



## **INFLUENCE OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE ON PUPILS SOCIAL SKILLS ACQUISITION IN KATSINA STATE.**

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### **Abstract**

*The study was designed to examine “The influence of pre-primary school experience on pupils’ social skills acquisition in Katsina state” It considered a research questions hypotheses which bordered on the difference in the social skills performance of preschool children who are exposed to early childhood education compare to the children who are not exposed to early childhood education. Three hundred and eighty-one (381) primary one pupil from the ten (10) local government areas of the state. In dependent t-test sample statistics was used. The result revealed significant difference in the social skill performance of primary school pupils between those that participated in early childhood education and those that are not exposed to early childhood education. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the social skills performance of pupils taught in the early childhood education and those that are not is rejected.*

**Keywords:** *Social Skill, Empathy Skill, Interaction Skill, Cooperative Skill, Preschool.*

### **Introduction**

Education is a foundation and building block of any meaningful development be it social, physical, economic, or emotional. The beginning of education is said to be from birth and do not end till the death of an individual. Also, it is a means to the overall development of the individual and the society. Education is a solid base which serves as a means for social, physical, economic, or emotional development of a child. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the education given in preparation for primary education in a formal school to children within age ranges of 3-6 years as a foundation for other levels of

education. Early childhood education is identified with many benefits which, according to Taguma, and Kelly (2012), include achieving adequate child welfare, strong social and economic base for lifelong learning. Based on the numerous benefits of early childhood education, it has received the attention of the world and seen by policy makers as a way of achieving a base for lifelong learning as well as obtaining support for the educational and social needs of the children and families. To ensure the realization of education for all without barriers such as age, gender, ethnicity or culture, the improvement and increase in accessibility of ECE was made the first goal in the Education for All in Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000). Children's right to education has also been emphasised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention which made ECE part of such rights (Education International, 2010). In the light of this, many countries considered the policy and provision of early childhood education. According to Onu and Obiozor (2010), ECE has been adopted to provide chances for the children to gain lifelong experiences through the exploration of the environment.

### **Social Roles of Preschool**

In most countries where education is provided for children, the demand for such institution have grown out of social need rather than the provision of formal education. According to Raji (2000) when remarked that with progressive change in cultural and social values as a result of economic revolution, women have to work in order to support their families financially. As a result of the above it becomes a matter of necessity to many parents to send their children to Nursery schools for proper and adequate careen when their mothers are away for work. Pre-school institution and early education bring children from different families together, and through this they learn to live together like brothers and sisters (Onibokun, 2012).

It was stated further that the children in preschools are made to be responsible. They are thought to respect other people's rights and to be law abiding. The pre-social interaction among pupils from different tribes, tongues, even children from different social backgrounds, living together; A solid foundation for social unity will help to reduce ethnic and tribal prejudices. In Nigeria, as far as the colonial era, many elites, Nigerian had been sending their children to the Nursery school because of pressing social need (Awoniyi, 1977).

### **Objectives of Preschool education in Nigeria**

In relation to the Nigerian educational setting, the importance of pre-primary school education has been well articulated as enunciated by Federal Government of Nigeria (2013).

The goals of pre-primary school education are to:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school;
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
3. Provide adequate care and supervision of the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices);
4. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys;
5. Inculcate social norms;
6. Develop a sense of co-operation and team- spirit;
7. Learn good habits, especially health habits;
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc.

From these goals, it could be adduced that preschool education in Nigeria is based on a robust policy framework that takes the developmental stage of childhood into consideration in a bid to provide a comprehensive educational opportunity for all Nigerian emphasized on social skill acquisition in the preschools.

### **Social Skills**

Walker (2018) Social skills as “a set of competencies that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships, contribute to peer acceptance and to a satisfactory school adjustment and allow an individual to cope effectively with the larger social environment”. Social skills are ways of dealing with others that create healthy and positive interactions. Children who have social skills can communicate clearly, calmly, and respectfully. They show consideration for the feelings and interests of their peers. They take responsibility for their actions, can control themselves, and are able to assert themselves when needed.

