

**EARLY SPORTING ACTIVITY AS A PRECURSOR TO ALL ROUND
HEALTH OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN IFELODUN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREA, KWARA STATE.**

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Abstract

This study investigated early sporting as a precursor to all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State. Descriptive research design of survey type was employed. The population for this study consists of all teachers in basic school in the study area. Multistage sampling procedures of stratified, purposive and random sampling techniques were employed to select 397 respondents. A researcher structured questionnaire was used for this study. The instrument was validated by experts in the department of Health promotion and Environmental Health Education University of Ilorin. The reliability level of the instrument was established through test re-test method using Pearson Product Moment. A correlation coefficient of 0.87r was obtained. The instrument was administered by the researchers and 3 trained research assistants. An inferential statistics of chi square (χ^2) was used to test the formulated hypotheses set for the study at 0.05 alpha level. The result of the findings revealed that mental health, physical fitness and level of social interaction have significant influence on all round health of school children in the study area. The study therefore, recommends that parents should encourage their children to participate in sports at early stage of their lives which would go a long way to improve their mental and social well being.

Keywords: *Early Sports, Mental Health, All Round Health, School Children and Precursor.*

Introduction

Naturally, parents and guardians tend to observe what the children want to do the most. Many of them love to play with gadgets rather than playing with toys or play outside. Sadly, most of the youngster nowadays always want to remain inside their home all day and every day just to play video games than to play outdoor or do physical activity with other children. Social media seem to have taken over from moon light play, hide and seek and other physical activities of yester-years. This is one of the negative effects of the engagement on modern technology. Due to technological advancement, the development of children's social skills or communication skills is very slow. Because, physical sports are sometimes only imposed in schools, and school age children are not introduced to outdoor activities or sports, which has consequences or effects on the child's growth. (Onohwaor & Eboh 2016).

All children and parents should know that sports is an experience that can change a child's lifestyle, create a great impact on his/her character or behaviors. To help children not to be addicted to gadgets or technology, parents should encourage them and engage them to do more important things like being involved in sports not only inside the school but also everywhere and anytime. We all know that distractions of technology for kids are always around them and always available and easy to access, (Hussein, Rami, Mohammadreza & Hussein, 2023).

Sport pertains to any form of physical activity or game often competitive and organized, that aims to use, maintain, or improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants and, in some cases, entertainment to spectators. Sports can, through casual or organized participation, improve participants' physical health. Hundreds of sports exist, from those between single contestants, through to those with hundreds of simultaneous participants, either in teams or competing as individuals. In certain sports such as racing, many contestants may compete, simultaneously or consecutively, with one winner; in others, the contest (a match) is between two sides, each attempting to exceed the other (Olanipekun & Akindutire. 2017).

Despite the popularity of sports as a leisure activity, there exists only little empirical evidence on the relation between sports participation and children's development. Prior research, mostly stemming from pediatrics or psychology, has devoted much attention to the role of sports for children's physical and mental health. Research on the link between sports and education has mainly focused on the role of sports activities among high school students or adolescents. An exception is a study by Dills, Morgan & Rottbof (2011), which studies the impact of recess and physical education on primary school children's learning process. A positive link between participation in high school sports and educational attainment, peer relations and professional success is well established.

Sports can provide an optimistic effect on the physical health of children. For the sustenance of the physical development of the children. Being engaged in sports we can see that there are physical benefits that give impact on children like stronger muscles, bones, and joints, their hearts can be stronger also, their body fats can also be controlled, kids may also have a lower chance to be sick, and their fitness can also be improved. Meaning sports can make all kids not only to be fit but also to be healthy (Akeredolu & Adebayo 2018). Along with the physical benefits, the mental benefits of

sports are similarly imposing. When we are physically active surely our mental health is also well. Sports can avoid the chance for kids to have depression and anxiety. We know that nowadays depression and anxiety can happen in all ages. As the sport has an impact on mental health, it is also a great thing to do to help children fight the feeling of depression or anxiety. Sports tend to increase the probability of children staying lively, letting them sleep better and keeps them mentally sharp. Improved physical activity levels directly relate and give the motivation to have good academics performance (Awoyinfa, 2015).

