

Are Filipino Children Still Playing? Results from a Preliminary Time-Use Study

**Ivan Neil B. Gomez, Jaira Grace R. Salazar, Jahzeel Ann G. Adan,
Donna May M. Gutierrez, Joseph Joshua R. Perez**
University of Santo Tomas

ABSTRACT

Background: It has previously been suggested that play is the main occupation the children engage in among children. However, the majority of these studies have been conducted in western cultures. Culture may influence how one group values play among children, which in turn can be reflected in their time-use.

Aims: This study aims to describe the time-use patterns in play engagement of Filipino primary school-aged children from selected schools in Manila.

Methods: Forty-five school-aged children in Manila participated in this study. Their parents logged their everyday activity in a time-use diary for a period of one week (five-day weekday and 2-day weekend). Entries were encoded and coded to determine the total number of hours spent on their different activities, specifically the time used in play activities.

Results: This study found play activities, whether as a primary or secondary occupation, is the least engaged in occupation among Filipino school-aged children, accounting for a mere 8.36 % of their time. There is almost an equal amount of play preference involving electronic devices (46.50%) and physical activities (50.50%) compared to play using traditional toys (24.00%).

Conclusion: The lack of time engaged in play and the dispreference for use of toys among Filipino children needs to be reconsidered by stakeholders in order to better promote and incorporate play in children's daily routines.

Keywords: time use, play, children, Filipino

INTRODUCTION

Occupations are the meaningful and purposeful daily activities humans engage in, which includes activities of daily living, play, leisure and work (WFOT, 2015). Among children, play is considered as the primary occupation, defined as any spontaneous or organized activity that provides enjoyment, entertainment, amusement, or diversion (Parham & Fazio, 2008), which contributes to their learning aside from the knowledge they get from formal settings. As a primary occupation, play becomes the focus of the activity, while as a secondary occupation, play becomes the vehicle for skills and concepts can be taught (Lynch & Moore, 2016). Regardless, through play, children develop initiative, self-regulation, and social skills among other necessary skills supporting childhood development (Goldstein, 2012; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Kangas et al., 2015).

Correspondence may be sent to Ivan Neil B. Gomez via email at ibgomez@ust.edu.ph

Unfortunately, though there is abundant research evidence showing that play supports young children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, the time used in play has often been ignored or at best addressed minimally (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Schaefer et al., 2011). For many children, the opportunities for freely chosen play are narrowing. Much of their play time at home has been lost to music, dance, or other lessons; participation in sports teams (using adult-defined rules); and afterschool homework or test preparation sessions. Some schools even have reduced or eliminated recess time, which is often the time used by children for play, in lieu of additional schoolwork (Pellegrini, 2006). Often, the only outdoor time in a school day is the 10 to 15 minutes left from a lunch period, with rules such as "no running allowed." Thus, the importance of play during childhood must be reemphasized by educators and health care practitioners who understand why it can facilitate skilled social interaction, emotional regulation, higher cognitive processing, and creativity (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Goldstein, 2012; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Kangas et al., 2015). Seemingly, the varying structure and cultural underpinnings of educational social systems may influence the time spent in play among children.

Play deprivation can be detrimental to a child's development. Research has proven that children between the ages of 5 and 14 years, predominantly in the developing nations of Africa, Asia, and South America, are forced into menial labour under inhumane and adverse conditions (White et al., 2009). These children at their prime age of play are driven by survival instincts to contribute to their household income, thereby sacrificing their opportunities to play. On the other hand, many children, especially those who are enrolled in regular schools, are pushed by their caregivers to give full attention to their academics and other school activities; neglecting the importance of play in the life of a child (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009). The conventional nature of play as the primary occupation among children is therefore challenged given the current cultural and socio-economic realities. Thus, in a developing country like the Philippines, it would be interesting to introspect whether similar evidence exists on the time used in play among children.

In the Philippines, Filipino children are observed to have lesser time in play participation (Cuevas, 2010). Several children and adolescents are already working at an early age. In the areas of Manila and other cities in the country, numerous children are working in the streets to earn money (Fernandez & Abocejo, 2014; Kane, 2009). While many of them are engaging in work, some children enrolled in school are preoccupied with their academic tasks; others are very involved with household chores; while some take care of their younger siblings. These situations may greatly influence the time use of Filipino children spent in play.

