



Perception of Parents and Teachers on Children's Outdoor Play

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers on children's outdoor play from two private primary schools in Nassarawa State and Plateau State. Children's play is an important aspect of children's lives. This is recognised globally due to its significance to children's holistic development. However, the extent to which children engage in outdoor play is often determined by parents at home and teachers in school, despite its contribution to learning. To obtain results, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 4 parents and 4 teachers. A convenience sample technique was employed to select the schools and the participants. Thematic analysis revealed three (3) themes: reflection and learning in children's outdoor play, concerns in children's outdoor play and equipment, materials, and opportunities in children's outdoor play. Considering participants' acceptance of the value of outdoor play, fear of children's safety is a concern and restriction of children's outdoor play in the rainy season due to cold and catarrh. Findings were compared with the reviewed literature, and there is a need for more awareness for parents and teachers through workshops, training, and television programs on the importance of children's outdoor play towards learning learning.

Keywords: Outdoor play, parents' and teachers' perceptions, affordance, environment

Introduction

Outdoor play is an important aspect of children's life. Friedrich Froebel linked children's education to outdoor play in the garden and the experience of nature (Tovey, 2007; Bruce, 2009; Wilson, 2012). Other pioneers like Montessori, McMillan, and Isaac recognised the importance of nature to children as they play around and are guided by adults. This signifies the importance of the outdoor environment in outdoor play. Children's outdoor play is considered important for their development at home and in school. Studies have shown that outdoor play plays a significant role in the learning and development of children because of space, freedom, and natural potentialities (Bilton, 2010; Gibson, 1979; and Tovey, 2016). Rothlein and Brett (1987) in a study of parents' and teachers' perceptions of children of two to six years observed that outdoor play is enjoyed by children and should be incorporated in children's learning process. However, McClintic and Petty (2015) and Rouse (2015), observed children's outdoor play has declined due to limited knowledge on how to promote it. Hence, there is the need for parents and teachers to be more informed of the importance of children's outdoor play, due to its relevance for their development and well-being.

One important aspect of early childhood is the play experience. However, in the past, outdoor play has declined because of various reasons like traffic issues, fear of

children's safety, limited time and injury (Kalpogianni, 2019; Tovey, 2007; Sandseter, 2020). Also, parents and teachers seem to have a limited understanding of outdoor play despite the potentials of the environment. Therefore, parents and teachers have the responsibility to understand outdoor play to enable them know the way children learn.

Research Questions

To understand the perceptions of parents and teachers of children's outdoor play, these specific questions were raised to guide the research:

1. What do parents and teachers describe as their perceptions of children's outdoor play?
2. How do parents and teachers support or hinder children's outdoor play?

Significance of the study

This study is significant to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers of children's outdoor play. Outdoor play is important for the holistic development of children due to its relevance with the outdoor environment. This offers diverse learning opportunities. However, it is an area with limited research compared to indoor play. The current study is significant to make contributions to fill the gap in outdoor play in Nigeria and Africa. Also, it will be important to students and other

Review of literature

Outdoor play is an open and free play activity engaged by children in the environment. This activity provides children freedom to explore and learn (Tovey, 2007). Therefore, outdoor play is an environment that offers children complete learning (Bilton, 2010). This includes language, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs for the well-being of children. However, children are exposed to risk outdoors, which makes them confident to make decisions to solve problems (Tovey, 2007). Further, Bento and Dias (2017) observed that when children play outdoors, they should be allowed to experiment.

This helps them to distinguish between success and failure and they should not be discouraged. The reason is that when children are discouraged in outdoor play, it results in low self-esteem, an inferiority complex, sickness, and boredom. Research has shown that poorly managed occurrences like pandemics, agriculture, urbanisation and weather can affect the outdoor environment, making it difficult for children to play outdoors due to uncertainties (Ardoin and Bowers, 2020; Copeland et al, 2011; McKendrick, Loebach, and Casey, 2018). Tovey (2007:2). Other activities include time, insufficient space, intolerance by children and technology.

