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Engagement in Leisure Activities and Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study determined engagement in leisure activities and academic performance of pupils in Enugu East LGA. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed. The study population was 60,576 pupils in the 474 private schools and 20,874 pupils in the 58 public schools in the study area. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 352 pupils. Three specific objectives guided the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation and chi-square were used for data analysis. Findings showed that based on mean responses, the following active leisure activities were highly engaged by the respondents; swimming (3.53), visiting (3.27), gardening (3.27), running (2.47), climbing (3.00), dancing (3.00), dramatic play (3.00) and riding bicycle (2.73). Findings also showed that passive activities with very high engagement included writing a story (3.27), sleeping (3.73), playing a musical instrument (3.20), reading books (3.07), drawing and painting (2.47), listening to music (2.40) and playing card games (2.13). Th finding further showed that a greater percentage of them had very high academic performance (66.50%), 33.40% had high academic performance while only 6.50% had an average academic performance. Better academic performance of the pupils was significantly associated with moderate engagement in active leisure activities, but not with engagement in passive leisure activities at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. It was therefore recommended that more time for engagement in active leisure activities be made available to pupils as it might help them in improving their academic performance.

Keywords: Leisure activity, Engagement, Academic performance, Pupils, School

Introduction

Leisure activity encompasses the activities that people engage in for reasons as varied as relaxation, competition, or growth. Leisure activities can also be viewed as activities

that people engage in during their free time, activities that are not work-oriented or that do not involve life maintenance tasks (Hurd & Anderson, 2020). Leisure activities are engaged, at different points in daily activities to refresh, be physically fit again, and be mentally alert to start or continue with work (Dansu & Uchegbu, 2007). These activities take place during time away from work and are not engaged in, just for existence (Hurd & Anderson, 2020). They include meditating, painting, playing, studying, computer usage, watching television, art, hobbies, sports, reading, spending time outdoors and shopping (Hofferth & Curtin, 2003).

The benefits of leisure time depend on its purpose. Structured and active activities are generally considered more beneficial than unstructured and passive activities. However, all forms of leisure activities have the potential for positive outcomes for children (Hofferth & Curtin, 2003). First, these activities can function as learning environments for mastering specific skills and techniques. Secondly, they promote positive relationships with peers. Thus, many leisure activities can provide learning opportunities and have positive behavioural, health and academic outcomes (Hurd & Anderson, 2020).

The academic performance of students is currently a major controversial issue in educational research, due to its relevance and complexity (Lamas, 2015). Academic performance is the quantitative result obtained during the learning process, based on the evaluations carried out by the teachers through objective test evaluations (Martin et al., 2017). It is a measure of the indicative and responsive abilities that express, in an estimated way, what a person has learned as a result of a process of education or training (Lamas, 2015). For Caballero et al. (2007), academic performance involves meeting goals, achievements and objectives set in the program or course that a student attends. There are different methods of measuring academic performance in children, such as standardized achievement test scores, teacher ratings of academic performance, and report card grades (Alvarez-Peregrina, et al., 2020). A child's academic performance is a function of factors such as intellectual capacity, personality, motivation, skills, interests, study habits, self-esteem, the teacher-student relationship, family income, parents' educational qualification, teacher-pupil ratio, teacher qualification, gender, and opportunities to engage in leisure activity (Lamas, 2015).

A positive relationship between leisure activity and academic performance has been explored through several studies and the results suggested that when a substantial amount of school time is dedicated to leisure activity (especially active activities), academic performance meets and may even exceed that of pupils not receiving additional leisure activities (Kayani et al., 2018; Scheuer & Mitchell, 2002). A comparison between students who are involved in leisure activities and who are not involved has been conducted by Trudeau and Shephard (2008), and it resulted in a positive significant

relationship between involvement in leisure activities and academic performance indicating that academic performance is improved with engagement in leisure activities. Children receiving additional leisure activity tend to show improved attributes such as increased brain function and nourishment, higher energy levels, and changes in body build leading to increased self-esteem and better behaviour, which may all support cognitive learning (Scheuer & Mitchell, 2002). The increased energy levels and time outside of the classroom may give relief from boredom, resulting in higher attention levels during classroom instruction, according to Scheuer and Mitchell (2002).