There are already studies conducted on how Mayan (Bazyk et al., 2011; Gaskins, 2000), American and Hispanic (Hofferth & Sanberg, 2001), and Asian (Baxter, 2007) children use their time, which includes the hours consumed for play activities. However, these were not from an "occupational" perspective. Forms of play often have cultural norms and may look quite different in diverse contexts (White, 2009). Some cultures started finding the difference of play in their own country compared to westerners. No research has yet been made in the Philippines about how Filipino children spend their time. Adopting a tool commonly used in the social sciences (i.e. time-use diary) and considering cultural disparities and the fact that play is the primary occupation of children, the time-use of Filipino children in play will be the focus of the study. This study, therefore, aims to describe the time-use in play engagement of Filipino primary school-aged children from selected private and public schools in Manila.

METHODS

Study Design

This is a descriptive study which used cross-sectional methods that determine how Filipino primary school-aged children (6-12 years old) from selected private and public schools in Manila, use their time engaging in play. Specifically, the authors utilised a Time Use Study design, which "measures the amount of time people spend doing various activities, such as paid work, childcare, volunteering, and socializing" (Tudor-Locke et al., 2011).

Subjects

The participants in this study were children from selected private and public schools in Manila. Their primary caregivers (persons spending the most time with the child, which can be parents, grandparents, siblings, eldest) monitored the children's daily activities from 5 AM to 12 AM (or until the child goes to sleep already). The caregivers acted as a medium to accomplish the time-use survey diary. Two sets of inclusion and exclusion criteria were enacted (Table 1). The first is for the children and the second is for the caregiver.

The participants of this study were selected using a random sampling technique. Manila is the main area where the participants came from. From a pool of the available districts and public school per district, participating schools were randomly chosen. The private school was selected according to the researchers' discretion and convenience.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this study.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Children	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • should be in a regular grade school (ages 6-12); • currently enrolled from the selected schools; and • (3) has no physical or mental disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unable to spend a 5-day weekday in their usual school routine (i.e. absent from school due to some reason) • spends the weekend of the time-use diary implementation in a non-usual academic-related school activity
Caregiver	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • should be able to read and write; • can speak Filipino or English; • has no mental and physical disability; and • (4) should be committed to being a partici- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not physically present during the time-use diary implementation

After selecting the two schools where the study will be conducted, consent forms asking for permission to implement the study were given.

It is worth noting that it is aimed to index the usual occupations of the participants. Thus, children who spend the weekend of the time-use diary implementation in a non-usual academic-related school activity were excluded (i.e. individual practice/tutoring, make-up classes)

Outcome Measures

In this research, a time-use diary was used to record the time spent on different activities of the participants. Time-use diaries have been used extensively in studies of adults and are becoming more popular for studies of children, therefore there are plenty of examples of how to construct and code diaries (Tudor-Locke et al., 2011). This study used a researcher-adapted Time-Use Diary based on the works of the GPI Atlantic (2002). The total time spent (in hours) in different activities, specifically play engagement was recorded across a whole week (5 weekdays, 2 weekend days). These modifications in the Time-Use Diary accounts for contextualization to be sensitive to the educational system in the Philippines, as well as the specific objectives (i.e. time used in play) of this study.

Procedures

Each consent form distributed had a note about the date, time and place of the orientation with the authors (decided by the director of the schools). In every orientation held, the authors introduced the study, discussed the purpose, stated the instruction and demonstrated how to log in on the time-use diaries, distributed the questionnaires for background, and retrieved their consent of joining in the study. The consent forms were collected from the school on the date that was also specified. Those who returned consent forms and those who wanted to join the study were given the time-use diaries that they would answer for one whole week (5 weekdays, 2 weekend days), filling in the activities done by the child during the day. The authors scheduled a date for the caregivers to return the diaries. Follow-ups about the progress of the diaries were made during the week through phone calls, messaging and reminders from the class advisers. The time use survey diary booklets were collected after one week on the said date.

Data Analysis

The summary of demographic data was obtained. Similar to the previous study by Tudor-Locke et al. (2011) and the works by GPI Atlantic (2002), the total hours spent by the children on play, activities of daily living (ADLs), education (inclusive of any school-related activities done outside the school), and leisure activities were tabulated per day, per weekdays, per weekends and weekly. The general time spent in play as primary and secondary

occupation was compared. Comparison between public and private schools was made. Each diary returned was analyzed and tallied by the authors. Means, percentages and thematic content analysis were the tools used to analyze the data. Microsoft Excel 2010 was used to compute for the sum, average and standard deviation of the hours spent in play.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

A total of $n= 45$ participants were able to return the time-use diary (19 participants from the public school and 26 from the private school). Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the participants in this study. There were more females (66.66%) compared to males (44.44%). Children who belonged to the Grades 3-4 were fewer compared to other grade levels.

