

# Edutainment: Peril or Promise

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the experiences of early childhood education teachers using edutainment in Early Childhood Education (ECE) classrooms. A mixed-methods study was conducted with 35 purposively sampled Early Childhood Education teachers. Seven of these responded to in-depth interview questions, while 28 of them responded to a survey questionnaire. Findings indicated that edutainment motivates learners, as well as linking learning to practical life experiences, and helps learners develop problem-solving skills and social skills. Integrating edutainment strategies such as role play, drama, and games improves students' participation and engagement in learning. However, Edutainment is associated with challenges such as financially expensive and time-consuming. In addition, edutainment requires adequate planning, including the preparation of appropriate props and resources. Three major themes that emerged are, the Promise, the peril and the best practice to optimize learning. The study recommends that teachers should be proactive and adopt 21st century strategies to engage learners using Edutainment

**Keywords:** Edutainment, merit, demerit, Early childhood Education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Learners are bombarded by the entertainment world in which they grow up. We live in a busy world where almost everyone has to multitask to cope with the increasing demands. From babyhood through infancy, parents and caregivers rely heavily on the entertainment world to soothe or entertain babies and preschool toddlers. While the world entertains, the education sector seeks to marry education to entertainment. Being cognizant that early childhood education has now become a global imperative (Dakar Declaration, 2000; NAEYC, 2009; UNESCO, 2009; UNICEF, 2014; Nyarambi & Ntuli, 2020; ) The idea of emphasizing Early childhood education is rooted in the Head Start programming, a American philosophy of providing early exposure to foundational knowledge and skills for children from low-socio-economic backgrounds (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2020). Studies indicate that this approach is vital for all children, not just for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds as this paves their way to a successful academic journey. Considering that the ECD child has very short attention span and a limited ability to grasp complex or abstract concepts makes the idea of edutainment ideally appropriate for such young learners to enjoy learning without tears, for edutainment grabs their attention and motivates them to actively participate in the learning process.

Some educators feel that as these young Generation Y learners get to school age, it becomes difficult to wean them off entertainment and box them onto plain educational room with only dry traditional pedagogical practices. Hence the need to blend entertainment and education helps children to grasp complex concepts through edutainment. Edutainment is a compound word derived from two words, education and entertainment. Edutainment (short for “entertainment-education”) is the use of entertainment media with educational and development objectives. Edutainment can take the form of movies, television shows, documentaries, social media campaigns, music, and games (Banerjee, et al 2019).

The Concept of Edutainment is derived from the amalgamation of education and entertainment. According to Addis (2005), edutainment is a compound word derived from combining education and entertainment. This comes as an application of Neologism in both the classroom and the entertainment world. it is a process of helping the contemporary entertainment-savvy learners acquire education as they are being entertained. As some scholars put it; it is having fun while learning (ELM

Learning). Edutainment may also be described as the integration of entertainment into pedagogical practices. While traditional approaches to education tried as much as possible to keep education and entertained in separate compartments, modern approaches seem to put these two in the same compartment. It is trendy these days to have education and entertainment in the same room and served to the same group of learners concurrently (Rheingold, 1992; Mencarelli, Pulh and Marteaux, 2007). Most of the learners seem to find it more palatable than transitioning from entertainment-filled preschool life to dry education. According to Sibilio, (2013), edutainment is a continuous and innovative brain stimulating experience that results from the interaction between education and entertainment. He goes on to express that there is a tight connection, which occurs between entertainment and education as learners interact in exciting ways they are motivated to explore more about important education concepts. Edutainment grabs the learner's attention that they are motivated to engage in the learning process using interactive and fun packed ways strategies. Early childhood development (ECD) period is the formative period. This is period when educators lay the foundation for approximate moral development, character development, social skills as well as develop decision making skills. These skills formed in ECD prepare them for solving real life problems later in life.