The beauty of the outdoors is that resources are free and inexhaustible. This gives children the opportunity to enjoy the outdoor environment. Thus, Gibson (1979) observed that the affordance of the environment with resources offers children the opportunity to explore the space for learning. For instance, in a study, Grubbels et al. (2012) observed that children get actively engaged in physical activities like jumping, which helps to develop their motor skills. This is related to Wilson (2012), who observed that children

display motor skills as running, skipping, jumping, bending, lifting, and turning, which helps them to explore and manipulate objects. However, not all children develop an interest in motor skills; rather, some might develop other areas like cognitive skills. Importantly, Outdoor play has psychological and physiological benefits to children. These results in the holistic development of children (Bilton, 2010; Wilson, 2012). This is important to the well-being of children (Tovey, 2007). Specifically, outdoor play is important for the physical well-being of children, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. However, these areas of development are interwoven for the well-being of children. Outdoor play provides an opportunity for collaborative learning.

Negatively, outdoor play is affected by technology, unpredictable weather, and unintentional risk like injury. Recently, children's lives have been controlled by secure houses, violence, abductions, and other academic activities in school and at home. However, there seems to be limited research on the problems of outdoor play that inhibit the success of policy and practice in early childhood. Sandseter et al (2019), in a study on barriers to outdoor play among European parents in Greece, Portugal, Estonia, Croatia, and Norway, observed that traffic was the major concern of parents with outdoor play. This is not different from what is obtainable in other areas. However, children enjoy different outdoor activities irrespective of the weather, especially when it rains and they splash water (Elliot, 2020).

Methodology

Despite our intention to interview random teachers and parents teaching in primary 1, 2 or 3 and parents whose children are in the school and in primary 1,2 or 3, a convenience sample was used to select 2 schools, 2 teachers and 2 parents each from the schools selected, making a total of 8 participants. As a result, all participants recruited, despite being from different ethnic groups, had a connection with children in primary 1,2, or 3. The four participants were assigned numbers 1-4 based on the order in which they were interviewed. 4 teachers and 2 parents held the minimum qualification in National Certificate in Education (NCE) while 2 teachers held a degree certificate.

The recorded interview lasted 20 minutes using semi-structured interview questions, keeping in mind that interview can be structured, unstructured and semi-structured (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). However, the researchers adopted the semi-structured interview given its flexibility and sustainability. This was a telephone interview to allow participants to express their feelings towards children's outdoor play which will help to inform policy and practice in Nigeria. Although we thought of having an online interview using zoom, we were not confident of the stability of the internet connections and providing data for the participants was to be more expensive. Therefore, we were left with the responsibility of recharging our phones to call the participants through WhatsApp which will be less expensive and to ensure that participants were well informed before the interview to charge their mobile phones due to the problem of electricity in Nigeria. Prior to the major interview, a pilot test was conducted with 2 persons who were not participants in the main study. This allowed us to identify some difficulties like time,

quality of the recorder, and clarity of questions. This is considered as an essential aspect of conducting an interview (Schumacher and Mc Millain, 2010).

Research Design

The study is a qualitative research with a phenomenological design. This is aim to understand and explore the experiences of parents and teachers with children outdoors

Population

All primary school teachers teaching primary 1 to 3 in private schools and teachers in North Central Nigeria constitute the population.

Sample

This comprised of 2 teachers and 2 parents from two private nursery schools in Nigeria (Plateau and Abuja). This is to have different opinions from different schools in the urban and rural area. All recruited participants were Nigerians who held some level of higher education and a minimum qualification in their fields. However, only private schools were utilised.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data interview will be analysed using thematic analysis or content analysis. This approach will provide an understanding of the research question and enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The interviews were telephone WhatsApp interview scheduled for a maximum of 20 minutes. Ten semi-structured open-ended questions were asked. These questions were the same for all participants. But, rephrased based on the participant's level of fluency in English. After carefully organizing and transcribing to identify interconnections, readings were done severally. The data collected was transcribed, coded, and interpreted. This process helped to gain more knowledge on the perceptions of parents and teachers on outdoor play. The coding started after the data was transcribed. Keywords were used to categorised the text. This was further put into themes. Lastly, the data were verified by rechecking the transcript and codes all over again for validity.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics in research refers to moral standards (Schumacher and McMillan, 2010). This is important to avoid any harm to participants. Even though there is no acceptable definition adopted to define ethical standards, it was important to consider the rights of participants to maintain confidentiality and only to be used for this research.

