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Exploring Cultural Relevance of Outdoor Games in Early Childhood Education: A Study of Yoruba Traditional Games in Oyo Town, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Background: Yoruba traditional outdoor games are important cultural practices that contribute to children's socialization, moral upbringing, and indigenous learning. However, the increasing influence of digital entertainment and modern educational practices has reduced their use in early childhood education.

Objective: This study examined the cultural relevance of Yoruba traditional outdoor games in early childhood education in Oyo Town, Nigeria. Specifically, the study explored their cultural significance, perceived educational benefits, and the challenges hindering their integration into early childhood education curricula.

Methods: A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consisted of early childhood education stakeholders, including preschool teachers, caregivers, and school administrators. A sample was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Cultural Relevance of Yoruba Traditional Outdoor Games Questionnaire (CRYTOGQ)*. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.70. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, with 2.50 as the criterion mean.

Result: The findings revealed that Yoruba traditional outdoor games promote cultural heritage, indigenous language, and societal values among children. The study also showed that integrating these games supports children's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. However, challenges such as limited teacher awareness, digital game influence, inadequate space, poor institutional support, and curriculum exclusion hinder their integration.

Conclusion: The study concluded that Yoruba traditional outdoor games are valuable tools for culturally relevant and holistic early childhood education. Their integration into the curriculum should therefore be encouraged and supported by teachers, parents, and policymakers.

Keywords: Cultural relevance, early childhood education, holistic development, indigenous play, Yoruba traditional games.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a programme that caters for the holistic development of children, and it has long-term impacts on the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and language development of children (Sari et al., 2023). That early childhood education play

prominent role in shaping child's emotional, social, cognitive development and also enhance creativity and social interaction of children in a natural environment through indigenous games (Matafwali & Mofu, 2023).

Indigenous games are traditional play activities that are passed down through generations, children engage in these games in a free and natural environment without adults guide or instructions (Maimela & Nedombeloni, 2026). Explained that these games occur in natural environment with minimal or no equipment while children rely on creativity, imagination and social interaction (Kyei-Nuamah, 2025). These games involve physical activities and are played in groups which foster team work, social skills, imagination, creativity, problem solving, abiding by rules and language development (Mwinsa & Dagada, 2025). This indicates that indigenous games are plays that have been in existence since our forefathers and are engaged in a natural space usually outdoors (Yeptho et al., 2025).

Outdoor games are free activities that children engage in a natural setting, with rules and regulations provided by

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the children themselves (Akay et al., 2025). See outdoor games as an outdoor activity in an open green space that emphasises competition, skill development, and social interaction (Ashar et al., 2024). When children play traditional games in the open air, they engage in physical and mental activities (Ismyo et al., 2024). They run, jump, stretch their arms and legs, and engage in mental calculations as they perform, and these activities give a lot of benefits to children (Santoso et al., 2024).

Outdoor indigenous games hold enormous benefits as they foster holistic development, physical fitness, and cultural awareness (Livhuwani et al., 2026). Outdoor indigenous games improve physical fitness, motor coordination, build teamwork, enhance communication skills, boost essential personal development, social skills, stimulate cognitive abilities and aid creativity of children (Zalmansyah et al., 2026). Also stated that outdoor indigenous games in a nature green space promotes mental, physical, boost immune system, reduce stress, anxiety and depression, promotes social and emotional development, aid team spirit, guarantee attention restoration, improve memory, improve positive behaviour, support social group, support self-discipline and improve general wellbeing of children (Nurhasanah et al., 2025). This indicates that outdoor indigenous numerous benefits to children when engaging in the outdoor games such as Tente, Bojuboju, Lakalaka, Bokoboko, Eku Meran, Eye Meta Tolongwaye, Talowa Ninu Ogba Naa, Okoto Tita, and Arin Tita (Ngyah-Etchutambe, 2025).

