

## Pedagogical Choices in Teaching Social Studies in Lower Primary Classrooms in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This research reports teachers' pedagogical choices in teaching social studies in lower primary classrooms in Nigeria. It is believed that neglecting the prescribed curriculum and teachers' pedagogical choices impacts social studies objectives. The research intended to (a) explore the pedagogical approaches prescribed in the social studies curriculum for primaries one and two, (b) to understand teachers' pedagogical preferences in teaching primary one and two learners' social studies, and (c) to examine teachers' application of free play and mutually directed play pedagogies in teaching primary one and two social studies. The study was conducted in Okigwe Education Zone, Imo State, Nigeria, using a qualitative research approach and a generic qualitative research design. The study participants were made up of primary one and two teachers of social studies (three primary one teachers and three primary two teachers) and primary one and two social studies curriculum documents. The participants were purposively sampled with the criteria that the teachers and social studies curriculum documents must be for the primary one and two learners in the Okigwe Education zone of Imo State. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and documents, which were analysed using document and thematic data analysis. Findings indicate that whereas teachers were conversant in using teacher-led pedagogies, facilitating learning using free play was lacking. It was also discovered that teachers scarcely used resource persons, field trips, illustrations and experiential learning approaches in facilitating social studies. In conclusion, professional development training for teachers to adequately incorporate free play or learner-led pedagogies was recommended.

**Keywords:** Learning, Pedagogical Choices, Pedagogy of Play, Social Studies Curriculum, Teaching

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria aims to develop learners who are responsive to the national development needs by adapting to their changing environment while contributing positively to the development of society (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). However, the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers in ensuring that social studies learners are well equipped continuously surface as a source of concern to stakeholders in the education sector. As such, there is a concern about learners' preparedness to meet the demands of present-day Nigerian society. In this study, we, therefore, set out to investigate the pedagogical choices made by teachers in social studies in lower grades of primary education in Nigeria.

A typical primary school classroom in Nigeria comprises learners from diverse backgrounds, learning abilities, languages, cultures, gender, learning needs and interests (Onyishi, & Sefotho, 2020). Meanwhile, how the teacher strives to meet all learners' needs without leaving any learner behind means, important decisions need to be made about appropriate pedagogical choices. In most cases, learners' age, teacher's content knowledge, learning content, class size and the learning environment influence teachers' pedagogical choices (Appleton, 2006; Vogt, Hauser, Stebler, Rechsteiner & Urech, 2018). However, the World Bank (2018) report indicates that learners in the upper primary are 7% proficient in reading in sub-Saharan Africa, while their performance in mathematics hinges at 14%. This clearly shows that there is a missing link between teachers' pedagogical choices, learning content and the learning output.

Effective pedagogical strategies are important to support children's holistic development. In addition, Kay and Greenhill (2011) emphasised the need for activities in the education system to align with the 21st-century skills deemed necessary to prepare citizens for an uncertain and fast-changing world. These skills, also described as soft, transferable, life, and survival skills, have gained increasing attention for developing and preparing learners for a fast-changing world (Greenstein, 2012; Kay & Greenhill, 2011). Although the focus in the early years of schooling is on developing skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (Pardede, 2020; Santosa, 2022), its integration is problematic because teachers lack knowledge and understanding of relevant pedagogies that stimulate learning in the early years (Tang, 2020). As such, most teachers gravitate to traditional teaching methods, such as the 'chalk and talk' method, wherein the teacher is actively involved in the teaching and learning process while learners are passive (Asarta, Chambers & Harter, 2021; Khan & Thube, 2019). Most childhood scholars support pedagogies that promote questioning, imagination, innovation, and risk-taking (Fleer, 2013; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play-based pedagogies stimulate these competencies and have gained popularity among primary school teachers (Fleer, 2013; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Though, the effectiveness of teachers' application of play-based pedagogy remains questionable. Here, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) could be among the factors impacting their choice of pedagogy.