They all facilitate learning in different ways. However, participants are concerned of children's safety.

Theme 1: Reflections and learning in children's outdoor play.

Parents and teachers reflected on their outdoor experiences growing up. From the recordings you could listen to the joy in their voices.

Parents

A common theme that kept recurring from the interviewers was their memories of early childhood play. This includes “Baram” and “playing on the grass”. Also, “climbing trees”. Listening to parents speak about their fun outdoor memories showed how they experienced freedom in outdoor play. We observed from their voices and expressions that they fell in love with outdoor play while growing up. Parents indicated that they played mostly with their friends. These experiences were mostly games done outdoor. Participant 1, 2 and 4 shared their experience of traditional outdoor play, which is accompanied by a song. 1 *“Singing and dancing to folk songs”* 2 stated *“Baram”*(Traditional golf, made up loose materials). 4 went deeper by narrating with examples and stated that *“ I play on the grass, that's where I learned how to braid hair, and we did some foodstuff and ingredients, we pretend to be a chef and we try to cook as from of playing”*.

Teachers

Teachers voiced their experiences and related more to what is practiced in their settings. 5, 6 and 8 had common traditional outdoor games growing up. 5 *“I played a lot with mud and sand”*. 6 mentioned *“I played with my friends, mostly role play, I was always the mother and my friend the daughter.* Participant 8 *“I played Baram and we had this flat stone that was used as a slide, most of our clothes had holes from that slide”* However, 7 was not sure when she responded *“I can't really recall oh-wahoo”*.

Therefore, it was understood that parents and teachers had more of traditional outdoor play . These experiences portrayed how they linked outdoor play to outdoor games in their environments. For instance, 5 *“Ah mine was “local games”. Suwey, we draw a line on the ground and.”* 6 *“Bojiboji (Hide and seek) there are lots of them.”* 7 *“play ball, Baram, eh you cut slippers, we sow it and we play. “ Shama” then we use to construct cars”*. Similarly, 6 and 8 had the common outdoor play of playing football outdoor. 6 said, *“Eh sometimes we play football, sometimes we play I don't know it in English. Charapke, we have Ga'ada”*. Participant 6's response was intriguing when her personal experience of how outdoor play contributed to her skill of braiding hair. To illustrate *“ i just told you about myself, how i learn to weave on, grasses and that was the beginning of my profession.”* 5 *“sometimes skipping”*. 6, *“Fire on The Mountain”*. 7 *“i can still remember that ahh one particular one, i did in those days with my sister, Eh Follow Your Leader”*.

Furthermore, reflecting on their memories, all participants acknowledged that outdoor play is significant for learning. This was evident when they identified different areas of learning and how outdoor play helped some of them in the future

Learning Parents

Parents all responded that outdoor play is important in supporting children's learning in different areas. Parents were specific in identifying that it helps children to appreciate nature. It also contributes to their I.Q, fosters creativity and to recall what they have learned or seen.

To illustrate this, participant 1 and 3 noted that children learn about nature when outdoor. 2 went further to mention how nature contributed to her extra skill as a hairstylist. *"I learned how to braid from how I used to braid on the grass"*.