Juvenile lifestyle has changed over recent decades towards a more sedentary lifestyle with higher usage of audiovisual media (Hilpert et al., 2017). As the popularity of sedentary behaviours, such as watching television, using the internet and video games increases, children tend to spend more time on them (Little & Wyver, 2008). This lack of participation in physical activity has contributed to a greater prevalence of pediatric obesity, a decrease in fitness, and a greater risk for health problems (Steele et al., 2008). It is currently recommended that to stay healthy, children need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. A study by Maina (2014) involving 138 children between ages 9-11 identified a lack of role models, lack of time and excessive screen time as some of the reasons why children do not engage in physical activities. Additionally, modern-day family life can be hectic, making it challenging to find the time and energy to engage in active leisure activities. Currently, primary schools are becoming more academically oriented, preferring to allocate almost all the school hours to intellectual activities, with little or no time for recess and sports (Maina, 2014). While the effects of physical activity have been extensively studied, the potential role of leisure time activities on the academic performance of children has not been widely explored in Africa. The aim of this study was therefore to determine the association between engagement in leisure activities and academic performance of school-aged children in Enugu East local government area, Enugu State.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study was to determine engagement in leisure activities and academic performance of primary school pupils in the Enugu-East local government area. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain the level of engagement in active and passive leisure activities by primary school pupils in the Enugu-East local government area.
2. assess the level of academic performance of primary school pupils in the study area.
3. determine the association between the level of engagement in leisure activities and the academic performance of primary school pupils in the Enugu-East local government Area.

Methodology

***Study area*:** This study was carried out in Enugu-East Local government area, Enugu State. Enugu-east local government area is home to over 500 public and private primary schools in addition to secondary and tertiary institutions (Ministry of Education, Enugu State, 2021).

***Study design*:** This study employed a cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional study has the ability to examine the current situation in a given place in other to ascertain the extent to which current practices meet the required standard (Uzoagulu, 2008).

***Population of the study*:** The study population comprised 60,576 pupils in the 474 private primary schools and 20,874 pupils in the 58 public schools in the Enugu-East local government area (Ministry of Education, Enugu State, 2021).

***Sample size determination and sampling technique*:** Sampling was done in multiple stages. Firstly, 10% of public schools and 2% of private schools were calculated and a systematic random sampling technique was used to select six public schools and 10 private schools from the list of schools. In the second stage, the formula below was used to calculate the sample size for both public and private schools in Enugu-east L.G.A.

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{\frac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

Where: N = Population of the study; n = Sample size; e = Margin error (0.05)
z = z- score (level of confidence); and p = baseline levels of indicators (50%)

This gave a total sample size of 304 pupils from private schools and 326 pupils from public primary schools in Enugu-East local government area. In the third stage, proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of pupils to be sampled from each school. Finally, the purposive sampling technique was used to select primary five and six pupils from each school that served as a sample for the study. The two classes were chosen because the pupils in those classes are expected to understand the simplified questionnaire.

***Instrument for data collection*:** A questionnaire developed after an extensive literature review was the instrument for data collection. It was made up of sections A-C. Section A was used to collect data on the respondents' background information. Section B contains items on how often children engaged in active and passive leisure activities in the past week. The items were on a 5-point scale - 0 is never, 1 is once a week, 2 is 2-3 times a week, 3 is 4-5 times a week and 4 is every day. Section C was for the 1st and 2nd term overall average result of each respondent, obtained from calculating the scores for all the subjects.

***Data collection method*:** The researchers administered the questionnaires verbally to the pupils with the help of three research assistants. The researchers and their assistants guided the pupils in completing the questionnaires by carefully explaining each item to them. In the end, the questionnaires were immediately collected from the respondents. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 30

minutes and those who were unable to understand the explanations were excluded from the study. Each pupil's 1st and 2nd term average scores were collected from their class teachers and recorded in section C of their questionnaire. Their averages were calculated and used as an academic performance measure. Six hundred and thirty questionnaires were distributed and collected. This gave a percentage return of a hundred.