	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Total No. of Participants	19	26	45
Total No. of Male participants	9	11	20
Total No. of Female Participants	10	15	25
	G1- 5	G1- 5	G1- 10
	G2- 5	G2- 4	G2- 9
Total No. of Participants Per Grade Level	G3- 2	G3- 4	G3- 6
	G4- 0	G4- 3	G4- 3
	G5- 5	G5- 4	G5- 9
	G6- 2	G6- 6	G6- 8

Table 2. Summary of participant characteristics ($n= 45$).

Play Occupation

Generally, play is participated in by the children as their primary occupation (the play activity is done predominantly than the other activity being executed simultaneously) with a total of 450.50 hours of as compared to the secondary occupation of 70 hours for the whole week (Table 3). 15.50% of the total hours spent in play accounts for play engagements as a secondary occupation. The children studying in the private school engaged in more hours of play, either as primary or secondary occupation.

	Public	Mean	Private	Mean	Total
Total Hours Spent as <i>Primary Occupation</i>	208.50	10.97	242.00	9.25	450.50
Total Hours Spent as <i>Secondary Occupation</i>	16.50	0.88	56.00	2.15	70.00

Table 3. Total time (hours) spent in play of the participants ($n= 45$).

Types of Play

The following section contains the types of play that the Filipino children engaged in based on the data results. The children's caregivers individually described the types of play activities. Since there were great variations in the terminologies used, we developed a coding system based on the caregiver responses. Three codes were used to categorize the play being performed by the children: play activities that use electronic devices, physical play activities, and play activities that do not require electronic devices. The play activities under each code were obtained from the information written verbatim on the diaries. Table 4 summarises the types of play activities the participants in this study engaged in.

The caregivers of the children reported on various types of play activities. We present the data in Table 5, which

summarises the types of play the children in this engage in, in terms of the percentages of the total number of hours. Physical play activities garnered the greatest number of responses (50.50%) compared to play activities that used electronic devices (46.50%). Play activities that used non-electronic devices were the least chosen type of play (24.00%). More children from private the school used electronic and non-electronic devices, while children from the public school had more physical play activities.

Table 4. Codes used for the play activities of the children with the corresponding verbatim play activities. *Time-Use of Play as Compared to Other Pertinent Areas of Occupation in Children*

Play activities that use electronic devices	Physical play activities	Play activities that do not require electronic devices
1.1 Computer/Laptop	2.1 Habulan/Takbuhan/Tayaan	3.1 Toy car
1.2 iPad, iPhone, iTouch	2.2 Taguan	3.2 Dolls
1.3 Cellphone games	2.3 Chinese garter	3.3 Lutu-lutuan
1.4 Arcade games	2.4 Ball games	3.4 Sulat-sulatan
1.5 PSP/Playstation	2.5 Sipa	3.5 Lego blocks
	2.6 Talon/Luksong-baka	3.6 Gogos
	2.7 swing	3.7 Mini toys
	2.8 Skating/Skateboard	3.8 Word search puzzle
	2.9 Hula hoop	3.9 Board games
	2.10 Sepak	3.10 Pogs / Cards
	2.11 Baril-barilan	
	2.12 Bahay-bahayan	
	2.13 Spell bingo	
	2.14 Bente-uno	
	2.15 Teacher-teacheran	
	2.16 Tinda-tindahan	
	2.17 Carpenter pretend play	

The Filipino children that participated in this study used most of their time in ADLs accounting for 56.75% of their total hours within the week. This is almost twice as much as the time spent in education-related activities (23.80%). The least amount of time was spent on play activities accounting for only 8.63%, which is more than six times less time compared to ADLs, and almost three times less than school activities. This time-use trend is similar between children attending private and public schools.

Table 5. Types of play that children engage in (n=45).

Types of Play	No. of children from public school that engage in each type of play	%	No. of children from private school that engage in each type of play	%	TOTAL	%
Play activities that use devices	9	47.00%	12	46.00%	21	46.50%
Physical play activities	12	63.00%	10	38.00%	22	50.50%
Physical activities that do not use devices	4	21.00%	7	27.00%	11	24.00%

Table 6. Total number of hours spent per area of occupation by participants from the public and private schools ($n=45$).

	Public	Private	Total
ADL	1,590	1,877.5	1733.75
Education	411	1,043	727
Leisure	267	394.50	330.75
Play (primary occupation + secondary occupation)	225	302	263.50

Note: ADL= activities of daily living

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to describe the time used in play among Filipino school-aged children. This study found play activities, whether as a primary or secondary occupation, is the least engaged in occupation among Filipino school-aged children. There is almost an equal amount of play preference involving electronic devices and physical activities compared to play using traditional toys.

