tested using Chi-square ( $X^2$ ). It recommends among other things that, Pre-school children should be given opportunity and free learning environment to play, by their teachers because of its influence on their overall skills development.

**Keywords:** play teaching strategy, skills development and early childhood education.

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### Introduction

Play is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable and flexible activity involving a combination of body, object, symbol use and relationships. In contrast to games, play behavior is more disorganized, and is typically done for its own sake (i.e., the process is more important than any goals or end points (Zosh, Hirsh, and Hopkins 2018). Recognized as a universal phenomenon, play is a legitimate right of childhood and should be part of all children's life. Between 3% to 20% of young children's time and energy is spent in play (Isaacs, Toran and Hahn 2012). Over the last decade, it has been observed that there is an on-going reduction of playtime in favour of educational instructions, especially in modern and urban societies. Yet, play is essential to young children's education and should not be abruptly minimized and segregated from learning. Not only play helps children

develop pre-literacy skills, problem solving skills and concentration, but it also generates social learning experiences, and helps children to express possible stresses and problems (Aronsson, 2009). Deeply entrenched within the historical roots of early childhood education, play has long been a dominant feature of early childhood teaching pedagogy (Bono, Del, Kelly and Sacker 2016). Over many centuries, philosophers, theorists, educationalists and more recently, policy makers have worked hard to define the nature of childhood, play and the purposes of education. In particular, researchers have become increasingly interested in how traditional and contemporary theories on play and childhood have informed conceptualizations of childhood and the development of early childhood curriculum (Schulz & Bonawitz, 2007) claim that until the nineteenth century, "childhood

was seen as an immature form of adulthood and children from all social classes had little status in society". Wood and Attfield suggest that it was the studies of classical play theorists, such as Rousseau, Froebel and Dewey, that dramatically changed societal views and attitudes towards children, to the extent that "freedom to learn could be combined with appropriate nurturing and guidance", through the strongly held belief that play was critical to children's learning and development.

Harris, ( 2023) identified the different types of play, on childhood developmental stages. They are: Unoccupied play: In the early months of infancy, from birth to about three months, the child is busy in unoccupied play. Solitary play: From three to 18 months, babies will spend much of their time playing on their own. During solitary play, children are very busy with play and they may not seem to notice other children sitting or playing nearby, Onlooker play. Onlooker play happens most often during the toddler years. This is where the child watches other children play, Parallel play: From the age of 18 months to two years, children begin to play alongside other children without any interaction. This is called parallel play, Social play: Children around the age of three are beginning to socialize with other children.

**Motor-Physical Play:** When children run, jump, and play games such as hide and seek and tag they engage in physical play (Vasileva & Balyasnikova, 2019).

**Constructive Play:** In this type of play, children create things. Constructive play starts in infancy and becomes more complex as the child grows. This type of play starts with your baby putting things in his/her mouth to see how they feel and taste.

**Expressive Play:** Some types of play help children learn to express feelings. Here, teachers can use many different materials. Materials may include paints, crayons, colors and pencils. Therefore, it seem to the present researchers that most schools lack the knowledge and skills on how to effectively use play method to facilitate teaching and learning in the Early childhood care

Education centers, hence this study on assessment of play Teaching strategy on skill development of children in Early childhood Education for selected pre-primary schools in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.

### Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that there is increasing lack of play teaching method in our Early childhood care Education classes. Currently, importance is placed on direct instruction with few teaching aids, thereby promoting cognitive ability only in the pupils. Also, the rigidity of the primary school curriculum is used in most of the preprimary school in Nigeria including Taraba State. Similar it is prevalent in the Early childhood care Education where free play method is not a priority, rather the pupils are engage more with mental task, leaving the areas of social, emotional and expressive development

### Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the use of play as learning strategy for skills development in Early Childhood Education. Specifically, it sought to

1. Investigate the influence of play learning strategy on the cognitive skills of children of Early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.
2. Determine the influence of play learning strategy on the social skills of children of Early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.
3. Find out the influence of play learning strategy on the motor skills of children of Early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.
4. Determine the influence of play learning strategy on the attentiveness of children of Early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent does play learning strategy influence Cognitive skills of children of early childhood in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State. ?
2. To what extent does play learning strategy influence the social skills in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local

- Government Area, Taraba State.?
3. To what extent does play learning strategy influence motor skills development in early childhood in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.?
  4. To what extent does play learning strategy influence attentiveness of early childhood Education of children of Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.?