***Data and statistical analysis*:** Data obtained were coded into Statistical Product and Service Solution (IBM-SPSS), version 21. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The average of the 1st and 2nd term results of the pupils were calculated and the academic performance of the pupils was categorized as poor (below 40), average (40-59), high (60-69) and very high (70-(33.30%), 26.70% were civil servants, 20.00% were traders, 13.30% were retired, and 6.70% were artisans. Information on the pupils' mothers showed that 46.70% were traders, 13.30% were farmers and artisans, 6.70% were 100). Means of 0-0.4 was regarded as no engagement, 0.5-1.0 = low engagement, 1.1-2.0 = moderate engagement, 2.1-3.0 = high engagement and 3.1-4.0 were regarded as very high engagement. Inferential statistics such as chi-square was used to determine the relationship between categorical variables. A p-value < 0.05 was chosen as the level of significance.

Results

Demographic/socio-economic data of the respondents

Table 1 shows the socioeconomic/demographic characteristics of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were aged 8-10years (46.60%), 33.30% were aged 11-12years and 20.00% were aged more than 12 years. Most of the pupils were males (73.30%) while 26.70% were females. Findings showed that more than a third of the respondents' fathers were farmers civil servants and retired and 13.30% were unemployed. Over seventy per cent of the respondents lived in rented homes (73.30%) while 26.70% lived in homes owned by their parents/guardians.

Table 1: Socio-economic/demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	*f*	%
Age (years)		
8-10	294	46.60
11-12	210	33.30
Above 12	126	20.00
Total	**630**	**100**
Gender		
Male	462	73.30
Female	168	26.70
Total	**630**	**100**
Number of children in the family		
One	42	6.70
2-3	168	46.70
4-6	210	26.70
More than 6	126	20.00
Total	**630**	**100**
Father/guardian's occupation		
Artisan	42	6.70
Civil servant	168	26.70
Farmer	210	33.30
Trader	126	20.00
Retired	84	13.30
Unemployed	0	0.00
Total	**630**	**100**
Mother/guardian's occupation		
Artisan	84	13.30
Civil servant	42	6.70
Farmer	84	13.30
Trader	294	46.70
Retired	42	6.70
Unemployed	84	13.30
Total	**630**	**100**
Housing type		
Renting	462	73.30
Home owners	168	26.70
Total	**630**	**100**

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation responses on the level of engagement in active leisure activities by the respondents. Active leisure activities that had very high engagement among the respondents were swimming with a mean of 3.53, visiting places with friends and family (3.27) and working in the garden (3.27). Activities with high engagement include running with friends (2.47), climbing trees (3.00), dancing with friends (3.00), shopping (3.00), skipping rope (2.13), dramatic play (3.00) and riding a bicycle (2.73) among others.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation responses on engagement in active leisure activities by the respondents

Active leisure activities	Mean	Std Dev	Remark
Playing football with friends	1.67	0.860	Moderately engaged
Swimming/playing in the water	3.53	0.719	Very highly engaged
Running with friends	2.47	1.456	Highly engaged
Climbing trees	3.00	1.318	Highly engaged
Visiting interesting places with friends/family	3.27	0.929	Very highly engaged
Working in the garden	3.27	0.929	Very highly engaged
Dancing with friends	3.00	1.367	Highly engaged
Walking with a pet animal (e.g. dog)	2.87	0.619	Highly engaged
Shopping with family and friends	3.00	0.817	Highly engaged
Skipping rope	2.13	1.148	Highly engaged
Acting drama with friends	3.00	0.817	Highly engaged
Riding bicycle	2.73	0.999	Highly engaged
Floor games (suweh)	2.13	1.456	Highly engaged
Hide and seek	1.73	1.341	Moderately engaged
Ten-ten (oga)	1.67	1.012	Moderately engaged
Hand games (tinko-tinko)	0.93	1.124	Poorly engaged
Fire on the mountain.	2.13	1.025	Highly engaged
Thug of war	3.00	1.367	Highly engaged