Occupations refer to the “everyday activities that people do as individuals, in families, and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life” (WFOT, 2015). Play as an occupation as mentioned earlier are unplanned activities that bring some form of enjoyment to the child (Parham & Fazio, 2008). As a primary occupation, play activities may include playing hide and seek, “tag,” using toys, etc. However, play may occur as a secondary activity, which is in conjunction with a primary occupation (Blanche, 2011). For example, while the child is being fed, he and the caregiver may be pretending that the spoon is an airplane going through a cave (i.e. his mouth). While play as secondary occupations can occur in different forms, the creativity involved depicts an essential component of play (Bundy et al., 2008). The findings in this study suggest that the majority of the children do not practice this phenomenon of secondary occupations. This is further reflected in the prevalent types of play activities that they engage in, which requires organisation and some structure.

The proliferation of technology-related play activities and devices has seen a decrease in physical activity among children (Cain & Gradisar, 2010). This is apparent in this study’s findings on the preferred types of play that the Filipino children involved in this study. Evidently, electronic devices have taken over toys (Kee & Samsudin, 2014). The technologisation of childhood play has also taken over their homes, with the parents not bothered, or at least not noticing (Plowman et al., 2009). It is projected that if such habits are not curtailed early on, a decline in the child’s developmental trajectory is not far from home (Straker et al., 2014). The findings from this research can be used to develop a study design that can establish baseline data of children’s time use across different occupations with emphasis on play specifically for public health monitoring.

Research on the time used in play activities from an occupational perspective is limited. Nevertheless, the findings of this preliminary study suggest that out of the different possible occupations that the participant children engage in, the time used in play activities is lowest. It is expected that most of the time should be spent on activities of daily living (i.e. sleeping), which supports health and development (De Jong et al., 2011; Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001). However, when compared to their American counterparts, the Filipino children in this study spent more time in educational activities similar to their Hong Kong-Chinese peers. The American primary school curriculum places a great deal of importance in unstructured activities such as play (Miller & Almonm 2009). This may be one reason why westerners use more time engaging in free play compared to Asians. Nevertheless, while sharing similar lesser time used in play, Hong Kong-Chinese children are faced with a great deal of academic pressure (Leung et al., 2010), which may explain higher time used in educational activities, thereby compromising playtime. Worth to note from the findings is the absence of work as a legitimate occupation that children engage in. While work is an expected developmental milestone for adults, in certain cultures, work predominates the time engagements of children. For example, in the Mayan culture children’s daily activities are primarily structured around adult work rather than play and children are expected to independently occupy themselves during their free time (Bazyk et al., 2011; Gaskins, 2000). Mayan families view play as a naturally occurring behaviour that is tolerated but not outwardly encouraged. They usually discourage the child to play if it conflicts with work.

It is evident the cultural reconstruction of play as a construct within a people might be linked to the amount of time children engages in it. This, therefore, challenges the pre-existing definition of play. To an extent, the definition accepted mostly by practitioners has been developed and constructed in the western regions of the world.

Health-related social constructs should be relevant and sensitive to the contexts where they are applied (Betancourt et al., 2016). We must veer away from overgeneralisations, but rather health care practitioners must be aware of existing cultural divergence and convergence (Kirmayer, 2012).

CONCLUSION

From the main objective, which is to describe the time-use patterns in play engagement of Filipino primary school-aged children from selected private and public schools in Manila, this study revealed that play has the lowest rate that the children spend their play time into as compared to other areas of occupation. The total hours given for one whole week in 45 children used in the study is 7560 and those children have spent only a total of 525.5, which is 6.95% of their time in a week.

This study is not without any restrictions. There were several limitations that the researchers had to face. While this study presented a comparison of public and private school children, future studies are recommended to discretely and thoughtfully incorporate such group differences in their research design. Furthermore, the authors recommend having a wider scope of the study that spans citywide and regional initiatives. Improvements in data collection may include the use of mobile apps that can ubiquitously record children's activities by the caregivers.

This study reflects its importance in promoting awareness to parents, teachers, community, and to the entire country regarding the value of playtime and age-appropriate play to a child's development and the lack of priority given to it nowadays. Moreover, the authors intend to set a new perspective about play, specifically to the Filipino community. Specifically, the lack of time engaged in play and the dispreference of use of toys among Filipino children needs to be reconsidered among stakeholders in order to better promote and incorporate play in children's daily routines.