Children learn social skills through experiences with peers, examples, and instructions from their parents, and time with adults. It is vital for children to use social skills because they are the route to creating and developing

relationships. They are needed for enriching social experiences, and they lessen the chance for negative interactions. Being the building blocks for friendships, social skills give children the chance to learn from their peers and learn how to be considerate with those they meet in the future. By having a positive impact on life experiences, social skills also give children a sense of confidence and mastery over their environment (Candy Lawson 2013).

Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. The extent to which children and adolescents possess good social skills can influence their academic performance, behaviour, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety. While most children pick up positive skills through their everyday interactions with adults and peers, it is important that educators and parents reinforce this casual learning with direct and indirect instruction. We must also recognize when and where children pick up behaviours that might be detrimental to their development or safety. In the past, schools have relied exclusively on families to teach children important interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, increased negative societal influences and demands on family life make it imperative that school's partner with parents to facilitate this social learning process. This is particularly true today given the critical role that social skills play in maintaining a positive school environment and reducing school violence. Social skills instruction can provide guidance when trying to help children build social skills (Quinn, 2000; Sainato & Carta, 1992).

Researchers have also studied particular social skill interventions in a variety of settings, as well as for children of different age levels and abilities. Findings suggest that quality interventions and related instructional strategies might:

- a. Focus on social and emotional learning strategies that encourage reflection and self-awareness.
- b. Encourage children to consider how individual actions and words have consequences.
- c. Develop children's ability to take different perspectives and viewpoints.
- d. Teach students to think through situations and/or challenges by rehearsing possible outcomes.

- e. Create opportunities to practice effective social skills both individually and in groups.
- f. Model effective social skills in the classroom and at home through praise, positive reinforcement, and correction and redirection of inappropriate behaviours.
- g. Adjust instructional strategies to address social skills deficits.
- h. Tailor social skill interventions to individual student needs.
- i. Refer to assessment and diagnostic results when deciding upon an intervention.
- j. investigates strategies designed to meet particular social skill deficits.

### **Types of Social Skills**

While school can be a positive social experience for many children, for others it can be a nightmare. School is not only a place where children learn reading, writing and math. It is also a place where they learn to get along with other people and develop social skills. Social skills are the skills we need to interact adaptively in our cultural environment. Although students do not get grades on social tests from their teachers, their peers are constantly giving them “grades” on “social tests” every day. If a child does well on these “tests”, he is apt to be well liked and happy. He will enjoy school and look forward to coming to school. If a child fails these tests, she is apt to feel disconnected and left out. Failing a social test can be more painful to a child than failing a reading or science test. For some children, social skills can be the hardest subject to pass in school. Social skills play a very important role in a child’s emotional health and well-being. Without friendships, school can be a very unhappy, lonely place that a child might want to avoid. Children are born with innate social competencies just as they are born with other innate strengths and weaknesses in abilities such as attention, memory, language, and motor skills. Weakness in these other skills can negatively affect a child’s social competency. (Candy Lawson 2013)

### **Interaction Skill**

Good social skills require good interaction skills. Because we interact verbally and nonverbally, both types of skills contribute to how well students relate to their peers. Children with language problems often have trouble socially

because they have difficulty understanding the words that other children use and/or putting their ideas into words to express these ideas to others. They cannot find the right words to use or easily put them together in a way that makes sense. They may have trouble understanding or telling jokes. They may not know the current jargon or idioms that their peers use. They may also have trouble keeping up the pace of conversations, particularly in a group. It is hard for them to jump into a conversation.

Other children, who may have good language skills, have trouble with nonverbal interaction. They cannot “read” body language, facial expressions or tone of voice. These children interpret words literally and may miss most of the intended interaction. Much of accurate interaction depends on nonverbal cues and gestures. To interact competently, a child must be able to process the whole message sent by another and integrate the verbal and nonverbal components of the message. Children with verbal and nonverbal interaction difficulties often resort to temper tantrums or “meltdowns” to interaction emotions such as anger and frustration. They may appear uncooperative, fresh or rude and may be called oppositional and/or defiant. Helping these children improve their interaction skills can greatly improve their social skills and level of peer acceptance.

### **Empathy skill**

Empathy is like perspective taking but means that you are able to feel what the other person feels. Empathy allows you to really connect with other people. For example, if a student got an A on a math test and her friend got a D, she wouldn't brag about her A to her friend because she knows it will make her feel bad because she didn't do well. She could empathize with her by saying something like “That's a bummer.” Other children often think of children who lack empathy as mean, unkind or self-centred. Cohen, C. (2000).