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation responses on the level of engagement in passive leisure activities by the respondents. Activities that were highly engaged by the respondents were writing a story (3.27), sleeping (3.73) and playing a musical instrument (3.20). Activities with high engagement include reading a book (3.07), drawing and painting (2.47), moulding with clay (2.40), bead making (3.07), listening to music (2.40) and playing card games (2.13) among others.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation responses on engagement in passive leisure activities by the respondents

Active leisure activities	Mean	Std dev	Remark
Playing games on phones and computers	1.200	0.542	Moderately engaged
Watching the stars	2.467	1.361	Highly engaged
Reading a book	3.067	0.929	Highly engaged
Playing board games (ludo, scrabble, ayo)	2.933	1.341	Highly engaged
Telling stories with family and friends	1.933	0.772	Moderately engaged
Drawing and painting	2.467	1.259	Highly engaged
Moulding with clay	2.400	1.084	Highly engaged
Bead making	3.067	0.929	Highly engaged

Writing a story	3.267	0.574	Very highly engaged
Watching the television	1.667	1.301	Moderately engaged
Listening to music	2.400	1.255	Highly engaged
Singing songs with family and friends	1.533	1.785	Moderately engaged
Sleeping	3.733	0.443	Poorly engaged
Fishing	0.933	1.380	Very highly engaged
Papercraft (e.g. making a boat)	2.067	0.772	Moderately engaged
Playing card games (e.g. Whot)	2.133	1.148	Highly engaged
Playing musical instrument	3.200	0.749	Very highly engaged

Table 4 shows the levels of academic performance of the respondents. A greater percentage of them performed very highly, academically (66.50%), 33.40% performed highly while only 6.50% had an average academic performance.

Table 4: Levels of academic performance of the respondents

Academic performance	***f***	**%**
Average performance (40-59)	41	6.50
High performance (60-69)	170	33.40
Very high performance (70-100)	419	66.50
Total	**630**	**100**

Table 5 shows the association between the levels of engagement in leisure activities and the academic performances of the respondents. Academic performance was significantly associated with their engagement in active leisure activities. A greater proportion (77.40%) of those that moderately engaged in active leisure activities performed very highly academically. The academic performance of the pupils was not significantly associated with their engagement in passive leisure activities at $p<0.05$ level of significance. However, 70.80% of those that highly engaged in passive leisure activities had a very high academic performance.

Table 5: Association between the levels of engagement in leisure activities and academic performance of the respondents

Leisure activities	Average performance F (%)	High performance F (%)	Very high performance F (%)	Total F (%)
Active activities				
Moderate engagement	6 (7.10)	13 (15.50)	65 (77.40)	84 (100)
High engagement	28 (5.50)	138 (27.4)	338 (67.10)	504 (100)
Very high engagement	7 (16.70)	19 (45.20)	16 (38.10)	42 (100)
		□² = 23.37, df = 4, p = 0.00*		
Passive activities				
Moderate engagement	29 (6.30)	133 (28.80)	300 (64.90)	462 (100)
High engagement	12 (7.10)	37 (22.00)	119 (70.80)	168 (100)
		□² = 2.88, df = 2, p = 0.24		

F = frequency, % = percentage, χ^2 = chi square value, df = degree of freedom, $p < 0.05$ level of significance

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the pupils engaged in various leisure activities such as playing football with friends, swimming, working in the garden, running, climbing trees, dancing, skipping rope, dramatic play, riding a bicycle, writing a story, sleeping, playing a musical instrument, reading a book, drawing and painting and listening to music. Supporting this finding, Rosić (2005), identified some of the activities children take on in their free time including sleeping, viewing television, listening to music, star gazing, playing games, taking walks, storytelling, reading books and pretend play. In addition, Hughes (2017) identified sports, arts and crafts, dance and music, as some of the activities children engage in for relaxation. Kuhn (2017) also gave sports, biking, taking walks, water spray wars, watching television and playing video games as some leisure activities for children.

