

The Effect of Early Childhood Education Experience on the Academic Performances of Primary School Children

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ABSTRACT The study identified the effect of early childhood education experience on the academic performance of primary school children. The research instrument used was the school continuous assessment records. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using z-test statistics, at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that there is a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary education and those without in their academic performances-cognitive ability, social skills and motor skills. Based on the findings and conclusion, appropriate recommendations were made.

INTRODUCTION

Education being an indispensable tool in nations building is a process of systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skill, potentials and abilities which will enable an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of his society and nation. It involves all round development of an individual physically, socially, morally, intellectually, and mentally, (Osakwe 2006). Pre-primary education as defined by Omozeghian (1995) is the education meant for children between the ages of 3 to 6 years. The National Policy on Education (2004) sees pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 years plus prior to their entering the primary school. That is to say that early education is a special kind of education provided in an institution for children, prior to their entering the primary school. Early childhood education, in the context of formal education can be said to be "a formalized educational process to which children between the ages of $2\frac{1}{2}$ through five plus are subjected to in designated pre-school institutions" (Mezieobi 2006)

Learning, according to Osakwe (2006) is a natural process of pursuing meaningful goals, discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience filtered through the learners' unique perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Hence, when a child is born into the world learning commences immediately to enable

him get adapted to the new system. The child learns to feed, hear, see and respond to stimuli, before learning to sit, walk, talk and behave like people around him. Day-to-day fluctuations in a child's behaviour may be expected as he strives between dependency of infancy and the dependency of childhood. He goes further to expose the world around him curiously seeking to acquire knowledge. The drive for curiosity is innate in every child and can be developed to yield greater results by given him early education.

Early childhood education experiences according to Barnard (2001) positively affect later home and school involvement in education. A child who fails to acquire early education may suffer emotionally, socially, intellectually and even physically if he is trusted into the primary school without a sustainable early childhood education experience that will give him a solid foundation in the primary school. Therefore for the effective and efficient unlocking and development of a child's latent abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive values in the society in which he lives, early childhood education becomes very imminent. This is of utmost importance because researches on early childhood education have shown that early childhood education experiences have great impact on all areas of a child's development and had suggested that the first teacher is an extremely important person in the child's life.

According to Feeney, Christensen and Moravick (1987), early childhood education is an asset of immense value in the later academic

pursuit of a child and much more lately in life. This early experience exposes the child to all fields which make him more apt to learn in the primary level as the confidence in his learning capabilities which he acquired from the nursery school is lifted to the primary school. This eventually aids and facilitates his learning. The early childhood institution aims at developing the cognitive and affective potential at an early age. Anderson (2002) is of the view that when children are exposed to early childhood education, they develop superior communication skills, necessary physical ability and social unity needed in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance.

Miedel and Reynolds (1999) are of the opinion that when families are involved in their children's early education, children experience greater success once they enter primary school and even in later life. The formal school setting in early childhood education is a supplement to the home and a substitute. It promotes the complete development of the child that the house can easily provide. Most parents are limited in what they can give such as space, variety of equipment, educational materials and experiences of their children. Many parents are burdened with their own concerns that they are unable to provide the guidance that a child needs as he faces problems and frustrations especially where mothers are the sole support or breadwinner of the family. Children may be left in the care of untrained and unhealthy people in crowded apartment devoid of play materials and playmates that children need leading to neglect and deprivation which may result to lasting severe and negative effects in the life of the child. If however the formative years are characterized by exposure to a wide variety of learning activities and social contacts, skilled teaching, and intelligent guidance, then healthy growth and adjustment occurs. Early childhood education give children a group experience which extends values of family given them a total experience in democratic living in which co-operation is strengthened and competition minimized.

Piaget (1956) spoke on the different effects of the environment on the growth of mental structures of the child which facilitates learning. He said that the environment stimulates learning and the development of the cognitive domain that the early years hold the key to learning. There is therefore the need for special attention to be given

to the sensitive nature of early learning by affording the child the right environment where he will develop the potentials and skills for later life experience and education.

The Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes the importance of education in our economic development and social transformation process; hence she has given priority to early childhood education by inculcating its purpose in the National Policy of Education (2004) as follows:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school,
- prepare the child for the primary level of education,
- provide adequate care and supervision of the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc),
- inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc,
- inculcate social norms
- develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit,
- learn good habits, especially health habits, and
- teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc.

The Government has a deliberate attempt to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the products of our educational system more useful to the society. Therefore early childhood education will provide that vital physical, psychomotor, affective, cognitive, social potentials which are fundamental to human life that will play very essential roles in the academic performance of children in the primary, educational level and even more in the later life of the individual child. This is the crux of the problem which this study attempt to analyze.