More so, sport affects the social development of the kids. Sport can not only help inspire and encourage children to be more physically active but also teaching them valuable skills and life lessons that they can carry with them until the time of maturity. We know that growing up can be challenging, leaving many kids with a sense of insufficiency but the sport has been found to help increase and boost their self-worth and self-confidence. Sport does also to help keep children improve socially. This helps children to do their best and engage in friendly or welcoming competition. As mentioned before, playing sports is a good way to maintain a kid's health in good conditions and have a better outlook on their body image. Playing your finest and winning, creates a sense of achievement hence modelling your self-esteem. Participating in sports and being part of any group provides a sense of belonging which improves their social skills (WHO, 2016).

The participation in sports helps to enhance friendships which help make children more sociable and outgoing. Sport more exactly can have an even bigger impact in the areas of growth or improving social skills in the process. Social skills that are learned or improved through sport while assisting children in growing into successful ones include communication, ability to follow rules, fair play, teamwork, independence, respect for others and leadership. Sports is the applicable way to keep children active but they offer several benefits that expand much beyond those benefits. It does not only support children in their growth process but stretches them to have essential skills to be positive and successful in their future life (Godwin-Kerika, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

However, there is a dearth of empirical evidence, about the causal effect of physical activities on the overall health of school children in study area. Also, currently, many school children are given less free time and fewer physical outlets at school; many school districts responded to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 by reducing time committed to recess, the creative arts, and even physical education in an effort to focus on reading and mathematics. This change may have implications on children's cognitive, physical and social well-being, because children's overall health capacity is enhanced by a clear-cut and significant change in physical activities like sport. It is on this note that this study sought to examine early sporting activities and its influence on all round health of school age children in Ifelodun, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, Kwara State.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions;

1. Will early sporting activities have influence on mental health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?
2. Will early sporting activities have influence on physical fitness of school children

- in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?
3. Will early sporting activities have influence on social interaction among school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study;

1. Early sporting activities will not have significant influence on mental health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.
2. Early sporting activities will not have significant influence on Physical fitness of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.
3. Early sporting activities will not have significant influence on Social interaction of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Methodology

Descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprise of all basic school teachers in the study area. Multistage sampling procedures of stratified, purposive and proportionate random sampling techniques were used to select 397 respondents. The study area was stratified into 3 Strata, Ifelodun East, South and Ifelodun West. In each stratum, 5 basic schools were randomly selected, purposively 5 basic schools were sampled because each strata group have equal numbers of schools. Also, purposive sampling techniques was used to select all the basic schools teachers from 15 schools sampled. In each school sampled, 26 basic school teachers were randomly sampled and in all 397 were sampled for this study. A researcher structured questionnaire was used to gathered data for the study. The instrument was validated by the experts in the department of Health Promotion and Environmental Health Education University of Ilorin. The reliability level of the instrument was established through test re-test method using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), a correlation coefficient of 0.87r was obtained. The instrument was administered by the researchers and 3 trained research assistants. The data collected were analysed using chi-square (χ^2) statistical tools to test the formulated hypotheses set for the study at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question One: Will mental well-being be an influence of early sporting activities on all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 1: Percentile Analysis of Influence of Early Sport Activities on Mental Well-being.

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	Positive Response	D (%)	SD (%)	Negative Response
1.	Children who are exposed to sport at early stage of their life will have a healthy mental health.	150 (37.8%)	151 (38.0%)	301	50 (12.6%)	46 (11.6%)	96
2.	Sport like cycling enable children to have a coherent mental ability.	201 (50.6%)	158 (39.8%)	359	25 (6.3%)	13 (3.3%)	38
3.	Airobic sport like skipping, running allow children at early age to avoid depression or anxiety that may affect their mental health.	173 (43.6%)	199 (50.1%)	372	19 (4.8%)	06 (1.5%)	25
4.	Swimming allows children to refresh their head and clear bad mood which is dangerous to their mental health.	120 (30.2%)	144 (36.3%)	264	55 (13.9%)	78 (19.6%)	133
	X			324 (81.6%)			73 (18.4%)

Table 1 shown the mean of positive responses by respondents to the items is 324 (81.6%), which is greater than the mean of negative responses, 73 (18.4%). This implies that mental well-being have influence on early sporting activities of all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Research Question Two: Will physical fitness have influence on early sporting activities of all round health of school children Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 2: Percentile Analysis of Influence of Early Sport Activities on Physical Fitness.

