



INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRIMARY PUPILS IN PAIKORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines influence of early childhood education on academic performance of primary pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria. Three hypotheses were tested. The study employed survey research design. The population of the study consists of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) and a sample of 188 school personnel (82 head teachers and 106 teachers) was selected through proportionate and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was “Early Childhood Education Questionnaire” (ECEQ) which measured pupils’ academic performance, writing skills and extra-curricular activities. The ECEQ was validated through face and content validity, and its reliability was determined using the test retest method and a coefficient index of 0.72 was obtained. The data analysis was made through the use of mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics. The finding of the study indicated that there was a significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on academic performance of primary pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. The study further revealed that there was a significant difference in opinions of school personnel on influence of early childhood education on writing skills among primary school pupils in the Local Government Area. The study also found that there was no significant difference in opinions of school personnel on influence of early childhood education on participation in extra-curricular activities by the primary pupils. It is therefore, recommended that, Niger State Universal

Basic Education Board (NSUBEB) and Paikoro Local Education Authority should work in collaboration to establish pre-primary sections at each primary school across Paikoro Local Government Area. It was also suggested that quality teachers, trainings, facilities and equipment that are necessary and essential for pre-primary and primary schools should be provided for quality teaching and enhancement of academic performance and participation in extra-curricular activities by all categories of pupils in the Local Government Area.

Keywords: *School Personnel, Early Childhood Education and Academic Performance*

Introduction

Early Childhood Education is the foundation of learning and the milestone in child's cognitive development especially, at the primary school level. This is the level of education that children are trained to develop higher academic exercise. The pre-school education forms an integral part of the child's life; as it helps to broaden his/her cognitive and social spectrums which lead to a solid and foundation stone in subsequent educational levels. Early Childhood Education provides the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social developments of the school child. When the child has necessary and requisite background and skills, it can prepare and provide a strong relationship with his/her academic performance at primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels (Nakpodia, 2011). Therefore, early childhood education becomes very essential for the overall development of the child and the education sector as a whole. It is an integral part of basic education that represents the first important step in achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA); and first step in child's educational aspiration (Nakpodia, 2011). Research findings have shown that attending high quality of pre-school programme helps to promote children's social and emotional development (Oniwon, 2015). Hence, children who attended quality early childhood education are more likely to have better test scores and grades (Wana, 2010 cited in Waliyat, & Arshad, 2015). However, the blame for poor academic performance among primary school pupils could be attributed to a variety of factors such as poor or inadequate school facilities, inadequate qualified school personnel, peers influence, family factors, and poor early childhood education.

This study therefore, is borne out the desire to find out how early childhood education could influence academic performance, writing skills, and participation in extra-curricular activities of primary pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

Academic performance is described as the extent to which a pupil has achieved his educational goals, as well as how well he/she is performing in the classroom teaching (Ibrahim, 2016). Academic performance refers to the process of accomplishing academic or educational tasks by pupils (Craft, 2012). Writing, on the other hand, is an essential communication tool for pupils to convey thoughts and opinions, as well as to describe ideas and events, and analyze information. Writing, according to Educators' Practice Guide (2017), is a vital component of pupils' literacy achievement. Thus, improving pupils' writing skills is a predictor in their subsequent educational pursuits and helps them to succeed in and outside the classroom teaching (Olson, 2010). Murphy and Smith (2015) maintained that writing is a life-long skill that plays a key role in primary and post-secondary levels of education; which lead to success across academic and vocational disciplines. This means that, when pupils have solid background in writing skills, it goes a long way to facilitate their academic excellence. Extracurricular activities refer to highly structured activities that emphasize skill building in which the skills attained increase the mastery of complex tasks especially under the guidance of competent adult leaders (Nikki, 2009). Massoni (2011) analysed that extracurricular activities are found in all levels of our schools in many different forms. This could be in a form of sports, clubs, debates, drama, school publications, pupils'/students' council, and other social events. Thus, involvement in extracurricular activities by pupils is consistently and positively correlated with school attendance and higher grade point average (Olson 2008 in Nikki, 2009). According to Reeves (2008), there is a strong correlation between pupils' involvement in extracurricular activities and school attendance, behaviour, and academic performance.