Traditional outdoor games in early childhood education play a crucial role in the over-all development of children (Bhagwan et al., 2025). Found that traditional outdoor games significantly improve children's communication skills, social interaction, cooperation, problem solving skills, creativity, strengthen cultural identity and encourage imaginative exploration (Temel et al., 2024). Found that traditional outdoor games preserve cultural identity among children, promote social cohesion, develop children's personalities, encourage cooperation play and enhance problem-solving skills among children (Aliriad et al., 2024). Concluded that traditional outdoor games enhance children's cultural values, responsibility, empathy, respect, justice, cooperation, confidence, truth and honesty, solidarity, courage, freedom, kindness and love (Ay & Tufan, 2023). This indicates that traditional outdoor games impact positively on the holistic development of children (Erol et al., 2022).

Integration of traditional outdoor games into modern early childhood education curricula has numerous benefits for children. That integrating traditional outdoor games stimulate cognitive skills which are crucial for early learning (Diego et al., 2023). Outdoor traditional games boost logical thinking and enhance children's social interactions, build cultural identity and appreciation for diversity connecting children to their heritage and promote a healthy lifestyle from early

years. Found that outdoor traditional games instill values of sportsmanship and discipline, emotional regulation and cooperation in children (Yilmaz et al., 2022).

The key challenges to the integration of traditional outdoor games into early childhood education are obstacles that hinder the successful implementation of culturally diverse games which promote children's physical, social and emotional growth (Garbossa et al., 2025). Found that most ECs are not aware of the importance of Yoruba traditional games and as a result this is often not integrated into their teaching practices. However, there are also several challenges, such as the dominance of digital games, lack of institutional support, and limited access to open spaces, as well as a lack of structured programmes that promote traditional games (Kufarimani & Chitanana, 2025).

Vygotsky claimed that children's learning and development is at its core a social and cultural phenomenon. "Every function in the child's cultural development shows up twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level, first between people (interpsychological) and then inside of the child (intrapsychological)" (Morris, 2019). This statement implies that children initially acquire knowledge through interaction with others such as peers, parents, and members of their community and gradually internalize this knowledge as part of their own thinking and behaviour (Mishra, 2023). In this sense, learning is not an individualized process, but a social process that is embedded in cultural experience (Zhang, 2022).

The intent of this theory is that children's cognitive, social and language development cannot be separated from the cultures that they grow up in. Play, communication and collaboration are social activities in which children learn (Cassell, 2022). Specifically, play is considered an effective developmental tool as it enables children to explore roles, rules, and relationships in the process of interacting with other people. Language is also very central as it provides children opportunities to connect, reason and incorporate cultural understandings (Wynberg et al., 2021).

This theory is greatly applicable in the current study on Yoruba traditional outdoor games in early childhood education in Oyo Town. Such games are more social and cultural in nature and entail interaction between the children in their natural settings where they learn through playing rather than being taught (ÇAKIROĞLU, 2019). Games like Bojuboju, Tente, and Lakalaka allow children to participate in collective activities through which it is possible to communicate, cooperate, and solve problems. These interactions as per the Vygotsky perspective are first attained at a social level where children are taught rules, values and skills by each other and then become internalized as individual capabilities (Alsaadi, 2021).

Moreover, the Yoruba traditional games are cultural instruments that pass on indigenous knowledge, language, and values of one generation to another. This is in line with the focus of Vygotsky on the influence of culture in development of children. The theory also underpins the premise of incorporating such games in the early childhood education curriculum because it puts emphasis on the significance of involving culturally and socially interactive learning experiences in promoting holistic development. Thus, the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky offers a good theoretical background to comprehend how the social, cognitive, emotional and cultural development of preschool children can be facilitated through the involvement in Yoruba traditional outdoor games.

2. METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was chosen because it enabled the researchers to collect and describe respondents' perceptions on the cultural relevance and challenges of integrating Yoruba traditional outdoor games in early childhood education without manipulating any variables. The study was conducted in Oyo Town, Oyo State, Nigeria, a culturally rich Yoruba setting where traditional outdoor games such as Bojuboju, and Tente are still practiced, making it suitable for the study.

