

## ENCOURAGING CHILDREN'S RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN IGBO CULTURE FOR CHANGING COMMUNITIES

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### **Abstract**

*Recreational activities are those activities full of fun and excitement that involve physical exercise which people perform when they are not working. It is in the culture of the whole world. Igbo culture recognizes the need to recreate and therefore have different forms of recreational activities suitable for children of various ages. It is unfortunate that some of these recreational activities for children in Igbo culture are fading away in most Igbo communities due to modernization. More emphasize are being placed on recreational activities in Western culture in most schools in Igbo land. This contributes to children's lack of interest in their culture and language. The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the recreational activities for children in Igbo culture. Among the major findings is that recreational activities for children in Igbo culture have all the features of any recreational means such as fun, excitement and physical exercise that helps the children's growth. It is also an avenue for teaching and learning of Igbo language and culture. Both parents and teachers should encourage the children to participate in these types of activities and also provide them with good environments.*

Recreation according to Hornby (2000:976); is an activity done for enjoyment when one is not working. Everyone must have time for work and time for rest or leisure. Uti and Ojeme (1997:7) assert that activities done for enjoyment and satisfaction during leisure periods are known as recreational activities. They continued to say that sports and pastimes are done during leisure hours for recreation. The recreational activity helps to reduce tension which must have been developed as a result of work or other problems. They remove anger from people and make them have fun and excitement.

Expressing his on view on the meaning of recreation Ottih (2002:117) opines that recreation is concerned with those activities in which a person voluntarily participate in during his leisure/free hours/time.

Every school programme recognizes the need for a short period of break from the regular class or academic programme in the school time table. The period lasting between 20 to 40 minutes is termed recess, recreation or break (Short long). The length of the break depends on the age and maturity of the students. The period is meant to give the students opportunity to engage in recreational pursuits. The students can use the free period to engage themselves doing what they love to do in the areas of sports, games and other outdoor and recreational activities. The period should not be misused by engaging in mischievous activities (Egenegbe, Nwokeji and Agwubike 1998:107).

From the definitions quoted one can summarize the meaning of recreational activities as those activities engaged in during leisure hours, they may be individual and dual sports, team games, or other pastimes. They remove tension from the participant's body and give him fun and enjoyment. Recreational activities are of two types; the indoor and outdoor recreational activities. Examples of the indoor ones are ludo, chess, ayo, watching television, table tennis, reading magazine and news papers etc. Outdoor recreational activities are; musical activities like choral groups social dance, folk dance modern dance, carving

molding clubs such as Boys Brigade Girls Guide, Man-o-war, Boys scout Drama etc.

#### **Characteristics of Recreational Activities**

- a. It is leisure time activity
- b. It must be satisfying and enjoyable to the participant
- c. It is voluntary
- d. It is constructive not physically harmful
- e. It is non-survival (Ottih 2002;117)

The word child has been defined by many scholars in various ways. A child is any person (male or female) between birth and 18 years of age (Oniyama and Asainaigbo 2004). According to BBC English Dictionary in Igiligi and Ogenyi (2005:1) a child is a human being who is not yet an adult. The general assembly of the united Nations in articles 1 as cites in Victor (2008:63) defines a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the, law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

In Nigeria for example all things being equal, anyone who is a pupil in the nursery, primary or junior secondary school is a child. A child cannot vote or be voted for in an election for he has not attained the voting age of eighteen years and above. In their own explanation of child in plural form Igiligi and Ogenyi (2005:2) say, that children are those who belong to certain age brackets ranging from pupils in the kindergartens to junior secondary schools, children who can run around and play pranks, children who reason as children but not like adults. In order words we are concerned with children who are children adventurous, curious, lively, playful and innocent.

In Igbo concept, a child is someone below the age of 18 years. The name for a child in Igbo is "NWATA". Many of the recreational activities for children in Igbo culture involve physical exercises like jumping running, hopping and other types of body movement. The childhood stage is such a distinct, period that

requires proper growth and development for effective and smooth transition to adulthood. The parents usually have divine, legal and social responsibilities to train and bring up the child to be an acceptable, responsible, promising and successful human being. According to Britane (2000:12) just as a plant needs soil, sun and rain to grow, the child needs care, love attention and understanding for effective growth and development.

Apart from the above needs, children need recreation for fun and fitness. There is a popular saying that all works and no play makes jack a dull boy. A healthy mind lives in healthy body. The recreational activities for children involve the use of body movements which help to prepare them for life in their environments. The movements give them enjoyment and satisfaction. They also involve strength, speed and agility. All these activities in addition to good food and sufficient sleep contribute to healthy growth and development of the children's organ system as well as the nervous system. If a child is well developed both mentally and physically there is every possibility that he will perform well academically. Recreational activities encourage team work among children .Through these activities children are trained on how to be good leaders and good followers. By indulging themselves in craft works such as basket making, broom making, molding pots, cups etc, carving objects and so children at early stage of life are trained to be self-reliant. These are of great benefit to children especially in this modern time where unemployment problems among the youths in most communities in Nigeria are common.