### **Cooperation skill**

Cooperation is about working together and helping others. When kids cooperate, they have more positive social interaction and are better to make and keep the skills needed for a lifetime of friendships. Overall, cooperation is an important skill that children will use throughout their lifetime. Kids who cooperate get along better at home, school and with peers. Parent and teachers

can help children cooperate by talking about, modelling and encouraging these valuable skills. Teaching children how to cooperate early really sets them up for long term success with friendships.

### **Responsibility skill**

Personal responsibility, particularly as it relates to study skills, is the acceptance of responsibility for one's learning like many skills, the acquisition of personal responsibility is a developmental process, best taught and understood over time for our children, personal responsibility begins with the assignment of household chores and jobs along with the establishment of appropriate expectations for their completion. Its expanses students enter school, to include the assumption of school assignments and the development of skills to help students become independent learners. Responsibility is one of six pillars of character education that include trustworthiness, respect, fairness, caring and citizenship. Responsibility can be taught through everyday interaction within a family or caregiver unit and can begin as early as infancy.

### **Preschool Experience and Social Skills Acquisition**

Well-informed teachers of young children recognize the importance of children's social development. The development of social skills lays a critical foundation for later academic achievement as well as work-related skills (McClelland & Morrison, 2013). Social development is such a key issue with young children that several methods to address social skills have been advocated. Some of these methods include

- setting up classrooms to enhance social development,
- providing play opportunities to promote social functioning, and
- teaching social skills directly.

Teaching social skills can incorporate several techniques, including direct instruction, learning from peers, prevention of problem behaviours, and children's books. Many social behaviours are better learned among peers (Ladd, 2005), so teachers of young children are in a unique position to promote social learning in their classrooms. The purpose of this article is to provide teachers with several research-based strategies to promote young children's social skills development.

Children learn these skills from the adults and children in their environment who model and explain how to behave in various circumstances (Ladd, 2005). The social skills that children learn when they are young form the basis for subsequent relationships that they develop in later childhood and adulthood (Ladd; Herald; & Andrews, 2006). Because of the importance of social development in the formative early years, all children need to learn and practice social skills.

**Influence of preschool experience on interaction skill** Children are naturally disposed to interaction. This enables them to establish and maintain social relationships with others, to express and share their thoughts and feelings, to represent and to understand the world around them. As the Primary School Curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999) notes, language has a vital role to play in children's development. Much learning takes place through the interaction of language and experience (Introduction, Department of Education and Science, 1999). This section explores the importance of supporting children's language and communication as part of their learning and development in early childhood. Significantly, Egan (1997), re-conceives education as our learning to use particular intellectual tools such as language and literacy, which shape how we make sense of the world as ours is a peculiar language understanding of the world (author's emphasis). Interaction at any education level plays a vital role in child life.

The ability to interact with one another is very important and has greater influence on their academic experience. Interaction provides children with the necessary tools to question, understand and represent all that they see, hear or experience. Understanding a wide base of vocabulary plays an important role in children's abilities to understand what they are reading later on. Right from an early age, as their vocabulary base begins to build up, children begin to link what they see in books, signs and print to words they know or an experience they may have already had. Interaction skills are also crucial in further extending children's knowledge for example, reading books can be used to help a child deal with a new experience such as the arrival of a new sibling or to explore different lifestyles and cultures.

As children progress and develop, they learn to interact verbally, understand language and recognize that objects and words in print have meaning. Positive adult/child interactions are crucial to the acquisition of language, vocabulary and interaction skills. It is through interactions that adults can explain what



words mean and also extend what children are learning through open questions and information sharing.