Edutainment may also be described as the integration of entertainment into pedagogical practices. While traditional approaches to education tried as much as possible to keep education and entertained in separate compartments, modern approaches seem to put these two in the same compartment. It is trendy these days to have education and entertainment in the same room and served to the same group of learners concurrently (Rheingold, 1992; Mencarelli, Pulh and Marteaux, 2007). Most of the learners seem to find it more palatable than transitioning from entertainment-filled preschool life to dry education-filled school life. However, Edutainment has its merits and demerits, strengths and weaknesses, this study analyzed the merits and demerits of Edutainment in ECD classroom as perceived by teachers. Edutainment such as role play, games, drama may positively contribute either positively or negatively to teaching and learning practices depending on how each is used (JISC, 2009). Edutainment is associated with development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and social skills.

Since the 1990s, there has been great interest in developing edutainment software and strategies to motivate learners. These include applications that include the allure of electronic games while achieving educational goals (Okan, 2020). This surge for integrating electronic technologies into education has been incrementally surging. However, in the mad rush to adopt this new, seemingly harmless technological fad, could it be that well-meaning educators and parents may overlook the long-term harmful effects of edutainment on pure (unadulterated) pedagogical practices. While most educators believe that learning without tears for fears is the way to go it is also important to avoid the risks associated with the edutainment. Some scholars feel that edutainment may be a Trojan horse which may outwardly seem innocent while it harbors hidden dangers inside. Buckingham and Scanlon (2000) perceive "Edutainment", is a hybrid genre that relies heavily on colorful and interactive material. Okan (2020) contends that while the process of learning should always be exciting, fun and colourful so that learners may acquire information without stressful work and serious study the entertainment should not steal the show, and be an end in itself, Instead, entertainment should be used as a means to an end.

Realizing that education's paramount goals of the development of cognitive structures and character development lead some educators to try to achieve these goals using educational technology as a medium, not an end in itself. It is the vehicle, not the content of Education. There are heated debates on the extent to which educators may fruitfully with minimal risk. While some scholars maintain that learning must be a pleasant experience with fun-filled activities, others believe edutainment is learning at a risk (Okan, 2020). On the other hand, King (1993) contends that edutainment may be described as not just the blending of the words but as a "curious amalgam." Why curious? Probably people want to know the reasons behind this amalgamation. There are usually benefits associated with the outcome of the amalgamation. The purpose of edutainment is to attract and hold the attention of the learners by engaging their senses and emotions through informal gamified technological formats, that are less didactic yet involving interactive pedagogic practices. Definition "Edutainment" is a hybrid genre combining learning and fun. It relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game-like formats, and on more informal, less didactic styles of address (Buckingham and Scanlon 2000). The purpose of edutainment is to attract and hold the attention of the learners by engaging their emotions through a computer monitor full of vividly coloured animations. Similarly, "edutainment" suggests overtly entertaining learning materials, which contain messages addressed to both parents and children. Through explicit educational claims, edutainment software encourages parents to believe that this software is beneficial in developing children's skills in a variety of subjects. They also raise learners' expectations that learning can be enjoyable.

The use of Edutainment in the classroom is in line with earlier educational initiative such as the “No Child Left Behind” of USA, 2002 and the Head Start Act of 2007, a federal program focusing on the provision of comprehensive services to low-income children and families, as it encourages states to develop high-quality preschool programs to prepare children for meeting the standards set by NCLB. This approach concurs with the "Leave No Child Behind" initiative of Zimbabwe, which focuses on ensuring all children have access to quality early childhood education (ECE). This includes promoting inclusive ECE, particularly for vulnerable children, and advocating for universal access to early childhood, primary, and secondary education. The government is committed to providing a strong foundation for improved learning outcomes.

