

Early Childhood and School Adjustment among Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study had two (2) objectives, two (2) research questions and corresponding null hypotheses. The study employed a survey research design and the population of the study is 54,062 primary IV pupils from 625 public primary schools in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State out of which a sample size of 381 pupils was selected using Multi stage sampling procedure. An instrument tagged “Early Childhood Education and Pupils’ School Adjustment (ECE & PSA)” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was presented to three experts for content and construct validity which gave a validity index of 0.86. The instrument was further pilot tested at Central Pilot School Garaku using Richards Kuder son reliability method which yielded a reliability index of 0.79. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between play-based learning and school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State. The results also showed a significant positive relationship between socio- emotional learning and school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that early childhood education has a significant impact on children, giving them a solid foundation in primary/lower basic school and positively influencing their primary school adjustment as well as their academic achievement later in life. The study therefore recommended among others that there is need for training and retraining of early childhood education teachers by the Nasarawa State Government on how to effectively and successfully carry out the play based learning in their respective classrooms.

Keyword: Early Childhood Education, School Adjustment, Primary Schools, Nasarawa State

Introduction

All over the world, early childhood/pre-school education has been recognised as necessary for the child's good academic advancement or development. Pre-school education, also known as early childhood education in Nigeria, is children's education from age 0 to 5 years. It is the education given to children in the formal school system before primary education. In the colonial period/era, preschool education in Nigeria was in the form of a sub-standard infant school run by adults who gathered children of age 3-7 years (Gomez, 2016). The sub-standard infant school aimed to teach children the rudiments of numbers and alphabets. Such schools were practised under shades of trees or uncompleted buildings. The unhealthy environment in which the substandard schools were practised made parents complain bitterly, afraid that their children may contract diseases or be bitten by snakes or scorpions in such schools. This placed increased pressure on parents amidst increased demand for preschool education from the government of Nigeria (Enemuoh, 2020).

Early childhood education that includes educational programme that serves children in pre-school years and is designed to improve later school performance. Merriam-Webster dictionary (2019) defines early childhood education as a school for children usually younger than those attending elementary school or kindergarten. Encyclopedia defines preschool as an early childhood programme in which children combine learning with play in a programme run by professionally trained adults. The word “Nursery” lexically means any place in which something is bred, nourished or fostered. Nursery school therefore means a place set apart for educating young children between ages three and five years. Akinola (2018) defines early childhood education as the education given in an educational institution to children aged three to five plus prior to entering into primary schooling. Many societies have practiced home-schooling for centuries. Nursery school in this study is defined as an educational programme in which children between the age of 3 and 5+ undergo a programme carried out by a professional known as the teacher and combining learning and play in carrying out the activities.

A child's innate potentials and curiosity can be fully developed through preschool education. Early childhood/kindergarten education has a significant impact on children, giving them a solid foundation in primary/lower basic school and positively influencing their primary school adjustment as well as their academic achievement later in life (Eskishumal, 2016). The inadequate exposure to preschool education at the early stage of life can be disastrous for a child's academic growth and development as the child who missed the opportunities for early or preschool learning can be haunt throughout life, retarding his/her school adjustment and workplace success in later life. Early childhood education comprises of programmes that include play based learning, intellectual and language instructions, physical and health education, socio- emotional learning among others (Barnard (2018). However, this study will capture two out of this indices or programmes which are play based learning and socio- emotional learning.

Play-based learning is an educational approach that incorporates play as a central component of the learning process. It recognizes that children learn best through active engagement and exploration in a meaningful and enjoyable context. As children play, they engage their imagination, take risks, and learn problem-solving to support their development. Play-based

learning is a powerful approach that has gained significant recognition in early education programs (Enemuoh, 2020). Instead of relying solely on traditional teaching methods, play-based learning embraces the innate curiosity and creativity of children to foster their development. By engaging in purposeful play, children not only acquire essential academic skills but also develop crucial social, emotional, and cognitive abilities (Gomez, 2016).

In a preschool classroom, play-based learning can take various forms. For instance, it could involve setting up hands-on sensory activities, such as a water table or a sandpit, where children can experiment and discover new textures and properties. It could also involve imaginative play with dress-up clothes or pretend kitchens, allowing children to explore different roles and scenarios while developing their language and social skills. Play-based learning is child-initiated and teacher-supported (Akinola, 2018). The teacher's role is to motivate and encourage the children to learn through interactions that expand their thinking. Through play, children engage in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making, all while having fun and building a strong foundation for future academic success.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education is crucial for a child's overall development, fostering skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These skills are not only essential for school readiness but also lay the foundation for lifelong success in relationships, mental health, and overall well-being. Social emotional learning (SEL) is a methodology that helps students of all ages to better comprehend their emotions, to feel those emotions fully, and demonstrate empathy for others (Garcia, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2020). These learned behaviors are then used to help students make positive, responsible decisions; create frameworks to achieve their goals, and build positive relationships with others. Social emotional learning is a vital component of early childhood education, providing children with the essential skills they need to thrive in all aspects of their lives. Through play, exercises and storytelling *pre-school children are able to better express their feelings*, they get along better, show empathy for others (Wichers, 2021).