REFERENCES

- Baxter, J. (2007). Children's time use in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: Data quality and analytical issues in the 4-year cohort. Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Bazyk, S., Stalnakar, D., Llerena, M., Ekelman, B., & Bazyk, J. (2003). Play in Mayan children. *The American journal of occupational therapy*, 57(3), 273-283.
- Bergen, D., & Fromberg, D. P. (2009). Play and social interaction in middle childhood. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(6), 426-430.
- Betancourt, J. R., Green, A. R., Carrillo, J. E., & Owusu Ananeh-Firepong, I. I. (2016). Defining cultural competence: a practical framework for addressing racial/ethnic disparities in health and health care. *Public health reports*.
- Blanche, E. I. (2007). The expression of creativity through occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 14(1), 21-29.
- Bundy, A. C., Luckett, T., Naughton, G. A., Tranter, P. J., Wyver, S. R., Ragen, J., & Spies, G. (2008). Playful interaction: occupational therapy for all children on the school playground. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 62(5), 522-527.
- Cain, N., & Gradisar, M. (2010). Electronic media use and sleep in school-aged children and adolescents: A review. *Sleep medicine*, 11(8), 735-742.
- Cuevas, S., Maligalig, DS, Martinez, A., and Rodriguez, RB. (2010) ADB Economics Working Paper Series: Education Outcomes in the Philippines by Asian Development Bank. Available at: <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Working-Papers/2010/Economics-WP199.pdf>. Retrieved: February 12, 2012.
- De Jong, E., Visscher, T. L. S., HiraSing, R. A., Heymans, M. W., Seidell, J. C., & Renders, C. M. (2013). Association between TV viewing, computer use and overweight, determinants and competing activities of screen time in 4-to 13-year-old children. *International journal of obesity*, 37(1), 47.
- Fernandez, R. C. C., & Abocejo, F. T. (2014). Child labor, poverty and school attendance: Evidences from the Philippines by region. *CNU Journal of Higher Education*, 8(1), 114-127.
- Gaskins, S. (2000). Children's daily activities in a Mayan village: A culturally grounded description. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 34(4), 375-389.
- Goldstein, J. (2012). Play in children's development, health and well-being.
- Harding, D. J. (1997). Measuring children's time use: A review of methodologies and findings. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working paper, 97-1.
- Hofferth, S. L., & Sandberg, J. F. (2001). How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 295-308.
- Kane, J. (2009). What the economic crisis means for child labour. *Global social policy*, 9(1_suppl), 175-196.
- Kangas, J., Ojala, M., & Venninen, T. (2015). Children's self-regulation in the context of participatory pedagogy in early childhood education. *Early Education and Development*, 26(5-6), 847-870.

- Kee, C. N. L., & Samsudin, Z. (2014). Mobile Devices: Toys or Learning Tools for the 21st Century Teenagers?. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, 13(3), 107-122.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (2012). Rethinking cultural competence. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 49(2), 149-164.
- Leung, G. S., Yeung, K. C., & Wong, D. F. (2010). Academic stressors and anxiety in children: The role of paternal support. *Journal of child and family studies*, 19(1), 90-100.
- Lynch, H & Moore, A. (2016). Play as an occupation in occupational therapy. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 79(9), 519-520.
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school. *Alliance for Childhood (NJ3a)*.
- Parham, L. D., & Fazio, L. S. (2008). *Play in occupational therapy for children*. St. Louis, MO.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2006). *Recess: Its role in education and development*. Psychology Press.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). Research and policy on children's play. *Child Development Perspectives*, 3(2), 131-136.
- Plowman, L., Stevenson, O., Stephen, C., & McPake, J. (2012). Preschool children's learning with technology at home. *Computers & Education*, 59(1), 30-37.
- Schaefer, C. E., & Drewes, A. A. (2011). The therapeutic powers of play and play therapy. *Foundations of play therapy*, 2, 27-38.
- Straker, L., Abbott, R., Collins, R., & Campbell, A. (2014). Evidence-based guidelines for wise use of electronic games by children. *Ergonomics*, 57(4), 471-489.
- Tudor-Locke, C., Leonardi, C., Johnson, W. D., & Katzmarzyk, P. T. (2011). Time spent in physical activity and sedentary behaviors on the working day: the American time use survey. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 53(12), 1382-1387.
- White, O. T. R., Arthanat, S., & Crepeau, E. L. (2008). Perspectives about occupational justice: can poverty and occupational deprivation influence child development?
- World Federation of Occupational Therapists. (2015). Defining occupational therapy, WFOT, 2012., *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 71:1, 18.