

Reimagining Child-Centred Data Collection in Africa: Rethinking the Nuances of Engaging Children Through Creative and Gamified Research Methods

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BACKGROUND

Meaningful data collection with children can be constrained by limited engagement, adult–child power dynamics, language differences and ethical sensitivities. Traditional adult-centred approaches may miss children’s voices, especially in sensitive or emotionally laden contexts.

AIM

To explore and reimagine effective strategies for qualitative data collection with children, drawing on African nursing and midwifery researchers’ experiences of difficult or failed child-engagement attempts.

METHODS

Exploratory qualitative design • Appreciative Inquiry: Discovery → Dream → Design → Destiny

11 African nursing/midwifery researchers who collected data on children aged 8–12 years • snowball sampling • Oct–Nov 2025

IDIs + participatory group engagements; in-person and virtual sessions (Teams/Zoom). Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke). Ethics:

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FOUR THEMES

1

Power imbalances & researcher–child dynamics

Adult-centred questioning could trigger silence, nodding and withdrawal.

2

Creative expression as children’s language

Drawing and visual expression revealed experiences that words did not.

3

Gamification & visual methods as engagement catalysts

Stickers and play-based approaches reduced anxiety and encouraged participation.

4

Digital platforms expanding participatory possibilities

Virtual spaces sometimes reduced fear, increased privacy and supported disclosure.

CREATIVE TOOLKIT

Drawing interpretation • Stickers • Photovoice • Photo-elocution • Photo-elicitation

PARTICIPANT VOICES

“When we allowed drawing, the child showed more than they could ever say.”

Efua, Academic Researcher, 36

“Turning the session into a game changed everything.”

Kerstin, Clinical Researcher, 45

“The child spoke more freely online than in person.”

Zainab, Academic Researcher, 38

CONCLUSION AND TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Innovative, participatory and gamified approaches can shift children from passive respondents to active contributors.

Addressing power dynamics and offering creative, visual and digital ways to communicate may improve engagement, data richness and authenticity.