Many educators and researchers are of the views that early childhood education is highly beneficial for children's cognitive and educational development. Page in Wilayat and Arshad (2015) found that in ideal pre-school years, the child undergoes a distinct and gradual change in terms of academic excellence, effective communication skills and extra-curricular activities.. Hence, early childhood education provides school children with the opportunity to show

talents and cognitive abilities in primary education being the next stage of learning. It is important to state that there are divergent views and perceptions of stakeholders in the education sector on the role of early childhood education as a complement to primary education. While some are in support, some are against it.

However, very limited researches have been carried out in Paikoro Local Government Area to determine the influence of early childhood education on primary pupils. Based on these differences among opinions of stakeholders concerning primary pupils who attended early childhood education and those that lack the background, this study investigated the opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on primary education across academic performance, writing skills, and involvement in extra-curricular activities in Paikoro Local Government Area.

Statement of the Problem

It is obvious that a number of parents whether educated or not, strive to enroll their children in early childhood education in Paikoro Local Government Area. This is due to the fact that some stakeholders in education have considered early childhood education as a means of achieving quality and children overall development across psycho-social, cognitive and language development in subsequent levels of education. On the other hand, some stakeholders, especially non-literate parents believed that early childhood education is a waste of funds. Thus, despite its value, most parents do not have the access and opportunity to enroll their children into it, which influence negatively on their capabilities in primary education; and form the basis of this study.

Research Hypotheses

For the purpose of this, the following hypotheses were tested:

H0₁ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (head teachers and teachers) on influence of early childhood education on academic performance of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

H0₂ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (head teachers and teachers) on influence of early childhood education on writing

skills of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

H0₃ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (head teachers and teachers) on influence of early childhood education on participation of primary school pupils in extra-curricular activities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

Research Design

Descriptive survey research design was used in this study. This design was considered useful because it permits the researchers to study small sample in order to generalize its findings to the whole population. The population of the study comprised of school personnel in all the public primary schools in Paikoro Local Government of Niger State. The school personnel here consist of teachers and head teachers. Paikoro Local Government Area has a total number of 196 head teachers and 1,620 primary teachers (Paikoro Local Education Authority (2018). This gives a total of 1,816 school personnel as population of the study. Sample size for this study consisted of 30 head teaches and 324 teachers making a total of 354 stakeholders. A multistage sampling technique was used to select sample for this study by the researchers. The schools in Paikoro Local Government Area were grouped to ease randomly selection. However, the sample size was determined using Research Advisors Sample Size Table (2006).

Early Childhood Education Questionnaire (ECEQ) was used as instrument for data collection in this study. The ECEQ comprised of section 'A' for demographic data of the respondents and section 'B' which was made up of 15 items that measure pupils academic performance, writing skills, and indicators of extra-curricular activities. The items were structured on a modified four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), to Strongly Disagreed (SD), which were scored as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

A pilot study was conducted on thirty school personnel (15 teachers and 15 head teachers) from 2 primary schools in Bosso Local Government Area in order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by using the test re-test method. This took place at an interval of two weeks and the scores generated were correlated using the Pearson Product

Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). A coefficient r value of 0.72 was obtained which implies that the instrument was reliable.

The data collection was carried out by the researchers with the aid of two research assistants. An introductory letter was written to the Education Secretary of Paikoro Local Government Area on the purpose of the research and a request for approval to have access to the selected schools and relevant records was made. The letter of permission obtained from the Education Secretary was delivered to head teachers of the selected schools for official permit to administer the instrument. Thus, each teacher selected was given the ECEQ to respond to the items as it represents his/her opinion. The administration of the instrument was made on the spot and it took an average of 15 minutes. The analysis of data was carried out using the mean, standard deviation and t-test.

Results

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on academic performance of Primary School Pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

Table1: Opinions of School Personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of Early Childhood Education on Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State

Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P-value
Head teachers	3.6951	0.2636	-5.0282	0.000
Teachers	3.89	0.27		

The Table 1 above shows the results of t-test on opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on academic performance of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is therefore rejected; implying that there is significant difference.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on writing skills of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

Table2: Opinions of School Personnel (teachers and head teachers) on Influence of Early Childhood Education on Writing Skills of Primary School Pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State

Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P-value
Head teachers	3.3049	0.3665	2.8749	0.0045
Teachers	3.16	0.33		

Table 2 above shows the results of t-test analysis on whether or not there is significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on writing skills of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Since the p-value is less than 0.05($P < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in opinions of teachers and head teachers on influence of early childhood education on writing skills of primary school pupils.

H₀₃ There is no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on participation of primary school pupils in extra-curricular activities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger state.