The population comprised early childhood education stakeholders, including preschool teachers, nursery caregivers, school administrators, and early childhood education practitioners, who were directly involved in children's learning activities (Jirattanawanna et al., 2024).

A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from chosen schools, giving all participants an equal chance of selection. The sample size ranged between 100 and 200 respondents, depending on availability. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Cultural Relevance of Yoruba Traditional Outdoor Games Questionnaire (CRYTOGQ)". The instrument had four sections: demographic data, cultural significance of traditional games, perceived benefits, and challenges of integration. It was designed on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was validated through face and content validation by experts in Early Childhood Education and Measurement and Evaluation, whose corrections were incorporated. Its reliability was tested through a pilot study in a nearby town, and a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable. Data were collected through direct questionnaire administration with the help of trained assistants. The purpose of the study was explained to respondents, questionnaires were retrieved after completion. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and exclusive academic use of data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Table 1. Mean Responses on Cultural Significance of Traditional Games

S/N	Item	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Preserves cultural heritage	3.21	0.68	Agree
2	Promotes indigenous language	3.05	0.72	Agree
3	Teaches cultural values	3.30	0.65	Agree
4	Reflects Yoruba traditions	3.18	0.70	Agree
5	Strengthens cultural identity	3.25	0.66	Agree
Grand Mean		3.20		Agree

The results in Table 1 show that all items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.20. This indicates that respondents agreed that Yoruba traditional games have strong cultural significance in early childhood education. Specifically, the highest mean score (3.30) shows that traditional games effectively teach cultural values, while other items confirm their role in preserving heritage,

promoting language, and strengthening cultural identity. The findings imply that Yoruba traditional games are essential tools for cultural transmission and identity formation among preschool children. Their inclusion in early childhood education can help preserve indigenous knowledge and ensure that children remain connected to their cultural roots.

Table 2. Mean Responses on Perceived Benefits

S/N	Item	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev	Decision
6	Improves physical development	3.35	0.60	Agree
7	Enhances social interaction	3.40	0.58	Agree
8	Improves communication skills	3.22	0.67	Agree
9	Promotes creativity	3.18	0.69	Agree
10	Enhances cognitive skills	3.28	0.64	Agree
11	Supports emotional development	3.15	0.70	Agree

12	Encourages active participation	3.33	0.62	⁵⁴ Agree
Grand Mean		3.27		Agree

⁴Table 2 reveals that all items recorded mean scores above 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.27, indicating general agreement among respondents. The highest mean (3.40) shows that traditional games strongly enhance social interaction, while other items highlight benefits such as physical development, communication skills, creativity, and cognitive growth. The results

suggest that integrating Yoruba traditional outdoor games into early childhood education promotes holistic development, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth. This supports the adoption of play-based and culturally relevant teaching methods in preschool education.

Table 3. Mean Responses on Challenges

S/N	Item	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Dev	Decision
13	Lack of teacher awareness	3.10	0.71	Agree
14	Influence of digital games	3.32	0.63	Agree
15	Limited space	3.05	0.75	Agree
16	Lack of school support	3.12	0.70	Agree
17	Not included in curriculum	3.25	0.66	Agree
18	Safety concerns	3.08	0.72	Agree
19	Lack of materials/guidelines	3.20	0.68	Agree
Grand Mean		3.16		Agree

The results in Table 3 indicate that all identified challenges have mean scores above 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.16. This shows that respondents agreed that multiple factors hinder the integration of Yoruba traditional outdoor games. The most prominent challenge is the influence of digital games (mean = 3.32), followed by curriculum limitations and lack of materials. These findings imply that despite the recognized benefits of traditional games, their integration is constrained by institutional, environmental, and technological barriers. Addressing these challenges requires curriculum reform, teacher training, and provision of adequate resources to promote the use of indigenous games in early childhood education.