Many social skills curricula provide lesson plans and guidance for both individual and group activities. Most involve modelling successful social skills through activities, games, and role-play, with teachers and peers providing the necessary feedback that allows the student to rehearse interactions (Chopra, 2016). In this way, pupils' practice and internalize skills within the classroom, which can often lead to transfer of certain skills to other settings, especially when direct support is provided to promote the transfer of skills. Teaching the skills needed for effective peer interaction early in children's school life can provide the foundation for success at school, and for success in life. There is no question that children need to interact with other children. This desire to play derives from the basic human need to belong to a group (Baumeister & Leary 1995), which results in an intrinsic motivation to co-operate with others towards some common goal. For young children, interest in co-operative play with others comes primarily from the need for social interaction, rather than from the specific content of the activity (DeVries & Zan 1994). Such co-operative interactions are essential for developing children's emerging understanding of fundamental social values of justice, caring and fairness, as well as their social skills and understanding. Battistich & Watson (2017) focused on the use of co-operative and collaborative learning techniques with preschool and early elementary children.

Emphasizes the role of learning in groups as a socialization process and in promoting inclusion, respect for diversity and social understanding. Practical issues around group-based learning with young children are suggested based on theory, research and classroom experience about the types of activities that are most likely to be effective with young children.

Social interactions are interactions that take place between peers that are positive in nature and successful for both children involved. These peer interactions are important because they lead to positive social and emotional development in children. Research has shown that children, who can interact successfully with their peers, even during preschool, are more popular, have stronger friendships, and are included more often in classroom activities than children who lack these skills. Children have many strategies that they use to interact with one another; some of these strategies are appropriate and some are

not. Most caregivers have seen children grab toys from peers, push or hit to get what they want, or ignore a friend who is trying to talk to them. Other children may have difficulty interacting with peers because of developmental disabilities, language delays, or social delays. It is important to teach children positive skills that they can use to successfully interact with their peers (Chandler,1998). Although there is an extensive body of research on co-operative learning (Johnson et al. 1981; Slavin 1990), very little of this research has involved preschool pupils or early elementary age. In their comprehensive meta-analysis of over 500 studies of co-operative learning, Johnson, and Johnson (1989) found only four studies of co-operative learning (less than one per cent of the research) involving preschool children. Perhaps this reflects the widespread, although erroneous belief noted above that young children are developmentally incapable of 'true' cooperation. Nevertheless, the small body of research on co-operation and co-operative learning in early childhood education suggests that young children, like older children, benefit from co-operative learning. For example, Vaughan (1996) introduced cooperative learning into a classroom environment characterized by disrespect, unfairness and intolerance between 5- to 7-year-old boys and girls. She found that co-operative learning resulted in more collaboration, less competitive behaviour, improved communication skills, better tolerance and respect for others, improved self-esteem, and a more positive and productive classroom in general. However, such positive outcomes are not a certainty. Howes and Ritchie (2002) found that for successful co-operative learning, the classroom needed to be a safe place for all students, the children needed to possess the social skills required by the activities.

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 social skills of children in the primary, educational level and even more in the later life of the individual child. Thus, it is in view of this background that this study sets out to investigate the influence of pre-primary school experience on pupils' social skills acquisition in katsina

### **Statement of Problem**

The importance of preschool education cannot be overlooked. Therefore, many researchers over the years have tried to further establish its importance and the role it performs in the development of pupils most especially on their skill acquisition, several previous studies have looked at the influence of preschool experiences and academic performance. However, since no previous study have combined preschool experience and social skills needed to be acquired at early stage of education such as interaction skill, cooperation skills empathy skill and responsibility skill of pupils. The researcher believes it will add to the existing literatures. Therefore, it is against these reasons that the study intends to critically examine the influence of preschool experience on pupils' social skills acquisition in Katsina state because loss of positive social experience in children is correlated with negative later-life consequences such as isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety feelings. Furthermore, low peer acceptance in the early years is a predictor of grade completion, dropout from school, and mental health and behaviour problems.

The main purpose of this research is to examine the influence of preschool experience on primary school pupils' social skill acquisition in katsina state.

### **Research Objective**

To investigate if there is difference in the social skill performance of the pupils who participated preschool and the pupils who did not have preschool experience.

### **Research Design**

This study adopted Quasi Experimental and survey research design. The Quasi Experimental research design lacks the full laboratory control and laboratory isolation. In the case of this study, the researcher sought to establish the difference in the social skill performance of pupils who are exposed to early childhood education and the children who are not exposed to early childhood education.