Other benefits of recreational activities as stated in Ottih (2002) are;

1. It helps to release strains and tension of life.
2. It breaks the monotony of daily activity and so prevents boredom and fatigue.

3. It promotes good health and fitness.
4. It develops good citizenship through socially accepted behavior.
5. It gives satisfaction and opportunity for creative self expression.

Recreational activities are very important for every human being especially the children and that is why Oduyale in Adenipekun (2007:182) emphasizes that children must run and jump, they must climb and hang. They must move over wide spaces without restriction. These movements are inevitable and vitally important in the early part of children's development.

Having taken the benefits of recreational activities into consideration and having considered the need for children to exercise their bodies, the Igbo have a wide range of such activities. Some examples of Igbo recreational activities for children are:

1. **Onye elela anya n'azu** (Nobody should look at the back)

Abụ: Onye elela anya n'azu  
Azịza: Mmṛnwu anyi na-aga n'azu  
Abụ: Onye elela anya n'azu  
Azịza: Mmṛnwu anyi na-aga n'azu  
Abụ: Onye elela anya n'azu  
Azịza: Mmṛnwu anyi na-aga n'azu  
Abụ: Onye elela anya n'azu  
Azịza: Mmṛnwu anyi na-aga n'azu

Song: Nobody should look at the back  
Chorus.: Our masquerade is moving at the back  
Song: Nobody should look at the back  
Chorus.: Our masquerade is moving at the back  
Song: Nobody should look at the back  
Chorus.: Our masquerade is moving at the back  
Song: Nobody should look at the back  
Chorus.: Our masquerade is moving at the back

This recreational activity is a play involving about ten or more children, the children will sit or squat around facing themselves while one of them chosen to be moving or rather running round them with a cane as the masquerade will be singing onye elela anya n'azu

while others sitting down will be responding Mmṛnwu anya na-aga n'iro. He/she runs round severally emphasizing that nobody should look back to see the moving masquerade. If someone by mistake looks back the mmṛnwu will flog him/her. The Mmṛnwu continues to sing and run round about three or four times and drops the cane quietly at the back of any of the children sitting. He then runs back to his position and sits down. The next masquerade will pick up the cane immediately to chase the former one before he sits down. He will run fast so that the second mmṛnwu will not catch him and flog him. The second mmṛnwu continues with the song and runs round the children sitting down and the play continues, till all of them take their turns.

2. **Okereke Okereke** (An Igbo name for a male)

Onyeisi: Okereke Okereke  
Ndị ọzọ: Duu duu yaa yaa!  
Onyeisi: Okoroafo Okoroafo  
Ndị ọzọ: Duu duu yaa yaa!  
Onyeisi: Kwenu o ga na-aga  
Ndị ọzọ: O-oga na-aga ngwo  
Onyeisi: Kwenu o ga na-aga  
Ndị ọzọ: O ga na-aga ngwo  
Onyeisi: O ga na-aga  
Ndị ọzọ: O ga na-aga ngwo  
Leader: Okereke Okereke  
Others: Duu duu yaa yaa!  
Leader: Okoroafo Okoroafo  
Others: Duu duu yaa yaa!  
Leader: Sing it shall be moving  
Other: It shall be moving to ngwo  
Leader: Sing it shall be moving  
Others: It shall be moving to ngwo  
Leader: It shall be moving  
Others: It shall be moving to ngwo

Okereke and Okoroafo are Igbo male names. This is also a recreational play among the Igbo children. It is done by about ten or more children sitting round holding a short stick and beating them on the ground according to the

tune of their song. Each of them passes his/her sticks to the person sitting next to him/her in a hurry as the leader says *kwenu o ga na-aga* and they will respond as they move their sticks *o-o ga na-aga ngwo*. They continue moving their sticks fast as the song goes fast until someone defaults by not moving his stick fast before another stick comes to him. In that case he has lost the game. He then gets up and is asked to stay aside as the others continue.

### **3. Akpakoro Kpaakoro**

Abụ: Akpa koro

Azizia kpa koro

Abụ: Akpa koro

Azizia: Kpa koro

Abu:Udu moo

Azizia:Ogene

Abụ: Onye o malụ

Azizia: Duu yaa yaa, duu duu yaa!

Abụ: Onye o malụ

Azizia:Duu yaa yaa Duu duu yaa!

Azizia: O tukwuo

Azizia: Ayaaoo

Abụ: Onye o malụ

Azizia: Duu yaa yaa, duu duu yaa!