Social studies is one of the subjects taught in Nigerian schools from primary classes 1-6 and Junior Secondary 1-3 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). The lower primary comprises classes I, 2 and 3 with learners aged between 6, 7 and 8 years, respectively. In contrast, upper primary classes comprise classes 4, 5 and 6 with learners aged 9, 10 and 11 years, respectively. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2007: p. v), the overall objective of social studies education at the primary and secondary education levels is to:

*“(a) develop the ability to adapt to his or her changing environment; (b) become responsible and disciplined individuals capable and willing to contribute to the development of*

*their societies; (c) inculcate the right types of values; (d) develop a sense of comprehension towards other people, their diverse cultures, history and those foundational things that make them human; (e) develop the capacity to recognise the many dimensions of being human in different cultural and societal contexts, and (f) develop a sense of solidarity and sharing based on a sense of security in one's own identity”.*

Considering the objectives of social studies and particularly learners' positive adjustment to a fast-changing society, teachers, among others, are tasked with teaching learners to meet the objectives of social studies education. The social studies curriculum is designed to inculcate fairness and justice, appreciation of diversity, and respect for different cultures and ethnoreligious groups (Mezieobi, Fubara & Mezieobi 2013). In a country with over 450 ethnic nationalities, accommodation and respect for cultural diversity are crucial to nation-building (Calabar, 2014). It is important to note that the knowledge taught can be imparted in ways that learners can understand and apply in solving problems. In the curriculum documents for the early years, pedagogies such as questioning, demonstrations, story-telling, inquiry, discovery, discussion, dramatisation, illustration, experiential learning through field trips is advocated (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). Here, clear guidelines are provided to teachers on what and how specific content should be taught, together with suggested resources and assessment guidelines. As such, effective teaching and learning in social studies is aimed at benefitting learners and the society they live in (Calabar, 2014).

#### *Play as pedagogy*

Although there are several teaching and learning pedagogies, such as teacher-centred instruction, a student-centred/constructivist approach, inquiry-based learning, the flipped classroom, project-based learning, small group instruction, cooperative learning and play-based learning, there is no one best method of teaching (Ahmad, Bakar, & Ahmad, 2018; Prabhu, 1990). However, play as a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning in the early years has received significant international attention from stakeholders and researchers in academia. According to Article 31 of the UN declaration of the right of the child in 1959, every child has “the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (Lansdown & Tobin, 2019: p 1195: United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 2013). The UN provision of the act became more explicit as the International Play Association (IPA) declaration of a child's right to play makes the following arguments:

*(a) Play is part of education. (b) Provide opportunities for initiative, interaction, creativity and socialisation through play in formal education systems. (c) Include studies of the importance of play and the means of play provision in the training of all professionals and volunteers working with and for children. (d) Strengthen play provision in primary schools to enhance learning and to maintain attendance and motivation. (e) Reduce the incompatibilities between daily life, work and education by involving schools and colleges and by using public buildings for community play programs. (f) Ensure that children have access to play and learning opportunities outside of the system of formal education (International Play Association (IPA), 1979: p. 1).*

In their declaration, IPA maintained that play positively influences children's interaction (communication), initiative (critical thinking), socialisation (collaboration) and creativity, which are all 21st-century skills. IPA further stressed that strengthening play in primary schools invariably

motivates children to learn while maintaining positive school attendance (International Play Association (IPA), 1979). It was further noted that professionals (teachers) must be trained in using play pedagogy to facilitate learning. In play-based pedagogy, learners' active participation is foregrounded. Ginsburg (2010) noted the importance of engaging pedagogies for learners in low-income countries.

The peculiarity of play-based pedagogy is embedded in its comprehensive nature to be used in various forms to achieve educational goals at the primary school level. A play way method is an approach to teaching that utilises various pleasurable activities to facilitate learning instead of theories (Hennessey, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Among other advantages of the play way method to learners are its physical value, social interaction, emotional development, and motivation to learn new ways of doing things differently (Hennessey, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play in various forms includes exploratory play, dramatic play, fantasy play, creative play, social play, imaginative play, role play, communicative play, and deep play (risky play) (Hennessey, 2016). These play-based pedagogical approaches are developmentally appropriate for teaching social studies in primary schools. In addition, learning through play can be teacher-directed, learner/child-directed, or mutually directed play; these play-based pedagogies allow for pedagogical choices (Danniels, & Pyle, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). According to Hennessey (2016), when a child is able to transfer learning gains from one context to another, one can assert that learning has taken place. The pedagogy of play can enable such transfer and deep learning of content knowledge, as supported by research conducted in mathematics, science, and literacy classrooms (see Cheng, 2011; Honeyford & Boyd, 2015).