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	Positive Response	D (%)	SD (%)	Negative Response
5.	School aged children who are exposed to sport are more likely to be physically fit than students without sport.	172 (43.3%)	161 (40.6%)	333	49 (12.3%)	15 (3.8%)	64
6.	Sport activities at early age allow children to develop strong bone for healthy life.	168 (42.3%)	190 (47.9%)	358	27 (6.8%)	12 (3.0%)	39
7.	Muscle and tissue of children who engaged in sport developed well.	186 (46.9%)	157 (39.5%)	343	34 (8.6%)	20 (5.0%)	54
8.	Early sport allows children to maintain healthy organs for daily activities.	200 (50.4%)	169 (42.6%)	369	18 (4.5%)	10 (2.5%)	28
	X			350.8 (88.4%)			46.2 (11.6%)

Table 2 shows the mean of positive responses by respondents to the items is 350.8 (88.4%), which is greater than the mean of negative responses, 42.6 (11.6%). This implies that physical fitness have influence on early sporting activities of all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Research Question Three: Will social interaction have influence of early sporting activities of all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 3: Percentile Analysis of Influence of Early Sport Activities on Social Interaction.

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	Positive Response	D (%)	SD (%)	Negative Response
9.	Sport activities allow student to bond at early age and lead to good social interaction.	209 (52.6%)	120 (30.2%)	329	40 (10.1%)	28 (7.1%)	68
10.	Children who are allow to participate in sports will have more friends than children who are not allowed.	131 (33.0%)	151 (38.0%)	282	61 (15.4%)	54 (13.6%)	115
11.	Children exposed to sport at early age will exhibit respect to elders more than children who are not expose to sport.	102 (25.7%)	190 (47.9%)	292	52 (13.1%)	53 (13.4%)	105
12.	Early sporting activities allow school aged children to learn proper social ethics.	211 (53.1%)	98 (24.7%)	309	45 (11.3%)	43 (10.8%)	88
	X			303 (76.3%)			94 (23.7%)

Table 3 revealed the mean of positive responses by the respondents to the items is 303 (76.3%), which is greater than the mean of negative responses, 94 (23.7%). This implies that social interaction have influence on early sporting activities of all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: Mental well-being will not have significantly influence on early sporting activities and al round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Table 4: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis Showing Influence of Early Sport on Mental Well-being.

S/N	STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	Df	Cal. Value	Table Value	Remarks
1	Children who are exposed to sport at early stage of their life will have a healthy mental health.	150 (37.8)	151 (38.0)	50 (12.6%)	46 (11.6%)				
2	Sport like cycling enable children to have a coherent mental ability.	201 (50.6%)	158 (39.8%)	25 (6.3%)	13 (3.3%)				
3	Aerobic sport like skipping, running allow children at early age to avoid depression or anxiety that may affect their mental health.	173 (43.6%)	199 (50.1%)	19 (4.8%)	06 (1.5%)	9	151.124	16.92	H ₀ ₁ rejected
4	Swimming allows children to refresh their head and clear bad mood which is dangerous to their mental health.	120 (30.2%)	144 (36.3%)	55 (13.9%)	78 (19.6%)				
Column Total		644	652	149	143				

$P < 0.05$

Table 4 showed that majority of the respondents agreed that mental well-being have influence on early sport activities. Also, the critical value of 151.124 was greater than the table value of 16.92 at 0.05 alpha level 9 degree of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis that stated that mental well being will not have significant influence of early sporting on all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area was rejected. This means that mental have significant influence that stated that mental well being will not have significant influence of early sporting of all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Hypothesis Two: Physical fitness will not have significant influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school age children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Table 5: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis Showing Influence of Early Sport on Physical Fitness

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Df	Cal. Value	Table Value	Remarks
5	School aged children who are exposed to sport are more likely to be physically fit than students without sport.	172 (43.3%)	161 (40.6%)	49 (12.3%)	15 (3.8%)				
6	Sport activities at early age allow children to develop strong bone for healthy life.	168 (42.3%)	190 (47.9%)	27 (6.8%)	12 (3.0%)				
7	Muscle and tissue of children who engaged in sport developed well.	186 (46.9%)	157 (39.5%)	34 (8.6%)	20 (5.0%)				
8	Early sport allows children to maintain healthy organs for daily activities.	200 (50.4%)	169 (42.6%)	18 (4.5%)	10 (2.5%)				
Column Total		726	677	128	57				