### Research Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H01:** There is no significant relationship between the Use of play learning strategy and cognitive skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.
- H02:** There is no significant relationship between the Use of play learning strategy and social skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.?
- H03:** There is no significant relationship between the Use of play learning strategy and motor skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.?

**H04:** There is no significant relationship between the Use of play learning strategy and attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area Taraba State ?

### Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design. The sample consists of fifty (50) early childhood teachers selected from 10 schools in in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. A self developed and structured questionnaire, strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly disagreed (SD) and Disagreed (D) used for this study. The instrument was face and content validated by experts. A trial test was conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire using 30 students who were not part of the sample size. The 20 items summary yielded a reliability index of 0.75. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. While the hypotheses was tested using Chi-square ( $X^2$ ).

### Results.

#### Research Question 1

Research question 1: To what extent does play learning strategy influence Cognitive skills of children of early childhood in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. ?

**Table 1**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
1.	Play promotes verbal skills among children	22	8.8%	22	8.8%	6	2.4%	-	-%
2.	Play activities enriches the vocabulary of children	22	8.8%	25	10%	3	1.2%	-	%
3.	Play stimulates curiosity among children	31	12.4%	10	4%	4	1.6%	5	2%
4.	Play improves problem-solving skills among children	33	13.2%	16	6.4%	1	0.4%	-	%
5.	Play raises language comprehension among kids	28	11.2%	15	6%	6	2.4%	1	0.4%
	Total	135	54%	88	35.2%	20	8%	6	2.4%
	Average scores	18		22		6		4	

From table 1 above, it shows that 135 (54%) of the participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes verbal skills among children, Play activities enriches the vocabulary of children, Play stimulates curiosity among children, Play improves problem-solving skills among children and Play raises language comprehension among kids. 88 (35.2%) also agreed with the research questionnaire

statements, 20 (8%) disagreed with the item statements while 6 (2.4%) strongly disagreed with the item statements.

### Research Question 2

To what extent does play learning strategy influence the social skills in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.?

**Table 2**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
6.	The activities of play helps children to better control impulsive actions	22	8.8%	23	9.2%	1	0.4%	4	1.6%
7.	Play promotes the character of empathy among children	19	7.6%	15	6%	13	5.2%	3	1.2%
8.	The use of play as learning strategy helps emotional and social adjustment among children.	12	4.8%	19	7.6%	10	4%	9	3.6%
9.	Use of play promotes peer cooperation among children	32	12.8 %	17	6.8%	1	0.4%	-	-%
10.	Play improves children's ability to take on the perspective of another	18	7.2%	11	4.4%	15	6%	6	2.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>41.2 %</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8.8 %</b>
	<b>Average scores</b>	<b>28</b>		<b>16</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>2</b>	

From table 2 above, it shows that 103 (41.2%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that The activities of play helps children to better control impulsive actions, Play promotes the character of empathy among children, The use of play as primary teaching tool helps emotional and social adjustment among children, Assignment of play promotes peer cooperation among children and Play improves children's ability to take on the

perspective of another. 85 (34%) also agreed with the item statements, 40 (16%) disagreed with the item statements while 22 (8.8%) strongly disagreed with the item statements .

### Research Question 3

To what extent does play learning strategy influence motor skills development in early childhood in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.?