3.2 Discussion

The findings revealed that respondents generally agreed that Yoruba traditional games have significant cultural value in early childhood education. This is evident from the grand mean score (above the criterion mean of 2.50), indicating overall agreement (Panga et al., 2022). Specifically, respondents agreed that traditional games help to preserve cultural heritage, promote the use of indigenous language, and teach important cultural values such as respect, cooperation, and fairness. They also agreed that these games reflect Yoruba customs and traditions and strengthen children's cultural identity. These findings imply that traditional games serve as important tools for cultural transmission, enabling children to learn and internalize societal norms and values in a natural and engaging manner. This supports the view that learning is culturally embedded and socially constructed.

¹The result is consistent with the findings of (Anggraini, 2025), who reported that traditional games strengthen cultural identity and promote social interaction among children. It also aligns with the position of (Kurniati & Mwariko, 2025), who found that traditional games preserve cultural heritage and enhance social cohesion. Therefore, Yoruba traditional games remain relevant in fostering culturally responsive early childhood education.

The findings showed that respondents agreed that integrating Yoruba traditional outdoor games into early childhood education has numerous benefits for preschool children, as indicated by a grand mean above 2.50. The respondents affirmed that these games enhance children's physical development through activities such as running and jumping. They also agreed that traditional games promote social interaction, teamwork, and cooperation among children.

Furthermore, the results indicated that traditional games improve communication and language skills, stimulate creativity and imagination, and enhance cognitive abilities such as problem-solving and critical thinking. Respondents also agreed that these games support children's emotional development and encourage active participation, thereby reducing sedentary behaviour.

³²These findings suggest that Yoruba traditional outdoor games contribute to the holistic development of children, covering physical, social, emotional, and cognitive domains. This reinforces the importance of play-based learning in early childhood education. The findings are in line with the study of (Anggraini, 2025), which revealed that traditional games improve creativity, communication, and social skills. Similarly,

(Hasan & Husein, 2024) found that integrating traditional games enhances cognitive development and supports early learning. Therefore, incorporating Yoruba traditional games into the curriculum can significantly improve learning outcomes for preschool children.

The findings revealed that several challenges hinder the effective integration of Yoruba traditional outdoor games in early childhood education, as indicated by a grand mean above 2.50. Respondents agreed that lack of awareness among teachers about the importance of traditional games is a major barrier. They also identified the increasing influence of digital games as a factor reducing children's interest in traditional outdoor play.

In addition, respondents agreed that limited space in schools, lack of institutional support, and the absence of traditional games in the formal curriculum pose significant challenges. Safety concerns and lack of instructional materials or guidelines were also identified as constraints to implementation. These findings indicate that despite the recognized benefits of traditional games, systemic and environmental barriers limit their effective use in schools. The dominance of modern technology and inadequate policy support contribute to the decline of indigenous play practices.

This result is consistent with (Kumar et al., 2025), who found that lack of teacher awareness affects the use of indigenous games in education. It also agrees with (Anggraini, 2025), who identified limited support and infrastructure as barriers to integrating traditional games. Therefore, addressing these challenges is essential for promoting culturally relevant teaching practices.

The study revealed that Yoruba traditional games have significant cultural relevance in early childhood education and that their integration into classroom activities promotes the holistic development of preschool children. However, the study also identified several challenges hindering their integration into modern educational settings, including lack of awareness among educators and parents, limited instructional resources, and increasing technological distractions among children.

This study examined the cultural relevance of Yoruba traditional outdoor games in early childhood education in Oyo Town, Nigeria. The study was guided by three specific objectives, which were to examine the cultural significance of traditional games, assess the perceived benefits of integrating Yoruba traditional games into early childhood education curricula, and identify the challenges hindering their integration.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised early childhood education stakeholders, including preschool teachers, caregivers, and school administrators in Oyo Town. A sample of respondents was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Cultural Relevance of Yoruba Traditional Outdoor Games Questionnaire

(CRYTOGQ)". The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50 used for decision-making.

