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INFLUENCE OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING APPROACHES ON THE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the influence of play-based learning approaches on the reading achievement of public primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. Three research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised all the 612 teachers in the 45 Government primary schools in Awka South Local Government Educational Authority of Anambra State. The sample size was 100 primary school teachers using the simple random sampling technique. The research instrument for the study was a validated questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Influence of Physical Play-based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement of Primary School Pupils (QIPPBLARAPSP)". The internal consistencies of the items in the clusters were determined using Cronbach statistics and an overall coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using Mean scores. The finding of this study revealed that physical play-based learning approach has a positive impact on the reading achievement of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. More so, the finding also identified teachers of skill, limited space to carry out physical play-based activities, lack of adequate resources, parental misconceptions about play vs. learning, time constraints, safety concerns and large class sizes as challenges of implementing physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement of primary school pupils. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others

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that educational authorities should provide teachers with professional development on the effective use of physical play-based learning approach for an improved reading achievement of primary school pupils.

Keyword: Play, Play-based Learning, Reading Achievement, Public Primary Schools

Introduction

Play in Early Childhood Education is paramount in all aspects of growth and development in young children. Play-based learning has both developmental and educational benefits. Henderson and Collier (2017) defined Play as a dynamic, self-directed, and intrinsically motivated process that allows children to explore, learn, and develop through hands-on experiences and social interactions. In recent years, the educational landscape has witnessed a growing interest in innovative pedagogical approaches that can enhance learning outcomes in primary education. Among these, play-based learning has emerged as a particularly promising method, especially when considering its potential impact on fundamental skills such as reading.

Play-based learning, as defined by Pyle and Danniels (2018), is an educational approach that leverages children's natural inclination towards play as a vehicle for learning. This method recognizes play not merely as a recreational activity but as a fundamental process through which children engage with and make sense of the world around them. In a play-based learning environment, children become active architects of their own knowledge, driven by curiosity and intrinsic motivation. The researcher defined Play-based learning as a child-centered, interactive, and experiential instructional approach that utilizes playful activities, games, and hands-on experiences to foster reading achievement, creativity, critical thinking, and social-emotional growth in children.

The theoretical underpinnings of play-based learning have been continuously refined and expanded upon in recent years. Nilsson, Lindström, and Wernersson (2018) highlighted how play-based learning aligns with constructivist theories of education, emphasizing the child's active role in building understanding through hands-on experiences and social interactions. In the context of primary education, play-based learning can manifest in different approaches such as physical play, role play, guided play, open-ended play, dramatic play, imaginative play, constructive play etc. However, the researcher focused this study on the influence of the physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement.

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Physical play as defined by Hirsh–Pasek (2015) is hands-on, experiential and sensory engagement with the world including activities that promote to motor skills coordination and physical activity. Physical play-based learning draws on a rich body of research in cognitive science, neurobiology, and educational psychology. Mavilidi, Schmidt, Pesce, and Paas (2018) have shown through their studies that physical activity can enhance brain function, improve attention and focus, and promote the formation of neural connections crucial for learning. The researcher defined physical play as active, movement-based activities that engage children's bodies and senses, promoting motor skill development, cognitive growth, and social interaction through structured or unstructured physical engagement with their environment and peers.

In the context of reading achievement, physical play-based learning offers several potential benefits. Callcott, Hammond, and Hill (2015) demonstrate how it can help children develop phonological awareness through movement-based activities that emphasize rhythm and sound patterns. Westendorp, Hartman, Houwen, Smith, and Visscher (2020) explained how gross motor activities can improve visual-motor integration, which is essential for tracking words on a page. Additionally, Toumpaniari, Loyens, Mavilidi, and Paas (2015) showed that active learning experiences can enhance vocabulary acquisition by providing concrete, multisensory representations of abstract concepts. Physical play-based learning enhances reading achievement by developing motor skills, phonological awareness, vocabulary, narrative comprehension, attention, social-emotional skills, and motivational crucial components for successful reading acquisition.

Reading achievement remains a cornerstone of academic success, with far-reaching implications for a child's educational journey and beyond. Solheim, Mattheoudakis, and Martín-del-Campo (2018) defined reading proficiency as encompassing a range of skills, from the fundamental ability to decode written symbols to the more complex tasks of comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking. The journey to reading mastery involves developing phonemic awareness, understanding phonics, building fluency, expanding vocabulary, and honing comprehension strategies. From the researcher's perspective, reading achievement refers to the demonstration of cognitive, linguistic, and communicative skills that enable individuals to comprehend, interpret, and respond to written texts, encompassing decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities. Reading achievement is crucial for lifelong success, as it serves as the foundation for academic accomplishment, career opportunities, and

personal growth, enabling individuals to access information, develop critical thinking skills, and participate fully in an increasingly complex and literate society.

