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Play as a necessity for the quality of life of older adults

[*El juego como necesidad para la calidad de vida del adulto mayor*]

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: play is a social, motor and affective activity that promotes participation, motivation and well-being in older adults. Its systematic inclusion in physical activity sessions can contribute to a better quality of life.

Objective: to design games that promote health, mood and motivation in order to improve the quality of life of older adults at the Pepito Tey sports complex in Santiago de Cuba.

Materials and methods: a descriptive study was conducted. The sample comprised 12 older adults selected through non-probability sampling from a population of 28. The

study used theoretical methods (analysis-synthesis), empirical methods (observation, interview, survey and expert judgment), and statistical procedures (percentage analysis).

Results: the diagnosis showed limited use of games during the classes, low participant motivation and a need for greater teacher preparation. In response, a proposal of five games was developed to stimulate participation, mobility, memory and interpersonal relationships.

Conclusions: the proposed games are relevant and feasible for working with older adults. Their use may contribute to mood, social interaction, motivation and quality of life in this age group.

Keywords: play, older adults, quality of life, physical activity, health.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el juego constituye una actividad social, motriz y afectiva que favorece la participación, la motivación y el bienestar del adulto mayor. Su incorporación sistemática en las clases de actividad física puede contribuir a una mejor calidad de vida.

Objetivo: elaborar juegos que favorezcan la salud, el estado de ánimo y la motivación para mejorar la calidad de vida del adulto mayor en el combinado deportivo Pepito Tey de Santiago de Cuba.

Materiales y métodos: se realizó un estudio con enfoque descriptivo. La muestra estuvo integrada por 12 adultos mayores seleccionados mediante muestreo no probabilístico, a partir de una población de 28. Se emplearon métodos teóricos (análisis-síntesis), empíricos (observación, entrevista, encuesta y criterio de especialistas) y estadísticos (análisis porcentual).

Resultados: el diagnóstico evidenció escasa utilización del juego en las clases, limitada motivación de los participantes y necesidad de mayor preparación de los profesores. Como respuesta, se elaboró una propuesta de cinco juegos con potencial para estimular la participación, la movilidad, la memoria y las relaciones interpersonales.

Conclusiones: los juegos propuestos resultan pertinentes y factibles para el trabajo con adultos mayores. Su empleo puede contribuir al estado de ánimo, la socialización, la motivación y la calidad de vida de este grupo etario.

Palabras clave: juego, adulto mayor, calidad de vida, actividad física.

RESUMO

Introdução: O jogo é uma atividade social, motora e afetiva que promove a participação, a motivação e o bem-estar em idosos. Sua incorporação sistemática em aulas de atividade física pode contribuir para uma melhor qualidade de vida.

Objetivo: Desenvolver jogos que promovam saúde, humor e motivação para melhorar a qualidade de vida de idosos no complexo esportivo Pepito Tey, em Santiago de Cuba.

Materiais e métodos: Foi realizado um estudo descritivo. A amostra foi composta por 12 idosos selecionados por amostragem não probabilística de uma população de 28. Foram utilizados métodos teóricos (análise-síntese), empíricos (observação, entrevista, questionário e opinião de especialistas) e estatísticos (análise percentual).

Resultados: A avaliação revelou uso limitado de jogos nas aulas, baixa motivação dos participantes e necessidade de melhor capacitação dos professores. Em resposta, foi desenvolvida uma proposta de cinco jogos com potencial para estimular a participação, a mobilidade, a memória e as relações interpessoais. **Conclusões:** Os jogos propostos são relevantes e viáveis para o trabalho com idosos. O uso de jogos pode contribuir para o humor, a socialização, a motivação e a qualidade de vida dessa faixa etária.

Palavras-chave: jogos, idosos, qualidade de vida, atividade física.

INTRODUCTION

Population aging is a demographic and social process with a broad impact. In this context, systematic physical activity, recreation, and play take on special importance because they promote functional autonomy, socialization, and psychological well-being in older adults.