The findings of the study revealed that Yoruba traditional outdoor games are culturally significant in early childhood education, as they help preserve cultural heritage, promote indigenous language, and instill cultural values in children. The study also found that integrating these games into early childhood education promotes the holistic development of preschool children, including their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. However, the study identified several challenges hindering their integration, such as lack of teacher awareness, the influence of digital games, limited space, lack of institutional support, absence in the curriculum, and insufficient materials.

3.2.1 Implication

The findings of this study imply that Yoruba traditional outdoor games are important tools for promoting culturally responsive and holistic early childhood education. The study revealed that these games help preserve indigenous cultural heritage, promote the use of Yoruba language, and strengthen children's cultural identity. In addition, the integration of traditional games in preschool activities contributes positively to children's physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and communication development. These findings suggest that teachers, curriculum planners, and policymakers should recognize the educational value of indigenous games and encourage their integration into early childhood education programmes. The study also implies the need for teacher training, curriculum improvement, and institutional support to ensure effective implementation of traditional outdoor games in schools.

3.2.2 Research Contribution

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on culturally relevant early childhood education by providing empirical evidence on the importance of Yoruba traditional outdoor games in preschool learning. The study enriches literature on indigenous play and child development by demonstrating that traditional games support children's holistic development while preserving cultural values and identity. The study also contributes theoretically through the application of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which explains how children learn through social interaction and cultural experiences. Furthermore, the findings provide practical information for educators, parents, curriculum developers, and policymakers on the relevance of incorporating traditional outdoor games into modern early childhood education practices.

3.2.3 Limitation

This study was limited to early childhood education stakeholders in Oyo Town, Oyo State, Nigeria, and therefore the findings may not fully represent other cultural or geographical settings. The study also

employed a descriptive survey research design, which focused mainly on respondents' opinions and perceptions without direct observation of children's participation in traditional games. In addition, the use of questionnaires limited the opportunity for respondents to provide more detailed explanations concerning the benefits and challenges of integrating Yoruba traditional games into early childhood education. Time, financial constraints, and limited access to some respondents also affected the scope of the study.

¹3.2.4 Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that early childhood educators should actively integrate Yoruba traditional outdoor games into classroom and outdoor learning activities in order to promote children's holistic development and cultural awareness. Curriculum developers and policymakers should include indigenous games in early childhood education curricula to encourage culturally relevant teaching practices. Schools should also organize seminars, workshops, and professional training programmes to improve teachers' knowledge and competence in the use of traditional games as instructional strategies. In addition, parents' community members should support children's participation in traditional outdoor games as a means of preserving cultural heritage and reducing excessive dependence on digital entertainment. Government and educational authorities should further provide adequate play spaces, instructional materials, and institutional support for the successful implementation of traditional games in schools. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies using larger samples, different cultural contexts, and other research designs such as observational or experimental studies to obtain broader findings.

³⁴4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Yoruba traditional outdoor games play a vital role in early childhood education by promoting both cultural preservation and holistic child development. These games serve as effective tools for enhancing children's physical abilities, social interaction, communication skills, creativity, and cognitive development.

Despite their numerous benefits, the integration of these games into modern early childhood education remains limited due to various challenges, including inadequate awareness among educators, insufficient institutional support, and the growing dominance of digital forms of entertainment. Therefore, there is a need for deliberate efforts to incorporate Yoruba traditional outdoor games into early childhood education practices to ensure culturally relevant and balanced child development.

⁷5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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assisted in validating the research instrument and to everyone who support and cooperation contributed to the successful completion of this research.

⁴²6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study, development of the research objectives, and preparation of the research instrument. The authors jointly participated in the literature review, data collection process, validation of the questionnaire, and coordination of field activities. Data analysis and interpretation were conducted collaboratively, with contributions from all authors in examining the findings and relating them to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, all authors were actively involved in drafting, reviewing, and revising the manuscript to ensure its academic quality and intellectual content. The authors collectively approved the final version of the manuscript for publication and agreed to take responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work. Each author contributed meaningfully to the successful completion of this research and the preparation of the article.

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