9 27.377 16.92 H₀ rejected

P < 0.05

Table 5: revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that physical fitness have influence on early sport activities and all health. Also, the critical value of 27.377 was greater than the table value of 16.92 at 0.05 alpha level at 9 degree of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis that stated that physical fitness will not have significant influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school age children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State was rejected this implies that physical fitness have significant influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Hypothesis Three: Social interaction will not have significantly be an influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Table 6: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis Showing Influence of Early Sport on Social Interaction.

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Df	Cal. Value	Table Value	Remarks
9	Sport activities allow student to bond at early age and lead to good social interaction.	209 (52.6%)	120 (30.2%)	40 (10.1%)	28 (7.1%)				
10	Children who are allow to participate in sports will have more friends than children who are not allowed.	131 (33.0%)	152 (38.0%)	61 (15.4%)	54 (13.6%)				
11	Children exposed to sport at early age will exhibit respect to elders more than children who are not expose to sport.	102 (25.7%)	190 (47.9%)	52 (13.1%)	53 (13.4%)	9	105.228	16.92	H0 ₃ rejected
12	Early sporting activities allow school aged children to learn proper social ethics.	211 (53.1%)	98 (24.7%)	45 (11.3%)	43 (10.8%)				
Column Total		653	559	198	178				

P < 0.05

Table 6: indicated that majority of the respondents agreed that social interaction have influence on early sport activities and all mind health. Also, the critical value of 105.228 was greater than the table value of 16.92 at 0.05 alpha level at 9 degree of freedom of. Therefore, the null hypothesis that stated that social interaction will not have significantly be an influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State was rejected. This means that social interaction have significant influence on early sporting activities and all round health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area Kwara State.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding from tested hypothesis one revealed that early sporting activities have significant influence on the mental health of school children in Ifelodun, Local Government Area. This means that early sporting activities has significant influence on mental health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State. This result is in line with the submission of Olanipekun & Akindutire, (2017) who reported that early involvement in sport aids in preventing or alleviating mental illness, including depressive symptoms and anxiety or stress-related disease. Andersen (2019) also highlighted that team sports participation is associated with decreased rates of depression and anxiety, and improvement in mental wellbeing.

The finding from tested hypothesis two shows that early sporting activities have significant influence on physical fitness of school children in Ifelodun local government area, Kwara State. This implies that early sporting activities contribute to physical fitness of school age children in Ifelodun Local Government Area. This is supported by a group of scientists from Minnesota who investigated the impact of physical exercise on the development of motor skills of children aged 6 - 12 years and came to the conclusion that increased physical activity has positive effects on the development of motor skills in children (Michael, Merlo, Basch, Wentzel & Wechsler, 2015). Also, Lobo and Winsler, (2016), corroborate this finding, when they reported that, creative dance is better achieved when the training is started early among children.

The finding from tested hypothesis three shows that, early sporting activities have significant influence on social interaction of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State. This means that early sporting activities is fundamental to social interaction of school children in Ifelodun, Local Government Area, Kwara State. This is supported by Scholars in physical education who were the first to use these questions as a basis for research, and their studies were usually designed to examine sport participation as an experience that shaped social and personal development in positive ways. Most of these studies found correlations between sport participation and positive character traits, although research designs were generally flawed and provided little information about the dynamics of specific socialization experiences in sports compared to other activities.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Early sporting activities have significant influence on the mental health of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?
2. Early sporting activities have significant influence on physical fitness of school children in Ifelodun Local Government Area, Kwara State?
3. Early sporting activities have significant influence on the social interaction of school children in Ifelodun, Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents are enjoined to allow their children to participate in sport at early stage as it can go a long way to improve their mental well-being.
2. Parents/guardians and schools should provide necessary facilities and sport equipment for children at early age so as to ensure proper physical growth of the children.

3. Parents and guardians should allow children to participate in sport with one another as it is an avenue to build social relationship among children.

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