Edutainment is a globally accepted trajectory of ensuring learning through entertainment. This approach that emphasizes that learning should be exciting and fun concurs with McKenzie (2000) who coined a related term “technotainment,” which he defines as technology heavily laced with entertainment. It is quite apparent that as educators shift their focus from education and rivet it on entertainment then education is at greater risk of tilting the balance towards more entertainment than learning. This is in contrary to the ultimate goals of edutainment, optimizing learning by leveraging entertainment. The titles of the edutainment software frequently flighted indicate the nature of the intended outcomes. Such titles and slogans as Fun for Brains is fun for all, Play and Learn Tired of Learning, We got something to keep you edutained (Okan, 2020) may have negative or positive implications for the ultimate desired outcome of education (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2000). The most important development in modern Pedagogy over the past ten years is the transition from knowledge acquisition view of learning to a knowledge construction view of learning. According to the knowledge construction theories, learning involves synthesizing mental representations that make sense to the learner. From this perspective, teaching should no longer be limited to information gathering (Okon, 2020), from lectures and textbooks but should engage the whole community of all learners participating in knowledge construction. In this case, educators facilitate the provision of guides on authentic cognitive and socio-emotional academic tasks through discussion and guided discovery (Suomala and Shaughnessy, 2000; Salomon and Almog, 1998).

Embracing technology and integrating it into educational programs has been an uphill task. Besides the fact that people generally resist change, there is the notion that technology is too expensive and too hard for the old time teachers. “It is not easy to teach old dogs new tricks”; some scholars argue. Hence getting the buy from educational institutions to embrace technology has taken long time. This study is undergirded by the Technology Acceptance and Adoption Model developed by Davis, 1989. The technology acceptance and adoption Model posits that there are two key factors that determine whether a computer system or new technology will be accepted by its consumers or potential users (Urhiewhu & Daniel, 2015): These key factors are; (a) perceived usefulness, and (b) perceived ease of use.

#### Research Questions

What are the experiences of Early childhood education Teachers in implementing edutainment strategies in the classroom ?

1. What are benefits of using edutainment strategies for ECD learners?
2. What strategies seemed to boost the learners performance more?
3. What challenges are faced by teachers in implementing other edutainment strategies?
4. What improvements can be made for effective use of edutainment for ECE?

## 2. METHOD

The study followed a descriptive mixed method study carried out from 35 purposively sampled Early childhood education teachers. This entailed looking at the teachers experiences and interpretations of the merits and demerits of using Edutainment in the classroom as an educational tool.

All ethical protocols, such as ethical consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, transparency, justice, and respect for client privacy were observed. Seven of these responded to in-depth interview questions, while 28 of them responded to an online survey questionnaire through google forms. The qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis identified patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This followed the 6 steps below.

1. Familiarization with data.
1. Systematic coding
2. Generating initial themes
3. Developing and reviewing themes
4. Refining and defining themes
5. Writing up your analysis

Finally, a critical discussion of the analysis and interpretation of the data collected was carried out in order to evaluate the significance of the findings.

### 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of the data collected from the 2 groups of participants, 7 interviewees and 28 Survey participants, were coded, cleaned, and analysed for recurring themes.

**Table 1: Summary of interview findings**

| PARTICIPANT | CODE | Verbatim statements  |
|-------------|------|--|
| 1           | T1   | <p>I used gaming, storytelling and field trips as part of edutainment to enrich my teaching practice in the class that I was attached to.</p> <p>2. Storytelling and Field trips appealed more to the learner's.</p> <p>3. The challenges that I faced in integrating education and edutainment were-maintaining education values ,learners were losing focus on the education side and concentrating more on the fun part</p> <p>-Fundings for the field trips some of the field trips were cancelled because of the funds for example we were supposed to go on a field trip to visit the New Government parliament but it was cancelled .</p>   |
| 2           | T2   | <p>During my teaching edutainment was most effective. I usually use storytelling, songs using my phone and bluetooth speaker. Before starting the lesson my introduction was either a song, story or game. This would help learners to enjoy and be interactive during the lesson. It would be learner-centered and help to create and remember what they have learnt. I would use storytelling to buy their attention and participation. Games would help me to identify where their strengths and weaknesses are. In some lessons I would use role play that also help them to always retain what they have learnt. Sometimes I would play some music or we sing as song for them to pay attention and be fully engaged into the lesson.</p> <p>Challenge- Learners become overexcited and difficult to manage</p> |
| 3           | T3   | <p>I incorporated various edutainment strategies into my teaching practice, such as games, storytelling, and hands-on activities. For instance, I created a math game where children had to solve problems to progress through a virtual maze. This approach made learning fun and engaging, and I saw a significant improvement in their math skills.</p>   |
| 4           | T4   | <p>I used games and story telling</p> <p>Challenge- Resources and internet connectivity</p> <p>I suggest schools should provide enough resource for the ECD learners. These learners learn through observing and modelling. They should be provided Screens for videos, Bluetooth speaker, WIFI for downloading videos and music Play areas should be also be available with proper resources.</p>   |
| 5           | T5   | <p>I used edutainment strategies like storytelling, role-playing, and educational games to make learning fun and engaging for my students.</p>   |