Even though there is no universally accepted description of play, Hennessey (2016; p. 10) noted that "play is a vehicle through which learning occurs. It is an intrinsically motivated, voluntary activity that allows the child the opportunity to construct their own knowledge". In free play, activities can be co-initiated by the child and the adult through deliberate and meaningful interactions (Wood, 2009). Such a view has implications for teaching and learning in that teachers must proactively create a conducive play environment that caters to learners' interests and learning choices (Hennessey, 2016; Wood, 2009). It also means deliberate and purposeful planning to teach content through the lens of play-based pedagogy.

#### *Dimensions of play-based pedagogies*

The contextual framework guiding this study are the three dimensions of play-based pedagogy; teacher-guided, learner-led and teacher-learner-directed play (Hennessey, 2016; Wood, 2009). Irrespective of learners' age, every learner at some point needs guidance. Teachers often find themselves providing such help to learners to support their academic journey.

Guided play is an intermediary between direct instruction and free play (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Teacher-guided play-based pedagogy can be multifaceted due to the diverse roles teachers are expected to take during teaching and learning. However, teacher-guided play is a friendly and playful technique teacher may employ to keep learners focused on the learning process (Danniels, & Pyle, 2018; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Wood, 2009). Teacher-guided play-based pedagogy differs from direct instruction, wherein the teacher is at the centre of instruction, and learners are passive in the learning process (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Although according to Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, and Singer (2009), research on kindergarten effectiveness shows a significant improvement in children's academic skills using direct instruction; learners taught using

guided play-based pedagogy outperformed learners who were taught solely using direct instruction. Meanwhile, Hadley (2002) opines that teachers must consider play pedagogy's outside and inside flow as they guide children.

Similarly, Hakkarainen, Brèdikytè, Jakkula, and Munter (2013) mention that teachers who guide play pedagogy for learners must understand the play idea, step into the play, and develop the play jointly while reaching togetherness. This is important because Hallam and Ireson (1999) avow that teacher-guided play-based pedagogy must be active and interactive for effective learning to ensue. Ireson (1999) further advises that teacher-guided play-based pedagogy should provide support and intervention after lesson delivery to enable learners to assimilate further, articulate, connect, explore, draw analogies and make sense of what is taught. Therefore, teacher-guided play-based pedagogy is important, especially in the early years of schooling to motivate and stimulate curiosity in social studies learners.

Play in its natural form is a child-oriented activity in which young people freely engage for fun and enjoyment. Learner-led play is most times referred to as free play or child-directed play; it is characterised by voluntariness, flexibility and imagination (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013; Wood, 2009). According to Catalano (2018, p. 1),

*From all types of play, unfortunately, free play is the least used in the daily program in kindergartens and primary schools in most of the European countries. When the child is free to play, he develops all his personality traits during it. He learns how to communicate with peers, to act or react in different situations, to respect some rules.*

In the views of Catalano (2018), learners are able to develop personality traits that lead to harmonious living through respect for one another when communicating with each other and obeying rules. However, Goldstein (2012) noted that despite the benefits of free play to young learners, free play has drastically declined in favour of formal/structured learning. The lack of free play seems to have long-term implications, as indicated in the findings of a study conducted by Gray (2019), an American psychologist, who concluded that there are more cases of adolescents and young adults experiencing depression, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness which seem to be linked to inadequate free play in their early childhood (Gray, 2019).

Therefore, Gray (2020) noted that children's free play helps build courage, confidence, physical capabilities and other survival skills needed in times of challenges and emergencies. However, when children are deprived of free play, it culminates in negative consequences that affect their physical and mental health (Gray, 2020). Restricting the child from free play could mean suppression of resilience, innovation and cooperation among children. This is because Gray (2019, p. 1) maintains that through free play, children "learn to cope physically and emotionally with unexpected, potentially harmful events; generate new ideas, sometimes useful creations; and reduce hostility and enable cooperation". During free play, teachers can observe children's true personalities, strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to strengthen learning through teacher-directed activities or teacher-learner-directed play. Observing children as they play can thus become a catalyst for reinforcement and motivation for further learning.