The literature reviewed highlights that physical activity contributes to improved physical and emotional health at this stage of life, while also strengthening a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and social participation (Casamen, 2022). Similarly, it has been noted that recreational games can be an effective way to increase the participation of older adults in community activities and improve their quality of life (Jarque *et al.*, 2022).

Previous research has shown that games are a valid alternative for increasing motivation toward physical activity in older adults, provided they meet their needs, preferences, and movement capabilities (La Rosa Arias *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Bermúdez Chaviano *et al.* (2024) report that physical-recreational activities positively influence autonomy, well-being, and the ability to connect with others.

From a pedagogical perspective, play has significant formative, educational, and communicative value. Barroso Arzuaga (2021) highlights its role in play-based learning and in creating contexts conducive to learning, participation, and motivation. In the case of older adults, these potential benefits can be harnessed to promote health, mood, and group interaction.

However, in practice, limitations are still observed in the use of games within classes aimed at this age group. Consequently, the objective of this research is to develop games that promote health, mood, and motivation to improve the quality of life of older adults at the Pepito Tey sports complex in Santiago de Cuba.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive investigation was conducted using theoretical, empirical, and statistical methods. The study was carried out during the 2024-2025 academic year at the Pepito Tey sports complex in Santiago de Cuba.

The population consisted of 28 older adults enrolled in the senior citizens' group at the institution. The sample comprised 12 participants, selected through purposive non-

probability sampling, based on their consistent attendance and willingness to participate in the activities.

Among the theoretical methods used was analysis-synthesis, which allowed the study of the conceptual references associated with play, physical activity and the quality of life of the elderly.

The following empirical methods were applied: observation of classes, with the purpose of diagnosing the treatment of play in practice; interviews with older adults, to learn about their perceptions of the usefulness of play; a survey of Physical Culture teachers, to assess their level of preparation on this topic; and expert opinion, aimed at evaluating the relevance and feasibility of the proposal.

Percentage analysis was used to process the information. The results were organized in tables and interpreted descriptively.

Diagnostic results

Observation results

Five classes of the grandparents' circle were observed with the aim of verifying the treatment that play receives within physical activities.

The results showed low motivation towards the classes, a limited variety of games, and only moderately favorable hygiene conditions in the area. It was found that traditional exercises predominated, while recreational activities were insufficiently used to stimulate participation, self-esteem, and social interaction.

Table 1. - Observation Results

Observed aspects	Low	Average	High	Total
Motivation towards classes through play	75%	25%	-	100%
Use of different types of games	0%	100%	-	100%
Hygienic conditions of the area	-	100%	-	100%

Results of the interview with older adults

The interview revealed a favorable assessment of play as a resource for maintaining motor and intellectual skills and for improving emotional well-being.

Table 2. - Results of the interview with older adults

Ask	Yeah	No	Total
1. They consider it important to incorporate games to maintain motor and intellectual skills	75% (9)	25% (3)	100% (12)
2. They consider play to be essential in the activities of older adults	75% (9)	25% (3)	100% (12)
3. They recognize that in practice few play activities take place.	100% (12)	0% (0)	100% (12)

Results of the teacher survey

The survey applied to five teachers confirmed that all recognize the importance of play, but admit insufficient preparation to use it systematically with older adults.

Table 3. - Results of the teacher survey

Ask	Yeah	No	Total
1. They consider play essential in working with older adults.	60% (3)	40% (2)	100% (5)
2. They acknowledge few studies that guide games for this age group	100% (5)	0% (0)	100% (5)
3. They consider their preparation insufficient for selecting and applying games	100% (5)	0% (0)	100% (5)

Game proposal

Based on the identified shortcomings, a proposal of five games was developed aimed at promoting mobility, memory, cooperation, motivation and interpersonal relationships in older adults.