Table 3

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
11.	Play promotes more creative movement among children	22	8.8%	11	4.4%	11	4.4%	9	3.6%
12.	Play enhances experimentation skills among children	24	9.6%	10	4%	8	3.2%	8	3.2%
13.	Through play, children develop walking ability more quickly	21	8.4%	18	7.2%	6	2.4%	5	2%
14.	Play enhances children's health by building healthy and active bodies	17	6.8%	13	5.2%	6	2.4%	14	5.6%
15.	Play makes the use of the limbs more effective among children	39	15.6%	10	4%	1	0.4%	-	-%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>14.4%</b>
	<b>Average scores</b>	<b>27</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>6</b>	

From table 3 above, it showed that 122 (48.8%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes more creative movement among children, Play enhances experimentation skills among children, Through play, children develop walking ability more quickly, Play enhances children's health by building healthy and active bodies and Play makes the use of the limbs more effective among children. 62 (24.8%) also agreed with the item

statement, 32 (12.8%) disagreed while 36 (14.4%) strongly disagreed with the item statements.

#### Research Question 4

To what extent does play learning strategy influence attentiveness of early childhood Education of children of Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.?

**Table 4:**

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%
16.	Play promotes longer attention span among children	12	4.8%	24	9.6%	12	4.8%	2	0.8%
17.	Play helps children to adjust to the school setting more easily	23	9.2%	11	4.4%	9	3.6%	7	2.8%
18.	Play promotes learning readiness among children	18	7.2%	18	7.2%	11	4.4%	3	1.2%
19.	Play enhances understanding ability among children	9	3.6%	25	10%	8	3.2%	8	3.2%
20.	Play enhances children's ability to concentrate	22	8.8%	5	2%	5	2%	18	7.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>33.2%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15.2%</b>
	<b>Average score</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>7</b>	

From table 4 above, it showed that 127 (25.4%) of the total participants strongly agreed to the questionnaire statements that Play promotes longer attention span among children, Play helps children to adjust to the school setting more easily, Play promotes learning readiness among children, Play enhances understanding ability among children and Play enhances children's ability to concentrate . 127 (25.4%) also agreed with the item statements, 144 (28.8%) and 102

(20.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the item statements.

#### **Analysis of Data and Testing of Hypotheses**

##### **Research Hypothesis One:**

There is no significant influence of Use of play learning strategy on the cognitive skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State

**Table 5: Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Play on Children's cognitive skills**

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of Teachers	$X^2$ Cal	$X^2$ Crit	Remarks
Observed	18	22	6	4	50	18.8	7.81	Significant
Expected	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5				

Analysis of the data above:

$$X^2 \text{ Calculated} = 18 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 22 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 6 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 4 - 12.5 / 12.5$$

$$= 2.42 + 7.22 + 3.38 + 5.78 = 18.8$$

De gree of Freedom (Df) is ( C -1)( R -1) = 3.

The analysis of table 5 above, shows that the Calculated Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) value of 18.8 which is greater than Critical Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) value of 7.81, with degree of freedom 3 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis one which states that, there is no significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the cognitive skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo L G A , will be rejected. Therefore, the implication of this is that,

there is significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the cognitive skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State.

#### Research Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence of Use of play learning strategy on the social skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA

**Table 6: Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis on Play on Social Skills development.**

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of Teachers	$X^2$ Cal	$X^2$ Crit	Remarks
Observed	28	16	4	2	50	34.8	7.81	Significant
Expected	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5				

Analysis of the data above:

$$X^2 \text{ Calculated} = 28 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 16 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 4 - 12.5 / 12.5 + 2 - 12.5 / 12.5$$

$$= 19.22 + 0.98 + 5.78 + 8.82 = 34.8$$

Degree of Freedom (Df) is ( C -1)( R-1) = 3.

The analysis of data in table 6 above, shows that the Calculated Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) value of 34.8 is greater than Critical Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) values of 7.81, with degree of freedom 3 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis two which states that there is no significant

influence of the use of play learning strategy on the social skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo L.G.A. is hereby rejected. The implication of this is that there is significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the social skills development in early childhood

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Taraba State.