|   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
|   |    | <p>- These strategies helped to increase student participation, motivation, and retention of information.</p> <p>One of the challenges I faced was ensuring that the edutainment activities aligned with the learning objectives. I had to carefully plan and design the activities to ensure that they were both fun and educational. Another challenge was managing the classroom environment, as some children would get overexcited during the edutainment activities.</p> |
| 6 | T6 | <p>Children loved games, simulations and story telling,</p> <p>One of the challenges I faced was ensuring that the edutainment activities aligned with the learning objectives. I had to carefully plan and design the activities to ensure that they were both fun and educational. Another challenge was managing the classroom environment, as some children would get overexcited during the edutainment activities.</p>   |
| 7 | T7 | <p>Children loved to participate- but time was a major constraint -Be organized, plan so as to align edutainment activities with learning objectives: Ensure that the activities are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes.</p> <p>Keep it simple and interactive: Be creative and use readily available resources, simple language and interactive elements to engage young children.</p>  |

### Research Question One: What are the strengths of edutainment?

Edutainment is associated with several strengths. Some of these are discussed here. Besides engagement and focus, edutainment inspires learners, it is highly effective and resource-efficient, it improves school attendance and academic performance. Most of the ECD teachers used edutainment strategies such as storytelling, simulations, role-playing, and educational games. These strategies were reported to make learning fun-packed and engaging for my students (T1, T3, T2, T4, T5, T6)- These strategies helped to increase student participation, motivation, and retention of information (T5). In addition, one participant reported that edutainment boosted the ECD learners performance in Maths (T3).

1. Edutainment can be used as a tool for solving real-life day-to-day problems.
2. Edutainment is generally cost-effective,
2. Edutainment makes learning interesting to such an extent that even the so-called dull student enjoys learning, through gamified apps that can complement learning. This helps in learner engagement through participation in diverse ways
3. Edutainment boosts retention through entertaining learners using multimedia, which increases the amount of information they retain.
4. Edutainment acknowledges that learners often have short attention spans. So, by adding entertaining elements to the learning experience, your employees will focus more.
5. Edutainment is an effective mechanism that may be used as an educational tool for triggering attitudinal and behavioural change and change their perceptions about what is “normal” and socially acceptable behaviour
6. Celebrities and social role models may inspire young learners to pursue their dreams, attempt the seemingly impossible daunting tasks so that ultimately they become high achieving
7. Edutainment may be used as a social influencer, effectively promoting new ideas.
8. Edutainment approach appeals to both young learners and adults, since it appears less formal. Edutainment may thus be used for awareness programs in communities whereby ECD, learners perform dramas with moral lessons to promote awareness and advocacy influencing global audiences.
9. Edutainment may be used in diverse pedagogical ways such as games, story- telling, projects, problem solving etc which easily grab the attention of young ECD learners with short attention span.
10. Entertainment enhances holistic development, as it also offers opportunities for growth and development in other domains such as developing socio skills and improving emotional intelligence. Edutainment thus helps young learners to develop and demonstrate problem-solving skills that prepare them for real life situations.