Statement of the Problem

Psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Erik Ericson opinionated that early childhood experiences have a lot of implications on the later life of individuals. The rearing practices which the child is exposed to influences the values, norms, and belief of individuals even in later life. The contents of the knowledge which the child is exposed to early in life are bedrock to later education and life. There is a scriptural injunction that says "train up a child in the way he should

go and when he is old, he will not depart from it, proverbs 22 verse 6. From this injunction, conclusion can be reached quickly that the manner of teaching a child to learn in pre-primary school days go a long way to help him through his educational pursuit and even more in his later life. Therefore the problem of this study is to find out the extent to which early education affect the later life of the child.

Hypothesis

To direct the thrust of this study, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

HO₁ There is no significant difference in the cognitive ability of pupils with pre and without pre-primary education.

HO₂ There is no significant difference in the social skills of pupils with pre and without pre-primary education.

HO₃ There is no significant difference in the motor skills of pupils with pre and without pre-primary education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The research design for this study was descriptive survey type, designed to look into the effect of early childhood education on the academic performance of primary school pupils.

Population of the Study: The population for this study comprised all primary school pupils of public schools in Delta State.

Sample and Sampling Procedure: The sample study comprised of 500 pupils drawn from all public primary schools in Delta State. The selection was based on multistage stratified sampling technique. The information obtained from this selection would provide some insight into the general nature of how early child hood education experience would affect academic performance of primary school children.

Instrumentation / Data Collection: The data

for this study were mainly generated from school records. The continuous assessment records showing the pupils cognitive ability, social skills and motor skills were collected from the selected public schools.

Data Analysis: In analyzing the data collected, the z-test statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance and presented on the following tables:

Hypothesis One: Hypothesis one stated that there is no significant difference in the cognitive ability between pupils with pre-primary education and those without.

Table 1 showed that the calculated Z-value of 2.05 was greater than the critical value of 1.96 with Df 498 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected because pupils with pre-primary education significantly differed in cognitive ability with pupils without pre-primary education.

Hypothesis Two: Hypothesis Two stated that there is no significant difference in social skills between pupils with pre and without pre-primary, education (Table 2).

Since the calculated Z-value of 2.66 was greater than the table value of 1.96, the result was significant and the null hypothesis rejected. It showed that there was a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary education and those without pre-primary education in social skills.

Hypothesis Three: Hypothesis three stated that there is no significant difference in the motor skills between pupils with pre and without pre-primary education.

Table 3 showed that the calculated Z-value of 2.49 was greater than the critical Z-value of 1.96 with 498 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected because pupils with pre-primary

Table 1: Cognitive Ability

	N	X	SD	Df	Z-Cal	Z-Crit.	Remarks
CWNE	300	63	5.50	498	2.05	1.96	Significant
CWONE	200	50	7.04				

CWNE = Children with Nursery Education

CWONE = Children without Nursery Education

Table 2: Social skills.

	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Z-Cal</i>	<i>Z-Crit.</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
CWNE	300	30.50	3.49	498	2.66	1.96	Significant
CWONE	200	23.44	4.50				

DF = 498, Z-cal=2.66, Z-critical=1.96 significant at 0.05.

Table 3: Motor skills

	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Z-Cal</i>	<i>Z-Crit.</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
CWNE	300	29.50	6.90	498	2.49	1.96	significant
CWONE	200	22.42	5.00				

education significantly differed in motor skills with pupils without pre-primary education.

DISCUSSION

This study has shown that there is a significant difference in the cognitive ability between pupils with pre-primary education and those without. This is not surprising as several studies have shown that early childhood education has significant impact on the academic performance of pupils. (Barnard 2001; Miedel and Reynolds 1999). Early childhood education has been observed to impact and influence the pupils' performance in spoken and written English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies etc as shown in the continuous assessment records.

Furthermore, this study has also revealed that there is a significant difference between pupils with pre-primary education and those without in social skills. This finding is in consistent with that of Anderson (2002) who said that when children are exposed to early education, they will develop superior communication skills necessary physical ability, social unity needed in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance.

Finally, the study observed that there is a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary education and those without in motor skills. The result indicated that the pupils with pre-primary education had greater tendency to perform better in motor skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that pupils who had pre-primary education perform better in their cognitive skills, motor-skills, and social skills than pupils who did not attend pre-primary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made from the findings and conclusion of the study:

- Early childhood education should be encouraged by the government by providing pre-primary educational facilities (class-rooms, instructional materials, and equipments) needed for the success of the programme.
- There should be proper enlightenment campaign on the importance of early childhood education.
- Parents should be involved in their children's early education experience by providing the necessary materials.
- Educational Planners should provide adequate programmes, policies and curriculum for early childhood education.

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