### Research Hypothesis Three

There is no significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the motor skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA

**Table 7:**

**Chi-square (  $X^2$  ) Analysis on the use of play learning strategy on the motor skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA.**

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of Teachers	$X^2$ Cal	$X^2$ Crit	Remarks
Observed	27	12	5	6	50	24.72	7.81	Significant
Expected	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5				

Analysis of the data above:

$$X^2 \text{ Calculated} = \frac{27-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{12-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{5-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{6-12.5}{12.5}$$

$$= 16.82 + 0.02 + 4.5 + 3.38 = 24.72$$

$$\text{Degree of Freedom (Df) is } (C - 1)(R - 1) = 3.$$

The table 7 above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) value of 24.72 is greater than Critical Chi-Square ( $x^2$ ) values of 7.81, with degree of freedom 3 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis three which states that there is no significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the motor skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA is hereby rejected, the implication of

this is that there is significant influence on the use of play learning strategy on motor skills development in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area , Taraba State..

### Research Hypothesis Four

There is no significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA.

**Table 8 : Chi-square (  $X^2$  ) Analysis on the use of play learning strategy on the attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA**

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Number of Teachers	$X^2$ Cal	$X^2$ Crit	Remarks
Observed	20	18	5	7	50	9.79	7.81	Significant
Expected	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5				

Analysis of the data above:

$$X^2 \text{ Calculated} = \frac{20-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{18-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{5-12.5}{12.5} + \frac{7-12.5}{12.5}$$

$$= 4.5 + 2.42 + 0.45 + 2.42 = 9.79$$

$$\text{Degree of Freedom (Df) is } (C - 1)(R - 1) = 3.$$



The table 8 above shows that the Calculated Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) value of 9.79 is greater than Critical Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) values of 7.81, with degree of freedom 3 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis four which states that there is no significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on the attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA, will not be accepted. Indicating that there is significant influence of the use of play learning strategy on attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. Nigeria.

### Discussion of the Findings

The research, which tries to access the use of play learning strategies for skill development in early childhood education for selected preprimary schools in Jalingo LGA, espoused the child's cognitive, social, motor, and attentiveness skills in the academic performance of children taught with the play way method.

The first research hypothesis, shows significant relationship between play learning strategy and cognitive skills development in early childhood education. This is in agreement with a research that investigated the influence of play way method on academic performance of preschool children where (Kawira, 2012) used 20 public schools and 9 private schools. He espoused that pupils had cooperative attitude towards learning and has the implication of developing the cognitive domain which brought about critical thinking in learning. It is also in agreement with (Ihekerenma, 2017) who also investigated the effect of Play way teaching strategy on primary school pupils' acquisition of basic science concept. Then the result from the research hypothesis two reveal that there is significant relationship between the use of play learning strategy and social skills development in early childhood in Jalingo LGA, because of decreasing support for play in early childhood programmed play quality among early childhood education diminishing to the lowest levels (Bedrova, Germeroth and Leong, 2011). On the effect of the play strategy on the early childhood education, Child's ability to interact positively with peers, the findings show that the child interacts effectively during play. This is in agreement with

(Lynch, 2015) that all the teachers in her study believed that children benefit socially from free play. This is also in conformity with (Veiga, 2016) that children who spent more time interacting in social group within their free play activities were rated high, and socially interacts better. Goal-oriented play activity encourages children to exercise and triggers the movement of body muscles. Active muscles are stronger, more agile, faster, and more powerful.(Gümüşdag, 2019) assert that Motor skills are considered important for children's physical, social, and psychological development. Pre-school age seems to be decisive for the development of motor skills.

Also, the last research hypothesis result showed that there is significant relationship between the use of play learning strategy and attentiveness of children in early childhood Education in Jalingo LGA, these findings are in line with Lewis (2000), who found that, there is correlation between the play teaching method and the development of language skills and attentiveness in young children.

### Conclusion

The use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the cognitive skills of children. Use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood will have a significant influence on the social skills of children, as well as influence the motor skills of children. Use of play as learning strategy for skills development in early childhood have a significant influence on the attentiveness of children in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the results obtained in this study. They include:

1. Pre-school children should be given free room to play by their teachers because of its influence on their cognitive skills
2. Play activities that make children into groups should be organized for the benefit of children's social skills
3. Children should be helped to engage in a lot of movement activities for the purpose of improving their motor skills

4. Play should widely recognize as a learning strategy in all schools because of its strategic importance in the development of children.

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