**Table 2: Responses to the Survey**

|    | EDUTAINMENT.....                             | Strongly agree | Agree | N/S  | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----|--|----------------|-------|------|----------|-------------------|
|    |  | %              | %     | %    | %        | %                 |
| 1  | Enhances learner engagement                  | 66.7           | 32.1  |      |          | 7.1               |
| 2  | Is fun and interactive                       | 53.6           | 42.9  |      |          | 3.                |
| 3  | Reduces stress associated with learning      | 53.6           | 32    | 10.3 |          |                   |
| 4  | Ensures self-paced learning                  | 32.1           | 46.9  |      |          |                   |
| 5  | Improves retention                           | 53.6           | 42.9  |      |          |                   |
| 6  | Develops critical thinking & problem solving | 67.9           | 21    |      | 7.1      |                   |
| 7  | Creates a positive learning environment      | 50             | 39.3  |      | 7.1      |                   |
| 8  | Encourages teamwork and teamwork             | 64.3           | 32.1  |      | 1        |                   |
| 9  | Boosts confidence                            | 60.7           | 28.6  | 1    | 1        | 1                 |
| 10 | Arouses curiosity & motivates learners       | 60.7           | 32.1  |      | 1        | 1                 |
| 11 | promotes holistic development                | 53.6           | 42.9  |      | 1        | 1                 |
| 12 | Time consuming                               | 39.3           | 35.7  | 10.3 | 10.3     |                   |
| 13 | Learner centred                              | 37.7           | 57.1  | 7.1  |          |                   |
| 14 | Teacher centred                              | 42.9           | 17.9  | 17.9 | 10.7     | 10.7              |
| 15 | Teacher centred                              | 42.9           | 17.9  | 17.9 | 10.7     | 10.7              |

In nutshell, the most repeated merits of edutainment are; It develops critical thinking & problem solving - 67.9%; Enhances learner engagement 66.7%; Encourages teamwork and teamwork 64.3%; Arouses curiosity & motivates learners 60.7%; Boosts ECD learners' confidence 60.7%

The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Most participants agreed that edutainment motivates learners, even the shy and reserved learners feel their confidence boosted. By encouraging learner engagement, edutainment is also associated with higher retention of information. In addition, most participants indicated that edutainment promotes holistic learning in a stress-free environment, leading to the development of other domains such as social skills and problem-solving skills.

#### **Research Question Two: What are the Demerits of Edutainment?**

Although edutainment has several merits, it also has some demerits. Edutainment is like fire, in the hands of a wise man. If properly used, it edutainment can be very beneficial. On the other hand, it can be abused because of its weaknesses. Some of these demerits or weaknesses are presented as pointed out by participants.

1. One major demerit is that it is time-consuming. It requires that the teacher plans and goes through the entire program and filters any bad moral concepts that may be embedded or integrated with the good lessons in an education video sold or presented in the name of edutainment. This is important as young learners may not be able to distinguish right from wrong concepts.
2. Sometimes commercialized edutainment has an intense focus on fun at the expense of education. There is danger when painting every aspect of learning with a Disney brush. This has led some to convert a museum into an amusement park
3. At the end of the lesson students may have enjoyed fun and yet fail to achieve the intended educational objectives.
4. The social movements in some cases use edutainment as a platform for advocacy, which may compromise good moral values associated with character development. There might be a need to sift and clip out undesirable components before edutainment is presented to you d learners.
5. In addition, edutainment is also condemned as time-wasting by other educators who wish to present the lesson concepts in brief. Yet with edutainment, the teacher may need to be strictly in charge of time since young learners may be carried with the Edutainment that they may not want to stop and start on another subject.
6. Another demerit pointed out is that some forms edutainment, such as videos or simulation props are financially costly (T4).

#### **Research Question Three**

*How best can the use of edutainment be implemented to optimize the benefits while minimizing the demerits.*

1. The effective use of edutainment such as games, videos, and role plays creates many opportunities for learners and the community at large to improve on awareness and advocacy of global issues.