The importance of reading achievement in the modern world cannot be overstated. As Torppa, Georgiou, Aro, Lerkkanen, and Niemi (2020) argued, it serves as a gateway to learning across all academic disciplines and is a crucial life skill in our increasingly text-rich world. Furthermore, physical play-based learning aligns well with the diverse learning styles and needs of primary school pupils. Mackenzie and Edwards (2023) argued that it caters to kinesthetic learners who may struggle with traditional sedentary approaches and can increase engagement and motivation among all students. By making reading instruction more enjoyable and interactive, this approach may foster a positive attitude towards reading, which Wexler, Gonzalez and Chenoweth (2018) emphasized as crucial for long-term academic success and literacy development.

Despite its importance, many education systems worldwide grapple with the challenge of improving reading outcomes, particularly in primary schools with limited resources and large class sizes. Despite these potential benefits, the specific impact of physical play-based learning on reading achievement in primary school settings remains understudied. While Singh, Saliasi, Van den Berg, Uijtdewilligen, and Groot (2019) have established links between physical activity and cognitive function in general, there is a need for more targeted investigations into how structured, reading-focused physical play activities affect various components of reading proficiency, such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

This study aims to address this gap in the literature by examining the influence of a physical play-based learning approach on the reading achievement of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on innovative instructional strategies and to provide educators with evidence-based insights for enhancing reading instruction in primary education.

Statement of the Problem

Education plays a critical role in shaping a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Traditional methods often emphasize rote learning and direct instruction; however, the integration of play into learning has gained recognition for its potential to enhance engagement and retention. Play-based learning encourages exploration, creativity, and collaboration, making learning more enjoyable and effective for young learners. This approach acknowledges that children learn best when they are active participants in their education, using their natural curiosity and playfulness to construct knowledge.

The integration of play-based learning in educational settings has been recognized as a valuable approach for enhancing children's engagement and cognitive development. However, in Awka South Local Government Education Authority, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the impact of physical play on reading achievement among primary school pupils. Traditional teaching methods still dominate classrooms, often overlooking the potential benefits of active, play-oriented strategies that could foster a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment. As a result, many pupils may be missing out on effective literacy development opportunities that align with their natural learning styles. This study aims to investigate how a physical play-based learning approach influences reading achievement, examining whether this approach can enhance motivation, engagement, and literacy skills among primary school pupils in Awka South. Addressing this issue is vital for developing effective educational strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners and improve reading outcomes in early education settings.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the influence of physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?
2. What are the challenges of implementing physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement in primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?
3. What are the best practices for integrating physical play-based learning approach into reading curricula in primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised all the 612 teachers in the 45 Government primary schools in Awka South Local Government Educational Authority of Anambra State. The sample size was 100 primary school teachers. Out of the 45 primary schools in the study area, simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 primary schools. In addition, simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 teachers from each of the 10 schools sampled making a total of 100 teachers that constituted the sample size of the study.

The research instrument for the study was a validated questionnaire, designed by the researcher. The instrument was titled ''Questionnaire on Influence of Physical Play-based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement of Primary School Pupils (QIPPBLARAPSP). The instrument was developed based on the information gotten

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from the review of related literature. The internal consistencies of the items in the clusters were determined using Cronbach statistics. The alpha coefficients gotten were 0.80, 0.82 and 0.81 for section B, C and D respectively, with an overall coefficient of 0.81 and these were adjudged adequate, and the instrument reliable. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using Mean scores. The decision point is 2.50. Therefore, any item with a mean of 2.50 and above is deemed agreed, while any item below a mean of 2.50 was disagreed.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Influence of Physical Play-based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement of primary school pupils

S/N	Influence of Physical Play-based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement of primary school pupils include:	Mean (X)	Remark
1.	Improving Phonological Awareness	2.79	Agree
2.	Enhancing vocabulary development	3.10	Agree
3.	Increasing motivation and engagement with reading	3.20	Agree
4.	Improving better comprehension skills	2.88	Agree
5.	Developing spatial awareness and visual processing	2.68	Agree
6.	Improving focus and attention span	2.57	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.87	Agree

The analysis in Table 1 above shows that item 1-6 had mean scores above the cutoff point of 2.50 mean score, with 2.87 as the cluster mean. This suggests that the teachers agree that items 1-6 are the influence of physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Table 2: Mean Rating of Respondents on the Challenges of Implementing Physical Play-Based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement in primary schools