Even though some scholars debate the extent to which teachers must interfere or get involved in children's free play as per teachers utilising children's free play for educational purposes (Trawick-Smith 2012; Elly 2015). However, free play encapsulates enormous opportunities for children to

learn new cognitive skills, practice and develop other life skills (Ashiabi, 2007). In this study, we argue that teachers should not hijack children's free play periods for educational purposes but rather become non-participatory observers in children's free play. Teachers are expected to use the observed free play activities to enhance learning, making learning experiential. When learning becomes experiential, it turns out to be evolutionary. Substantiating this position is research on the evolutionary advantages of free play during childhood (Greve & Thomsen, 2016). It was noted that 75.9% of 238 adults aged 18 – 90 used in the study were able to recollect their childhood free play experiences while linking them to social success and individual adaptability in adulthood (Greve & Thomsen, 2016).

Mutually directed play, otherwise known as teacher-learner-directed play, is a pedagogical technique that may not have received considerable attention in our learning spaces. This pedagogical approach balances the two extremes of learners' autonomy to direct learning and teachers' dominance to control learning outcomes (Henry, 1990). Contemporary researchers circumvent the idea of advocating for any of the two extreme approaches (teacher-centred and learner-centred) but aim at striking a balance between both approaches, hence the mutually directed play-based pedagogy (Leggett & Ford, 2013). The issues of teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches have always been subjects of academic debates that raise tension due to the philosophical perspectives of scholars such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey (Leggett & Ford, 2013). The beliefs of Piaget and Vygotsky on teachers' pedagogical practice contrast in that while Piaget believes that children should have autonomy in exploring, constructing and controlling their learning, Vygotsky believes that teachers should guide and support children's learning (Piaget, 1971; Vygotsky, 1962). However, mutually directed play-based pedagogy seeks to integrate and blend the beliefs of Piaget and Vygotsky for optimal learning gains and outcomes. It can therefore be argued that a balanced pedagogical approach in social studies teaching and learning is better than a single-method approach because it enables children to become more involved in their learning.

#### *The motivation and objectives of the study*

The school and classroom environment remain a miniature society wherein learners receive the right type of values and knowledge on how to accommodate unity in diversity and develop life/social/survival skills necessary for any individual to fit into any society. However, learners' inability to transfer their learnings from classrooms into real-life contexts in Nigeria leaves researchers questioning whether social studies teachers' pedagogical choices effectively prepare learners for a fast-changing world. It is against this background and concern that the researchers are motivated to (a) analyse the pedagogical approaches prescribed in the curriculum to teach social studies in the lower primary classrooms and (b) to understand teachers' pedagogical preferences in teaching primary one and two learners' social studies (c) to examine teachers' application of free play and mutually directed play pedagogies in teaching primary one and two social studies.

## **2. METHOD**

### **A. Research Design**

The study adopted a generic qualitative research design as we set out to explore and understand how teachers conceptualise and apply the pedagogy of play in teaching social studies in primaries 1 and 2 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). The use of generic qualitative research allowed the

researchers to understand how the participants make meaning of the research phenomenon (Kennedy, 2016).

#### B. Participants and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling of six lower primary school social studies teachers constitutes the sample for the study. Two participant teachers were sampled from each of the three selected primary schools. The criterion for selecting teachers was that they needed to teach social studies in primaries 1 and 2. The three selected primary schools for the study are situated in the semi-urban areas of the Okigwe education zone of Imo State, Nigeria.

#### C. Data Collection Tools and Analysis

Social studies curriculum document was used to collect data for research objective (a), while semi-structured interviews served as data collection methods for research objectives (b) and (c). Descriptive and content analysis was considered the most suitable data analysis method for the study because the study involved interviews and document analysis.

#### D. Validity of Research

The validity of the research was done through triangulation, whereby data from the different schools as well as within each school was compared, to analyse consistencies and trends in the data. In addition, we provide thick descriptions of participant responses when presenting and discussing the findings.

#### E. Ethical Procedures

Ethical permission to conduct the research was sought from the faculty of education research ethics committee of the University of Johannesburg and the school principals and research participants in Nigeria.

#### F. Conflict of Interest

This work does not have any conflicting or competing interests. This research received no specific grant from the public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agencies. Furthermore, this study has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication anywhere.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data shows that teacher-directed learning and teacher-learner-directed activities were utilised, incorporating different pedagogies using the lens of play. However, the data was silent on learner-directed pedagogies, as discussed in the following themes.