Social and emotional development begins early in life. This is when children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with others. It's when they learn how to form and sustain positive relationships; experience, manage and express emotions. A growing body of scientific evidence confirms that children who acquire a strong emotional foundation skill in the early years can better manage everyday social interactions later in life (Reynolds, 2021). It is critical for the development of overall brain architecture and has enormous consequences on their ability to learn. Teaching children how to self-regulate in the early years helps them understand and control emotions, focus on learning and manage stress. Teaching children self-awareness in the first years of life helps them develop strong social emotional abilities. School adjustment is a state whereby an individual interacts harmoniously with his environment and is satisfied with the role he has been assigned to play. Cox (2016) conceived adjustment, as an individual's general adaptation to his or her environment and the demands of life. McLloyd in Teibowei et al. (2020) sees school adjustment as the psychological processes through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life; it is the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs; it is the process of finding and adopting modes of behaviour suitable to the environment or to change in the environment. It can also be seen to be

the process through which a person tries to strike a balance between his requirements (needs, desires and urges) and the reality of life; it is the ability of an individual to adapt to his environment even in the place of changes taking place (Wichers, 2021). School adjustment plays a vital role in a child's life; and like a pillar, the entire life of the child is based on it. It is not limited only to a child's progress and achievement, but also their attitude towards school, anxieties, loneliness, social support and academic motivation. With the difference in environment and setting found in the home-school and nursery school, there will be transitional needs, especially for the homeschoolers, that could be confronting them in primary school. To help them adjust in their new environment, these needs are to be addressed since every year numerous homeschooled children are being transferred into primary school and this transfer can be both stressful and it induces anxiety (Surekha, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

The choice of how one's child receives his/her education is a huge decision to make, which is often made depending on personal factors such as time, availability, socio-economic status as well as one's child's personality. This choice, to a large extent, contributes to the success in career, educational foundation, and how educated a child becomes. Early childhood programmes which provide childcare services help in enhancing children's adjustment in primary schools in terms of their attitude towards school, anxieties, loneliness, social support and academic motivation. Unfortunately, not all parents and caregivers can afford to send their children and wards to nursery school due to many factors ranging from financial difficulties to family norms and values, sit-at-home mums, cultural belief systems, religious systems to mention a few; hence some opt for nursery schooling while some go for homeschooling before primary education.

From the foregoing therefore, there is an urgent need for Government to subsidized the early childhood education which will make it accessible to all children irrespective of their family socio economic background because early childhood education will provide the vital physical, psychomotor, affective, cognitive, social potentials which are fundamental to human life that will play essential role in the primary and even more in later life of the children. This study aimed to investigate the impact of early childhood education on school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine early childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Examine the relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State;
2. Determine the relationship between socio- emotional learning and social adjustment among primary school pupils in the study area.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

1. What is the relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State?
2. What is the relationship between socio- emotional learning and social adjustment among primary school pupils in the study area?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between socio- emotional learning and social adjustment among primary school pupils in the study area

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design allowed the researcher to collect data from the respondents using questionnaire and subject them statistical analysis. According to Orodho (2019), descriptive survey research design is a method of collecting information by way of interviewing or by administering a questionnaire from a selected sample. It is mostly used to collect information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any variety of social issues. This design was deemed appropriate for this study because the researcher collected, analyzed and report information as it exists on the field without the manipulation of the variables under study. Descriptive survey design was used in this study because the researcher tried to find out the impact of early childhood education on school adjustment and academic achievement of primary school pupils.

The target population of the study comprised of fifty four thousand and sixty two (54, 062) primary IV pupils from all the public primary schools in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts of Nasarawa State. There are 625 public primary schools spread across the five Local Government Areas in the Senatorial Districts. The five Local Government Areas are Karu, Keffi, Kokona, Nasarawa and Toto. The distribution of the population is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Study

S/N	LGA	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils
1	Karu	187	17,082
2	Keffi	43	11,945
3	Kokona	123	11,118
4	Nasarawa	172	7,460
5	Toto	100	6,457
	Total	625	54,062

Nasarawa State Universal Basic Education Board (NSUBEB) Lafia, 2025

The sample size of the study comprised of 381 Primary four (4) pupils from the public primary schools in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The sample size was adopted using a table for sample size determination by Paul C. Boyd Educational and Psychological Measurement (2006). The study adopted a Multi Stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select three out of the five Local Government

Areas in the zone based on the high numbers of schools in the area. The selected Local Government Areas are Karu, Nasarawa and Kokona. In the second stage, four (4) schools were selected from each of the selected Local Government Area using simple random sampling technique. Finally, proportionate sampling technique was used to select 381 Primary IV pupils from the twelve selected schools for enumeration. The sample size of the study was presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample Size of the Study

S/N	LGA	Schools	Number of Pupils	Sample Size
1	Karu	Cent. Primary School Gitata	89	33
		Primary School Aso Pada	78	29
		Primary School Kafin Shanu	76	28
		Central School Uke	116	44
2	Kokona	Central School Kana	77	29
		Primary School Yelwa Bassa	92	35
		Primary School Amba	87	33
		Primary School Bokoko	71	27
3	Nasarawa	Primary School Tammah	109	41
		Central School Laminga	94	35
		Central School Bakono	66	25
		Primary School Udeni Gida	58	22
		Total	1,013	381

An instrument tagged “Early Childhood Education and Pupils’ School Adjustment (ECE & PSA)” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument which consists of five (5) items was designed based on 4- point likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA= 4), Agree (A= 3), Disagree (D= 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD= 1).