According to the result of this study, eighty per cent of the pupils highly engaged in active leisure activities while over seventy per cent of them engaged moderately in passive leisure activities. Studies have proven that balanced and moderate engagement in leisure activities develops the minds of children for adulthood. According to Brîndescu (2010), early childhood is a time when leisure activities are critical for socializing, cognitive and moral development, taking diverse roles, and learning how to be distinct from others. Therefore, giving leisure activities the attention they deserve during childhood is the foundation of healthy physical, social and cognitive development, allowing infants to gradually assume various social roles, and develop competencies and talents that they may later use in broader situations such as academic endeavours (Brîndescu, 2010).

Academic performance is the result of learning, prompted by the teaching activity by the teacher and produced by the student through school grades (Lamas, 2015). The results of this study showed that the academic performance of the pupils in this study was generally impressive. Contrary to the findings of Akinsolu (2010) who reported that the academic performance of pupils in Nigeria has over the years been on the decline. In addition, Arong and Ogbadu (2010) observed that many products of Nigerian primary schools have been discovered to be unable to write their names.

Sarma, Wijesinghe, and Sivananthawerl (2015) also reported a low level of educational performance in language, mathematics, and the overall subject average among school-aged children. However, the appreciable level of academic performance observed among these pupils, suggests that engaging in leisure activities could have an added advantage to the cognitive functioning of the pupils as observed by Alesi, et al (2014), Chen, et al (2014), Kamijo, et al (2011), Kubesch, et al (2009) and Verburgh, et al (2016).

Researchers have affirmed that among the different ways to improve educational achievement, promoting leisure activities is attracting increasing interest (Pfeifer & Cornelißen, 2010) as it has the advantage of being relatively cheap and easy to implement and it could be applied at the school level. However, it needs to be balanced as the overall effect of leisure activities on educational outcomes could be both positive and negative (Fernandes et al., 2017). This lends credence to the finding of this study which showed that pupils that engaged very highly in active leisure activities were found to perform less than those who engaged moderately. This indicates that excessive engagement could be counter-productive to the academic performance of children. A positive relationship between leisure activity and academic performance has been explored through several studies and the results suggested that when a substantial amount of school time is dedicated to leisure activity (especially active activities), academic performance meets and may even exceed that of pupils not receiving additional physical activity (Kayani et al, 2018; Scheuer & Mitchell, 2002). In addition, a study by Trudeau and Shephard (2008), showed a positive significant relationship between involvement in leisure activities and academic performance, indicating that academic performance is improved with engagement in leisure activities. This may be attributed to the fact that children receiving additional physical activity tend to show increased brain function and higher energy/concentration levels which may support cognitive learning (Scheuer & Mitchell, 2002). However, it appears that improved academic performance is linked to active rather than passive leisure activities as no association was found between academic performance and passive leisure activities. Golsteyn et al. (2020) even warned that high engagement in passive leisure activities such as playing video games, watching the television and using the internet may also decrease students' attention to school work or indirectly affect academic outcomes by increasing the allocation of time to these activities.

***Limitations of the study*:** The major limitation of this research work was the use of academic records provided by different class teachers. Teachers' assessments might be subjective in measuring academic performance and this might introduce bias to the study. Using standardized questions for every respondent may have made the result more objective and accurate.

Conclusion

This study determined the association between engagement in leisure activities and the academic performance of pupils in Enugu East LGA. The pupils were actively participating in various leisure activities such as swimming, visiting interesting places, gardening, running, climbing, dancing, dramatic play and riding bicycle. A good number of them also engaged in passive activities such as writing stories, sleeping, playing a musical instrument, reading books, drawing and painting, listening to music and playing card games. The pupil's academic performance was found to be generally high contrary to

expectation. However, it was also found that engaging in active, rather than passive leisure activities might have contributed to the impressive academic performance of the pupils. Thus, confirming that integrating active leisure with intellectual activities holds the potential for academic success among school children.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of the study.

1. The government and primary school administrators should work together and implement policies that will foster the engagement of moderate leisure activities and as well provide good facilities to cater for that in schools.
2. Parents and pupils should be adequately informed of the benefits of moderate engagement in leisure activities.
3. There should be further studies to examine the association between engagement in leisure activities and the academic performance of pupils at other levels such as secondary schools.

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