#### A. Teacher-directed learning activities

From the prescribed curriculum documents, teacher-directed activities seem to be prefaced. In the description of teacher activities in both primary one and two, the teacher plays a dominant role in directing learner activities. For example, instructions to teachers on how to organise and engage all learners in the classroom include teacher-led strategies such as questioning, as captured by the following excerpts:

*Ask questions to lead pupils to suggest ways of keeping our environment clean.*  
*Ask pupils to list the electrical appliances used in the home ... Use guided questions to explain the dangers of ... Guides pupils to understand how to show positive attitudes ...*  
*Ask questions to lead pupils to list the types of accidents ... Uses guided questions to identify ways of preventing accidents and steps to ...*

*Ask questions to lead pupils to mention ways of storing things. Leads pupils to find out how things were stored in the past. Leads pupils to identify reasons for storing things properly ...*

Teachers elaborated on how they integrated questioning with play-based pedagogies to stimulate learning. When using guided questions to teach about the dangers of electrical appliances, they described how they will link their teaching to real-life examples as follows:

*“have to display some of the appliances, that means I have to gather data from the house, school. When I gather them and display them, I will form a song using them”.*

Another response was the use of demonstration and experimentation using the play way method, best captured by the following excerpts:

*“will use the play way method and teach them the rhyme like three bottles on the wall..... If you call the pupils out, then you use them and demonstrate the can (can in this context means a water container or water bottle)” and “I will ask them questions...Play way method....so that the lesson will be understood by the children”.*

Another teacher-led strategy outlined in the curriculum documents is classroom discussions, whereby the teacher is expected to lead, guide or initiate the discussion, as captured by the following examples:

*Leads discussion about roles of a family member through guided questions.  
Guides pupils’ discussion on what accidents in homes are. Uses guided questions to discuss  
Leads discussion on the advantages of living together ...  
Create discussion to involve pupils in providing ...  
Creates discussion which guides pupils to suggest some advantages ...  
Leads the pupils in discussion to discover harmful substances. Organise class discussion on drug abuse and its dangers.*

In this instance, guided participation in classroom discussions took place with the teacher taking the role of guide or facilitator. The expectation here is that the teacher takes an active role to intentionally engage learners in the co-construction of knowledge. As described by one teacher, it is not about “...defining that thing to them, you want them to get the idea and understanding of what you are about to teach through play”. It is therefore promoting learning through discovery directed by the teacher.

#### B. Teacher-learner directed play activities foster curiosity

There were numerous examples from curriculum documents of teacher-learner directed play activities. These include the use of role play to be integrated into teaching and learning as follows:

*Through guided questions and role play leads, the pupils understand the meaning of ...  
direct role play on positive attitude  
Direct role-play of the family. Direct children to find out about ...  
Call on the pupils to demonstrate ... Drama showing the reasons for taking substances into the body.  
Organise role-play activities and visit to transport facilities and centres.  
Guides a play or drama.*

From the responses of teacher participants, the play way method, which could be considered in the categories of role-play/ demonstration/ drama methods, was among the teacher's most preferred pedagogical choices. An excerpt from a teacher on how they integrated role play seemed to be teacher-learner directed as learners were expected to role play, as described in the following scenario when teaching values:

*“if you want to teach the child about ... how to communicate or greet people we use play way method in teaching. We want the child to learn how to greet elders, how to respect somebody we want to inculcate in the child to respect to appreciate and to associate with people .... You can apply play in teaching ...when you get somebody to pretend like he don't want to communicate with this person and that person will be feeling inferior”.*

One of the teachers noted that their preference of this method was that it stimulated interest and curiosity, which resulted in learners grasping concepts easily, exemplified by the following utterances: *“Because the children learn more and faster with it...They put more interest”*. Moreover, teachers acknowledged the importance of play in remembering important concepts learnt, best exemplified by the following excerpt: *“They will not forget that lesson because they will recollect the act they played and what they did then and they will be able to do the act”*

In the curriculum documents, pedagogies such as story-telling, the use of drawings, paintings and pictures, and inviting relevant community members to talk to learners were also advocated. Examples include:

*Uses stories; to highlight the effects of ...  
Ask pupils to narrate their own experiences. Present drawings and paintings of ....  
Ask pupils to paint.... Use pictures and questions to guide pupils in enumerating ...  
Uses pictures ..... to lead and guide the pupils to identify...  
Ask pupils to use local mud or paper to make beads i.e. adornments.*

Here again, teachers were of the view that these methods stimulated interest in the following ways: *“Because children like story and they like playing.... So, when you're talking to them: playing and telling them story, they will grab it quickly”*.