Teachers

When teachers were asked if outdoor play helps children to learn, they all admitted that outdoor play helps children to learn a lot of things. This includes creativity; it helps them to appreciate nature, improves their cognitive ability and develops skills. For instance, 8 and 7 identified that outdoor play helps children to communicate as they interact with their peers in school. 8 responded that it helps children in *"expression, communication and language"*. They also identified that when children play outdoor they tend to appreciate nature by playing with grass, water and sand. Therefore, they perceived that it would contribute to their cognitive development and skills acquisition. For example, 6 *"improves their love for nature and strengthens their motor skill."*

Furthermore, teachers perceived that outdoor play contributes to the cognitive development of children. Furthermore, 7 and 8 demonstrated that children learn a lot of things when they are outdoor, by appreciating their immediate and wider environment. 6 *"there is something about nature it has a way in improving their I.Q"*. *"When children go out to play you discover they learn how to be creative"*. 7 also raised the idea of technology and how society has gone technological, thereby exposing children to different devices. 8 *"they develop cognitive tenacity, for instance, a child who doesn't know to number, you as a teacher you give them sticks to count ..."*. *They learn a lot, sometimes what they are talking about resurfaces in their play ... "academics."* This is related to 2's voice on *"recall"*. 2 stated, *"Em when they are playing outside sometimes, they use to recall what they have been thought in school, and will say my teacher said this and that."*

Although 6 and 7 were not in-depth, they mention areas of learning that were common with other participants. 5 *"...Children learn more when outside, they learn about the environment, trees, leaves, they want to know more about sand they want to explore" ... "it boosts their creativity."*. Also, 8 observed that *"Children should be outside; it improves their love for nature and strengthens their motor skill."*

Based on these findings, it was observed that parents and teachers acknowledge that children learn a lot through outdoor play. In this regard, they believe that it offers children the opportunity to be creative and communicate well. They also agreed that children appreciate nature as they play in the environment.

Therefore, parents and teachers mentioned that outdoor play is a way of socialization that helps children to interact with humans and the natural environment. Also, they noted that it gives children the opportunity to be creative as they interact with the natural resources in the environment. Therefore, they linked the creative abilities of children to their ability to recall what they see around the environment and what they are taught in school.

Theme 2: Concerns in children's outdoor play

1. Fear

Parents

All participants demonstrated that outdoor play contributes to children's learning, but feared that children are exposed to injury, cold and social vices. Therefore, they perceived that as children play outdoor, they should either be watched or supervised. For example, from the vignette, 3 said that *"children should be under my watch..."* because they can be exposed to *"social vices and get mannerless."* This is because they mentioned that children learn from one another. Although they also mentioned children's health and risky play like rough and tumble, climbing trees and fences, they were more concerned with the societal social vices.

Teachers

All teachers feared that children are prone to injury as they play outdoor. Therefore, they saw that their presence is paramount to guiding some of the children's behaviours in outdoor play. For example, 6 *identified that children should be watched, guided because they fight when playing outdoor."* Therefore, it was suggested that their presence in children's play is to guide and direct children. That's why 2 suggested that as children play, *"show them example by playing with them."*

2. Supervision

Parents

Considering parents' concerns about outdoor play, they mentioned that children should be watched and should not be left alone to play outdoor. All parents responded that children should always be with someone in outdoor play. For instance, 1 said children should be under *"supervision to avoid injury"*. Also, 3 said *"Some of the children they are very rough while playing climbing of trees, fence, sometimes they use to stone each other so if they must go out to play, then you must watch after them"*

Teachers

When teachers were asked the question related to them supporting outdoor play, they responded that they play with children. 1 suggested children should be supported when outdoor *"...I play with children to coordinate, guide and tell them what to do"*

because they are tender and in order not to hurt themselves, so you need to be watching them."

Regarding both responses, parents and teachers perceived that children's outdoor play needs supervision. This is to ensure children's safety within the home and school environment as a result of the exposure of physical injuries and security issues of abduction. It is perceived that outdoor play exposes children to dangers both at home and in school. Therefore, they mentioned that children need to be watched in play outdoor. They observed that children engage in a lot of risky play outdoor. This puts them at risk of fighting, cutting themselves, learning bad words, throwing stones at each other and being prone to different sorts of dangers. Therefore, participants suggested that aside from supervision, children should be guided and coordinated in outdoor play.