Game 1. Walk in different directions

- Objective: to contribute to the development of locomotor motor skills.
- Materials: small flags, chalk, and small balls.

- Organization: participants organized in two or three rows.
- Development: At the teacher's signal, the participants walk slowly to the flag, pick up a ball, and roll it to the next person who continues the action. In this variation, several objects are placed on the ground, and the teacher directs movements to the right or left to pick them up.
- Rules: do not leave before the signal; wait for your partner's turn.

Game 2. Jump like a ball

- Objective: to promote flexibility and coordination.
- Materials: baton, medicine balls or large balls.
- Organization: work in rows by teams.
- Development: At the sound of the whistle, each participant advances with small hops to a mark, circles the mark, and returns to make way for the next participant. The variation consists of performing the course with a ball between the legs.
- Rules: wait for your partner to arrive before starting; jumps must be adjusted to the physical capabilities of each participant.

Game 3. The capitals of the countries

- Objective: to promote memory and cognitive activity.
- Materials: blackboard and chalk or crayons.
- Organization: two teams.
- Development: The teacher writes the name of a country for each team. One team member runs or moves to the board and writes the corresponding capital; then they

can explain an additional fact related to the country. This variation allows the use of dates or historical places.

- Rules: Team help is allowed, but with a lower score.

Game 4. Solidarity

- Objective: to encourage cooperation and support among colleagues.
- Materials: chalk, hoops and flags.
- Organization: working in pairs and teams.
- Development: Lines are drawn on the ground representing streets and sidewalks. One participant helps their partner reach their “home,” represented by a hoop or circle. In the variation, the action simulates picking up the partner at their home to accompany them to the grandparents' circle.
- Rules: The couple who completes the course correctly and safely first wins.

Game 5. My favorite dance

- Objective: to contribute to the development of basic motor skills and body expression.
- Materials: keys, flags, chalk and balls.
- Organization: participants seated or standing in a circle.
- Development: The teacher asks each participant what their favorite dance was and invites them to imitate some movements in the center of the circle. The variation allows participants to substitute a favorite sport for the dance and imitate a characteristic action.

- Rules: everyone must participate according to their physical abilities and in an atmosphere of respect and group support.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The diagnostic findings show that play still occupies a secondary place in classes for older adults, even though both participants and teachers recognize its importance. This situation coincides with that proposed by Jarque *et al.* (2022), who warn of the need to diversify recreational offerings to encourage greater participation of this population group.

The proposed approach aims to address specific needs identified in practice: motivation, mobility, cooperation, memory, and social interaction. In this regard, La Rosa Arias *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that games can increase motivation for physical activity, while Bermúdez Chaviano *et al.* (2024) highlight their positive influence on autonomy, joy, and relationships with others.

The incorporation of games into work with older adults is also supported by evidence on the general benefits of physical activity for this stage of development, including improved physical and emotional well-being, prevention of functional decline, and enhanced quality of life (Casamen, 2022). Furthermore, recent play-based experiences aimed at older adults, even in cognitive areas such as chess, suggest favorable effects on mental stimulation and active participation (Guillermo & Quizhpilema, 2025).

From a pedagogical perspective, play fosters communication, engagement in the activity, and the development of values, making its inclusion in community and therapeutic contexts relevant (Barroso Arzuaga, 2021). Consequently, the presented proposal is considered a viable alternative for enriching the classes of the grandparents' circle.

Limitations of the study include the small sample size and the descriptive nature of the design, which prevent the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the work offers a contextualized, practical proposal that can be refined through future intervention research.

CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical references consulted confirmed the importance of play as a resource to promote the health, motivation and quality of life of older adults.

The diagnosis carried out at the Pepito Tey sports complex showed a limited presence of play in classes, a scarce variety of recreational activities, and a need for greater teacher training for its systematic use.

The proposed games are relevant and feasible for working with older adults, as they potentially contribute to motivation, socialization, communication, mobility, and physical and emotional well-being.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution:

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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