### C. Discussion

Responding to research objective (a), which is to find out the pedagogical approaches prescribed for teachers to teach social studies in the lower primary classrooms. The prescribed pedagogies show that the inquiry method took the lead, followed by; discovery, discussion, role play/demonstration/drama, illustration/use of examples/storytelling, explanation, experiential, constructive, excursion and resource person approaches. The data supports the view that teachers assume different roles, such as demonstrators, interpreters, and scaffolders of learning content. They also allow learners to be in charge of their learning through play while they (teachers) serve as guides (Danniels, & Pyle, 2018; Wood, 2009). In this regard, they take on the role of an observer, facilitator, stage manager, and participant during the teacher-guided play-based pedagogy (Jones & Reynolds, 2015). It is also evident that they utilise different approaches to teaching. Dominic-Ugwu and

Nonyelum (2019) argued that using a multi-approach encourages learners' active participation rather than one learning approach. This is important as Leggett, and Ford (2013) reminds us that excessive use of a particular pedagogy limits learning.

From the responses of teacher participants, the play way method, which could be considered in the categories of role-play/ demonstration/ drama methods, was among the teacher's most preferred pedagogical choices. Play way method of teaching is a technique that encourages teachers to use diverse pleasurable activities to enable teaching rather than being theoretical in lesson delivery (Hennessey, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). The benefits of play way teaching method among learners include social interaction, emotional and physical development, and motivation to learn (Hennessey, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Although teachers did not specify what kind of play way method they employed in teaching, storytelling and class discussion were scarcely used. When teachers' responses are compared to the document analysis results, it shows that teachers have not sufficiently incorporated inquiry, discovery, discussion, dramatisation, illustration, explanatory, experiential, field trip, and resource persons approaches in teaching social studies. The reason for their preference was that learners learn faster and can easily remember what was taught. However, the result contrasted with the assertion of Khan and Thube (2019), who noted that learners prefer the integrated approach to learning to a single learning approach. According to Leggett and Ford (2013), contemporary researchers insist that no particular pedagogy is most suitable for teaching and learning, hence the idea of striking a balance with all available teaching and learning methods. Teachers are positioned to guide learners in their learning; hence, they take on the roles of demonstrators, interpreters, questionnaires, and scaffolders, among many others (Danniels, & Pyle, 2018; Wood, 2009). This makes them balanced in their choice and use of learning pedagogies. However, teachers' response has shown otherwise, which may contribute to the challenges influencing learners' proper adjustments to society.

The curriculum documents and views from teachers were, however, silent on the use of free-play or learner-led play. Free play, which builds courage, confidence, physical capabilities and other skills needed to survive in a fast-changing world (Gray, 2020; Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013), are not fostered. Teachers' responses confirm the views of Catalano (2018), who avow that primary school teachers did not utilise free play for learning purposes. Catalano (2018) opine that free play is a catalyst that develops learners' personality traits and helps to instigate harmonious living. Observing children's free play activities and integrating their free play ideas into classroom practice is a veritable asset a teacher must deploy in equipping the child for the future. Unfortunately, teachers are yet to understand how to facilitate learning using the child's free play.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

With limited research on the teaching and learning of social studies in Nigeria in the early years of schooling, this research adds to the body of knowledge on teachers' interpretation of the curriculum and how it unfolds in practice. Learning involves cognition, emotion and a social environment that promotes collaboration and connectedness (Smith, 2017). Play-based pedagogies connect cognition and emotion and includes approaches that invoke imagination and creativity. In this study, the data was analysed using the lens of play-based pedagogies. The findings confirm that teachers have incorporated pedagogies such as story-telling, inquiry, discovery, discussion, dramatisation, illustration and field trips, as advocated in the social studies curriculum. The examples

provided by teachers links to strategies that draws on the characteristics of guided play, aimed at actively engaging learners through inquiry.

However, the study also revealed that teachers lack an understanding of facilitating social studies using free play both within and outside the classroom. This is because the curriculum is not explicit on the importance of free play in children's learning and development as well as how it can be incorporated. Free play helps build courage and confidence, skills necessary to survive in a fast-changing world. We recommend further research to be undertaken in this area to understand how it can be incorporated both in the curriculum and in practice. The researchers also recommend a professional development programme for social studies teachers, aimed at capacitating teachers in applying pedagogies applicable to the early years of learning. More importantly, teachers need to be capacitated on the use of free play to facilitate social studies teaching and learning.

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