Theme 3: Equipment's/ Materials and Opportunities for Outdoor Play

Parents and teachers agreed that children are provided with outdoor play equipment/materials. This is supported by the time given for them to play at home and in school. Although the timings differ by parents and teachers, it is important that participants recognized the importance of children playing outdoors. All teachers agreed that young children need to at least play outdoor twice a week. While parents noted that children can play when they feel like playing outdoor when they have completed their academic activities. Hence, teachers and parents play a critical role in supporting children's outdoor play, which depends on the availability of facilities and opportunities to play outdoor. However, when asked about what type of resources children have and the time given to children to play outdoor, participants responded as follows:

Facilities

Parents

All parents responded that they provide outdoor play facilities at home for children. Although it varies, children enjoy playing with them. For example, 1 said, *"I buy things on few occasions like scooter, bicycle, broom to learn how to sweep"*. 3 and 2 also mentioned that they provide balls for outdoor play.

Teachers

Regarding teachers' perceptions of outdoor play materials, they all commented that the school provides outdoor play materials. 3 said that *"for now the school provides everything ...like, merry go round, slides and swings"*. 4 identified *"... merry go round, slides, swing, ball and stones. There are a lot of them lullaby materials."* Although it was admitted by teachers that these materials are provided by the school, it was noted that these materials could be expensive as said by 8 *"these gadgets are 50,000 it needs a lot of money."*

Time

Parents

When asked how often children play outdoor, parents said not always, because it depends on the weather and the activities of the day. To illustrate parents admitted that children's

outdoor play comes with their mood to play. They also observed that outdoor play occurs in bits, which comprise of different play activities. Therefore, they believe that after lunch; children should complete school homework afterwards they can engage in outdoor play. 6 suggested in a week *“I will say no more than four hours and not every day, but most days.” This is because they perceived children have other activities like homework, eating lunch and the need to observe siesta.*

Teachers

Teachers all mentioned that children only get to utilise these materials when they are on recess hour or break time and when observing physical exercise or games. Teachers mentioned that children only play when they are during recess hours. For instance, children play for a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of one hour in school” *I said, “Sometimes forty minutes or a maximum of one hour and they don't play every day outside?”*.

Weather

Parents

All parents agreed that children should not be allowed to play outdoor when it rains.

For instance, 3 responded that *“I don't allow them when it rains ...they love playing with water, or when it's early or when it's time for studies.”*. 1 *“when they play in the rain, it can make them sick and so I don't allow it”*

Teachers

Teachers observed that when the weather is cold, especially when it rains, children should not be allowed to play outdoor. This can be further seen in their responses in

Therefore, based on these responses parents and teachers had a common idea and admitted that children should not be allowed outdoor when it rains. This is because it can get muddy and cold. Hence, children can have cough and catarrh, which will require medication.

Therefore, parents and teachers perceived the rains as a seasonal condition that children should be discouraged from playing outdoors. This is because they belief children can get sick. They also observed that the cost of medical bills is high and therefore it is better to avoid going to the hospital by discouraging outdoor play when it rains. Overall, the perception of children's outdoor play is seen the table below:

S/no	Themes	Parents perception	Teachers perception
1	Reflections of outdoor memories a.learning.	Facilitates learning through communicating with others.	Supports holistic learning. Creativity, language development and so on.
2	Concerns in outdoor play.	Fear of abduction, injuries,	Need supervision and guidance in play.

	a. Fear b. Supervision.		
3	Equipment/materials and opportunities of outdoor play. a. Facilities b. Time c. Weather	a. Unlimited time to play after necessary activities. b. Facilities are loose materials in the environment. c. Weather affects opportunities of outdoor play	a. Restrictions to outdoor play due to school curriculum. b. Available manufactured outdoor play materials . c. Outdoor play is affected by weather, especially rainy season.

Conclusion

Children's outdoor play can either be supported or hindered by parents and teachers. To support outdoor play, parents and teachers admitted that they provide children with some level of support to play outdoors. Although there are different types of outdoor equipment at home and in school.

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