2. Edutainment offers an opportunity for learners to develop and demonstrate problem solving skills that prepare them for real life situations.
3. Today we are faced with global issues such as security, health, environmental crises etc that are affecting different population groups.
4. Edutainment may be used as an eye opener to enhance awareness of global issues. As learners network with others on simulations of global issues from the classroom, this helps the learners to embrace a sense of community and the desire to contribute to the needs & the welfare of their people

#### 4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Although the application of Edutainment is not new, it has been evolving with time. It is used in a variety of ways to give young children a head start in education. This head start allows the ECD learners to grasp complex concepts at an early age. Edutainment strategies have a way of engaging as many learners as possible through the use of multimedia. Hence, edutainment can be a tool to achieve some of the SDGs, and educational policies, such as SDG number 4 and “ No Child left behind (NCLB) Act of 20002 and the Leave No Child Behind (NCB) of Zimbabwe. According to studies by WORLD BANK, 2015 Edutainment is among the most cost-effective ways to change people’s attitudes and behaviours-“*Best Bet Innovation*”. This is associated with boosting children’s school attendance and improving learning outcomes among rural households

Although edutainment has several strengths, it also has its weaknesses. Edutainment is like fire, in the hands of a wise man, edutainment can be very beneficial. On the other hand it can be abused because of its weaknesses. Some of these weaknesses are discussed in the next section. There is also the weakness of having bad concepts being infiltrated into the good lesson through entertainment. Further, edutainment is criticized by some scholars for the "Disneyfication" of educational institutions so that there is more entertainment than learning in the classroom (Ballofet, et al, 2014).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Edutainment or educational entertainment refers to the combination of education and entertainment. It involves using entertainment methods to teach educational content in a fun and engaging way. The main aim of this approach is to optimize learning by blending education with entertainment. Edutainment is defined as an application compounded with educational aims and measurements and providing learners with skills and clearer understanding regarding the value of life, using available resources, innovative methods presented in a way that ensures that learners have a good time in the learning experience (Aksakal, 2015). The major goal of Edutainment is to create an environment where learning becomes an enjoyable experience rather than a chore. This entails incorporating strategies, such as simulations, games, role plays, etc. One of its distinctive features is that edutainment is not only focused on the content but also on the way in which the content is delivered. Edutainment transforms the teacher’s role in the classroom from being a Sage on the stage to a guide by the learner’s side (King, 1993). Hence, if properly implemented, edutainment may contribute to better information retention among young learners as well as job creation and opportunities for jobs for the school leavers. Three major themes that emerged are, the Promise, the Peril and the best Practice to optimize learning. These are the 3 Ps. These three major themes that stood out are; 1. the **Promise** (advantages) of edutainment to the field of education. 2. The **Perils** (disadvantages)-perils associated with edutainment, and 3. the best **practices** that minimize the negatives and optimize the promise of edutainment.

##### **Theme one- The promise. This has 7 subthemes**

Edutainment develops critical thinking, empowers learners with problem solving skills, enhances learner engagement, encourages teamwork, arouses learners curiosity, motivates learners and boosts ECD learners’ confidence to actively participate in learning, thus improving academic performance.

##### **Theme Two: Perils of Edutainment**

The main danger associated with edutainment is; the Disneyfication of the learning process to the extent that as learners mature, they cannot learn without being stimulated by entertainment or gamification. Educators need to find a way of eliminating this notion.

##### **Theme Three: Best Practices with Edutainment**

The best practice of implementing Edutainment effectively is to set SMART objectives, stick to stipulated time frame and assess if the objectives have been achieved after each lesson. This way edutainment ceases to be entertainment and end in itself but uses entertainment as a channel to optimize learning in an enjoyable way.

In a nutshell, the research generated indicators that show the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), focusing on quality education, strongly emphasizes inclusive education, aiming to ensure that all learners, including those with disabilities, have equal access to quality education at all levels. This goal recognizes that inclusive education is crucial for achieving the SDGs and promotes a learning environment. Thematic analysis triangulated the quantitative findings. The study recommends that educators scale up their pedagogical skills, integrating edutainment strategies such as role plays, simulations, gamification and using digital tools in support of teaching and learning in early childhood.

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