Table 3: Opinions of School Personnel (teachers and head teachers) on Influence of Early Childhood Education on Participation of Primary School Pupils in Extra-Curricular Activities in Paikoro local Government Area of Niger State

Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P-value
Head teachers	3.0528	0.4735	1.032	0.304
Teachers	2.99	0.42		

Table 3 above indicates results of the analysis on whether or not there is significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on participation of primary school pupils in extra-curricular activities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05($P > 0.05$), the null hypothesis is therefore retained. This implies that there is no significant difference in opinions of teachers and head teachers on influence of early childhood education on participation of primary school pupils in extra-curricular activities.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of this study found that is a significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood

education on academic performance of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. In agreement with this finding, a study by Ewniyi (2012) revealed a significant difference in academic performance of primary five pupils who have kindergarten experience and those without such experience. Nakpodia (2011) also posited that childhood education have strong relationship with pupils' performance at the primary school level and, perhaps, at both secondary and tertiary levels. Hence, pre-primary education according to Hague in Eze (2016) helps to expand the cognitive development of children at the early years of primary education and has a strong bearing on attendance and participation of children in extra-curriculum activities, once they enter primary school. The study of Baji (2015) on impact of nursery education on academic performance of primary pupils in Chanchaga Local Government Area of Niger State also indicated that pupils who had nursery education performance better in concept understanding, writing skills and social development than those without nursery background. This implies that pupils who attended early childhood education possess the basic rudiment of understanding concepts, writing, and social relations.

The study finding further indicated that there is a significant difference in opinions of head teachers and teachers on influence of early childhood education on writing skills of primary school pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. In supporting this study's outcome, Amadi (2013) states that early childhood education makes children develop good language skills, numeracy skills and social habits for effective communication needed now and in later stages of their lives. This is because, through early childhood education, children are exposed to good speaking, listening, reading and writing, which prepare them for transition into the primary level of education. According to Waliyat and Arshad (2015), the environment and educative process of nursery schools allow children to orient themselves gradually to the realities of their world through expression of fantasy and play. Amadi (2010) conducted a study and concluded that it is required of preschool teachers to be given special training that grooms them to be caring and empathetic, teaching them the rudiments of numbers, letters, shapes, colours as well as inculcate in them social norms and values, spirit of enquiry, and creativity through play. This means that preschool or early childhood education enhance children's mental abilities as well as writing at the primary school level.

The finding of the study also shows that there was no significant difference in opinions of school personnel (teachers and head teachers) on influence of early childhood education on participation of primary school pupils in extra-curricular activities in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger state. This

means that early childhood education does not influence extra-curricular activities of primary pupils. Waliyat and Arshad (2015) upheld that the pre-school education is designed to investigate and assist the mental, physical, emotional, linguistic, and also social upbringing. Play, therefore, may be seen as one of the miracles of childhood experiences from nursery to primary level. According to Oniwon (2015), early childhood education provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of children both at the pre-school and primary education. Contrary to finding of this study, Wana (2010) in Waliyat and Arshad (2015) maintained that children who have the experience of early childhood education do not feel shy, they are confident and have a number of playmates who do not hesitate in participating in games or other extra-curricular activities. Thus, the pre-school education is a systematic programme in which children participate in out of class activities before they enter primary school that is designed to promote their social, emotional, academic, linguistic, and literacy skills. Play provides children with a variety of essential experiences: such as sensory, exploratory, emotional, and social experiences which are all sources of mastery of subjects or class achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the result of this study, a conclusion is drawn that early childhood education is very essential in the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of primary pupils. Therefore, pupils who attended early childhood education were more likely to perform better in primary school activities than those who did not attend it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Niger State Universal Basic Education Board (NSUBEB) and Paikoro Local Education Authority should work in collaboration to ensure effective implementation of the objectives of early childhood education. This collaborative effort would ensure that every primary school in Paikoro Local Government Area has a mandatory section for early child care as well as establish early child care development centres in the Local Government Area.
2. Niger State Universal Basic Education Board and Paikoro Local Education Authority should provide quality teachers and through workshops train teachers to enhance quality teaching at pre-primary and

primary schools to improve pupils' writing skills and academic performance.

3. Niger State Universal Basic Education Board, Paikoro Local Education Authority, and other stakeholders such as Parents' Teachers Association (PTA), School Based Management Committee (SBMC), and Old Boys Associations should provide facilities and equipment that are necessary and essential for pre-primary and primary schools to enable effective participation in extra-curricular activities by all categories of pupils in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State.

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