S/N	Challenges of Implementing Physical Play-Based Learning Approach on Reading Achievement in primary schools include:	Mean (X)	Remark
7.	Limited space to carry out physical play-based activities	2.80	Agree
8.	Time constraints in utilizing physical play-based learning approach	3.11	Agree
9.	Teachers lack of skills in utilizing physical play-based learning approach	3.20	Agree
10.	Safety concerns about physical play-based activities	2.89	Agree
11.	Large class size affects teachers' utilization of physical play-based learning approach	2.70	Agree
12.	Parental misconceptions about play vs. learning	2.60	Agree
13.	Lack of adequate resources for physical play-based learning in schools	3.01	Agree
14.	Poor curriculum that supports the use of physical play-based learning approach	2.89	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.90	Agree

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The analysis in Table 2 above shows that item 7-14 had mean scores above the cutoff point of 2.50 mean score, with 2.90 as the cluster mean. This suggests that the teachers agree that items 7-14 are the challenges of implementing physical play-based learning approach on reading achievement in primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Table 3: Mean Rating of Respondents on the best practices for integrating physical play-based learning approach into reading curricula in primary schools

S/N	The best practices for integrating physical play-based learning approach into reading curricula in primary schools include:	Mean (X)	Remark
15.	Using movement to reinforce phonics and letter recognition	3.21	Agree
16.	Incorporating storytelling with physical enactment	3.11	Agree
17.	Designing active words and vocabulary exercises	3.01	Agree
18.	Utilizing rhythm and music in reading instruction	2.89	Agree
19.	Developing outdoor literacy activities	2.80	Agree
20.	Encouraging dramatic play-based on literature	2.86	Agree
21.	Using manipulatives for world building and spelling	3.01	Agree
22.	Implementing cross-curricular physical literacy activities	2.74	Agree
23	Using peer-led and collaborative play-based reading exercises	2.67	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.92	Agree

The analysis in Table 3 above shows that item 15-23 had mean scores above the cutoff point of 2.50 mean score, with 2.92 as the cluster mean. This suggests that the teachers agree that items 15-23 are the best practices for integrating physical play-based learning approach into reading curricula in primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study revealed that physical play-based learning approach has a positive impact on the reading achievement of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. This study is in harmony with Holmes, Carlson, Crawford and Neuman (2017) which states that PPBL improves phonological awareness and decoding skills in primary school pupils. The study is also in line with Nielsen, Justice, Manning and McCoach (2019) which revealed that PPBL enhances reading comprehension and vocabulary development in elementary school students. This study is also in line with Bennett, Chazan-Cohen, Peisner-Feinberg, and Burchinal (2022) which stated that PPBL increases reading motivation and engagement among primary school pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The finding also identified teachers of skill, limited space to carry out physical play-based activities, lack of adequate resources, parental misconceptions about Play vs.

learning, time constraints, safety concerns and large class sizes as challenges of Implementing Physical Play-Based Learning approach on reading achievement of primary school pupils. This study is in line with Hirsh-Pasek, Zosh, and Golinkoff (2015) which noted that teachers' lack of training and limited resources hinder effective implementation. This study is also in line with Mavrogordato and Martin (2020) that emphasizes the impact of parental misconceptions about play-based learning, revealing that 70% of parents believe play is separate from learning, underscoring the need for parental education.

The study also reviewed use of movements, incorporating storytelling with physical enactment, designing active words and vocabulary exercises, utilizing rhythm and music in reading instruction, developing outdoor literacy activities, encouraging dramatic play-based on literature, using manipulatives for what building and spelling, implementing cross curricular physical literacy activities and using peer-led and collaborative play-based reading exercises as the best practices for integrating physical play-based learning approach on reading curricula in primary schools. This study is in line with Loris, Chazan-Cohen, and Peisner-Feinberg (2022) that demonstrated the effectiveness of dramatic play, manipulatives for word building and spelling, cross-curricular physical literacy activities, and peer-led collaborative play-based reading exercises. This study is also in line with Laura, Jill, and Katherine (2019) which emphasized designing active word and vocabulary exercises, utilizing rhythm and music, and outdoor literacy activities to enhance reading engagement.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the physical play-based learning approach is significant and positively influences the reading achievement of primary school pupils. It is hoped that the implementation and utilization of physical play-based learning approach will enhance the reading achievement and overall academic achievement of primary school pupils.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

1. Educational authorities should provide teachers with professional development on the effective use of physical play-based learning approach for an improved reading achievement of primary school pupils.
2. School administrators should encourage and support teachers' utilization of physical play-based approach to enhance the reading achievement of primary school pupils
3. Curriculum developers should modify the academic curriculum in order to accommodate the utilization of physical play-based learning

approach on reading curricula in primary schools.

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