### **Population of the Study**

The target population of the study as was three hundred and ninety-one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-eight (391,938). That is the total number of

primary one class pupils who transited from preschool 2018-2019 academic year.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The selection of the sample for this study was given careful consideration bearing in mind the purpose of this study. This is because Abok (2016) pointed out that ‘if the sampling plan is not correctly designed and followed, the finding of the study will be incorrect and misleading’. Based on this, to have a representative sample of respondents for this study, stratified sampling was used in selecting the local governments. Those are, Katsina with the sample of 59 respondents, Batagarawa 36 respondents, Rimi 33 respondents, Jibia 49 and Kaita 16 respondents. Others include Daura 70 respondents, Sandamu 15 respondents, Maiaduwa 31 respondents, Zango 28 respondents and Baure 44 respondents. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was adopted in selecting the sample. Three hundred and eighty-four (381) primary one pupil were selected from the ten (10) local government areas of the state.

Local Government Area	Total Population Of pupils	Sample of Pupils
Katsina	10,811	59
Jibia	8,913	49
Kaita	2,987	16
Batagarawa	6,351	36
Rimi	6,074	33
Daura	12,755	70
Sandamu	2,689	15
Maiaduwa	5,721	31
Baure	8,066	44
Zango	5,120	28
TOTAL	69,487	381

Table 1 Distributions of Sampled Local Government and their Population

Source: SUBEB (2018) Katsina state primary school census.

### Instrumentation

The researcher used achievement test for pupils, it contains questions and alternative answers where the pupils selected the most appropriate answers each

of to the ten (10) questions drawn from early childhood education curriculum, titled “Social skill achievement test.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The administration and collection of data was carried out by preschool teachers after seeking from the parents of the children through the school authority. The researcher serves as the research assistance. The research was conducted on primary class one pupils after completing their preschool experience, the research was carried out in the first month of their transition to primary one class. The children were assessed on social skill acquisition in the preschool in comparison with the pupils who do not have early childhood education experience: Control group and Experimental group.

### **Statistical Analysis Procedure**

The analyses were carried out through the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) in the analysis of data and testing of the hypotheses. The null hypotheses seek to ascertain the significant difference between two variables is analyzed through the use of t-test statistic and Pearson Correlation, to uphold or reject the hypotheses advanced for the study an alpha of 0.05 level of significance was used.

**Table 2 Summary of t-test on pupils’ social skill performance between pupils that are exposed to early childhood education and the pupils who are not exposed to the early childhood education.**

Groups	No. of Student s	Mean Score	SD	Df	Pearson Correlation	t <sub>cal</sub>	t <sub>crit</sub>
Experimental	187	6.0267	1.2112	372	0.0495	20.0431	1.9728
Control	187	3.2727	1.3778				

t value is at 0.05 level of significance

The table 2 indicated the result of the independent t-test sample statistics which revealed a significant difference in the social skill performance of primary

school pupils between those that have preschool experience and their counterparts who did not attend the preschool programme. The  $t_{cal} = 20.0431 > t_{crit} = 1.9728$  at degree of freedom 372 and 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, hence there is significant difference in the social skills performance of pupils with preschool experience and those without preschool experience.

### **Discussion on Findings**

The research question determined the differences between the social skill performance of primary school who are exposed to early childhood education and those children that are not exposed. It showed the social skills performance of pupils that participated in early childhood education was 6.0267 while the social skills performance of pupils that did not participate early childhood care education just 3.2727. It means the experimental group performed higher than the control group.

Conclusively, pupils who are taught in early childhood schools have significantly higher social skill performance than their counterpart who are not exposed to early childhood education experience. The education acquired by the experimental group offers the children teachers who an opportunity to learn new approaches for facilitating active learning in Social skills. Therefore, government should make early childhood education a core and compulsory programme that every primary school be it private school or government school must have a section of early childhood education that will prepare the children the social skills needed in primary school. This will also improve children readiness in primary school, man is a social animal that lives within group of people and need to comply and adapt to the social skills require in a social environment.

However, since pre-school education is the first step in child's educational journey and it is among the major factors determining later success of students in the academic arena, pupils should be given a well-planned and adequate pre-primary education. The early years of a child's life represent a crucial period of biological, psychological, social, and emotional growth and change. It was concluded that teachers should focus well on the pupil's social skills and help in the development of the skills.

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