Song: Akpakoro

Chorus: Kpa koro

Song: Akpakoro

Chorus: Kpa koro

Song:My potoo

Chorus: Gung

Song:He that falls victim

Chorus: Duu yaa yaa,duu duu yaa!

Song: He that falls victim

Chorus: Duu yaa yaa, duu duu yaa!

Song: As he stoops

Chorus: A yaa ooo

Song: He who falls victim

Chorus: Duu yaa yaa duu duu yaa!

The play also involves ten or more children holding their hands and move round in a circle singing happily. As they hold their hands they move round fast as if they are hopping and stoop down fast when they sing *Onye o malụ duu*

*yaa yaa duu duu ya!* In few seconds they get up and continue the play until they get satisfied or were asked to stop by their leader. Other recreational activities for Igbo children are; *Kedu onye ga-Abụ oyim* (who will be my friend), *Izo nzuzo* (hide and sick game, *Igba oso*. (running) *Tufuonu nwa mere aru* (throw away a child that committed an abomination), *Anyi na-oka ede* (we are cultivating cocoyam) etc.

### **The Practicability of these Activities in the Modern Society**

It is observed that the recreational activities for Igbo children enumerated above are being practiced in the Igbo traditional setting where communal living was highly cherished but today the practice is fading away especially in the urban cities in Igbo land. Many Igbo people today have moved from their local villages to urban towns. Here they live in flats, bungalows duplex etc. which has eroded the practice of compound unit where children of different families within the same compound saw themselves as one and play together. Many parents in the modern societies do not permit their children to practice recreational activities at home to the detriment of their studies. Instead they prefer them to be reading all the time and doing their home works, given to them by their school teachers. There is also the problem of enough space or play ground for the children to play and enjoy themselves.

Some Igbo parents have succeeded in making their children foreigners in their own fatherland by preferring them to communicate only in English language at home instead of their mother tongue or their native language. This has made some of these children not to develop interest in Igbo recreational activities for children.

### **A Way Out**

With the modern system of education in Nigeria today, schools serve as very good meeting point for children of various background. Every school programme as noted earlier by Esgenege, Nwokeji and Agwubike recognizes the need for a short period of break from the regular class or academic programme in the school time table. This period lasting 20 or 40 minutes is termed recess, recreation or break (Short or long). This is for games and other physical exercises. It will be of great benefit if the above enumerated recreational activities in Igbo are introduced at this period to the children. It should be a way of providing for the children a wide range of activities to complement the ones they have been having before. It will also serve as an avenue for the children to learn and speak their local language and develop interest in it especially at this present time many Igbo people mainly the elites are playing apathy to their language. Though the school system has almost erased the challenges on space in that schools usually have a playing field, there are still some private primary and secondary schools in Igbo communities that do not have enough space for playing field. Some schools are sandwiched in between building in some developed cities like Enugu. In such condition the environment is not conducive for learning or for carrying out other co-curricular activities. The government and school inspectors/supervisors should order the closure of such schools that are below the standard of a school. Parents should understand that recreational activities are tagged co-curricular activities that are existing in schools. Children need them for proper growth and development and also for fitness. They should therefore not prevent the children from benefiting from this great opportunity because such exercises will not in any way affect the children's studies negatively instead it will help them to perform better in school work for all works and no play makes jimmy a dull boy. The activities give the

children satisfactions and opportunities for creative expression. Creativity is very important for growing children for it will help them in future to face the challenges of life especially those created by unemployment problems in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Recreational activities as earlier discussed in this paper contribute to the social and physical welfare of the participant. They provide leisure, fun and excitement and remove tension and anger from the participants' body. A look at the Igbo recreational activities for children's reveals that they provide fun and excitement for the children through the songs for each of the activities. The activities also make the children to become sociable. They help to create team spirit in them thereby satisfying the social welfare of the children. This activities analyzed have exercises like dancing, running, chasing, squatting, hopping and the like and these help to take care of the physical requirement of the children. These activities' are really meant for children. They are constructed to suit the children. For children to grow and develop well both mentally and physical, they need to sing, play, jump, run, dance and perform other physical exercises. For safety precaution during the recreational activities, there is need for expert instructors where necessary, there should be practices with moderation to avoid fatigue and there should be provision of adequate, first aid materials and please adhere to laid down rules and regulations.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of all the values of recreational activities for children, parents should encourage their children to participate in this exercise and provide them with conducive environment with all the necessary facilities. The government should sanction or close up

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private schools that have no play field or meet up to the standard of a school in our communities.

Teachers should make sure that the time allotted for recreation in the school time table is well utilized.

The activities should be encouraged not only among the Igbo children but for all children in the world. These activities should also serve as an avenue for teaching and learning language and culture especially for the children of the elites who do not know how to speak Igbo.

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