The researcher visited the sample schools with introductory letter from the Department of Educational Foundations, Nasarawa State University Keffi seeking permissions to conduct research in the sample schools with the help of three research assistants selected from the teachers of the sampled schools. The instruments were administered and retrieved on the spot for analysis. Mean and standard deviations were used in answering the research questions while the formulated hypotheses were however tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). In answering the research questions, any weighted mean below 2.50 was considered disagreed while above was considered agreed. In testing the null hypotheses, if the p- values were found to be less than 0.05, the null hypotheses were rejected while those greater 0.05 were accepted or retained.

Results

Research Question One: What is the relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on Early Childhood and School Adjustment Among Primary School Pupils

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.	Dec.
1	I received early an instruction through playing which enables me adopt to the new environment	162	107	59	53	3.00	0.83	Agree
2	I am able to interact freely with my peers as a result of the early childhood education I pass through.	128	123	52	78	2.79	0.91	Agree
3	I was exposed to early education which makes me have close tied with my teachers	65	87	102	127	2.24	1.12	Disagree
4	I always feel sad whenever my mummy ask me to prepare for schooling	118	109	86	68	2.73	0.92	Agree
5	I feel isolated and lowliness because I have not attended early childhood education	183	144	28	26	3.27	0.78	Agree
Grand Total						2.81	0.91	

Table 3 revealed mean and standard deviation rating on relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State. From the table, the respondents have disagreed with item 3 as evidence from its mean score of 2.24 which is below 2.50 bench mark set for this study. However, the respondents have agreed with items 1, 2, 4 and 5 and seen from their mean scores of 3.00, 2.79, 2.73 and 3.27 for items 1, 2, 4 and 5 respectively which were all above the bench mark (2.50) set for this study. Also, the overall mean score of 2.81 is also above the bench mark of 2.50, implying that play based education has impact on school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between socio- emotional learning and social adjustment among primary school pupils in the study area?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on Socio- Emotional Learning and Social Adjustment among Primary School Pupils

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.	Dec.
1	I have a good concentration during classes	98	184	68	31	2.92	0.84	Agree
2	My exposure to early childhood education has enhanced my communication skills	166	124	59	32	3.11	0.80	Agree

Early Childhood and School (Jibrin, et al.) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59479/jiaheri.v5i1.99>

3	I freely joined my classmates in group reading	173	116	73	19	3.16	0.79	Agree
4	I am always confident to ask question in the class	152	131	52	46	3.02	0.81	Agree
5	I am able to read and write with little understanding	101	155	68	57	2.79	0.91	Agree
Total						3.00	0.83	

Table 4 showed mean and standard deviation rating on the impact socio- emotional learning on school adjustment of primary school pupils of Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts of Nasarawa State. The table further revealed that the respondents have agreed with all the items in the table given their mean scores of 2.92, 3.11, 3.16, 3.02 and 2.79 for items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively which were all above the bench mark of 2.50 set for this study. More so, the overall mean score of 3.00 is also above the bench mark (2.50) of this study. This therefore indicates that socio- emotional learning has impact on school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State

Table 5: Correlation Between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	Std Dev.	Df	R	Sig. (2- tailed)	Decision
Early Childhood.	381	2.89	.98	379	.828	.003	Reject H ₀₁
School Adjustment	381	3.20	.87				

***significant at 0.05 level

Table 5 revealed a positive significant relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, n= 381, R= .828 and p value was .003 which is less than the alpha value (0.05) implying that a positive significant relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, hence the null hypothesis one was rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between socio- emotional learning and social adjustment among primary school pupils in the study area

Table 5: Correlation Between Socio- emotional Learning and School Adjustment of Primary School Pupils

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	Std Dev.	Df	R	Sig. (2- tailed)	Decision
Socio emotional. Learning. .	381	2.92	.86	379	.811	.011	Reject H ₀₂
School Adjustment	381	3.19	.77				

*****significant at 0.05 level**

Table 6 revealed an R value of .811 and a p value of .011 which is less than the alpha value (0.05). This indicates a significant positive relationship between socio- emotional learning and school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between socio- emotional learning and school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts is hereby rejected.

Discussions

Findings from research question one and hypothesis one revealed a significant positive relationship between Early Childhood and school adjustment among primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts, Nasarawa State. This finding is in line with the findings of Enemuoh, (2020) which revealed that Play-based learning is a powerful approach that has gained significant recognition in early education programs. Instead of relying solely on traditional teaching methods, play-based learning embraces the innate curiosity and creativity of children to foster their development. Gomez (2016) also added that by engaging in purposeful play, children not only acquire essential academic skills but also develop crucial social, emotional, and cognitive abilities.

Results of research question two and hypothesis two also showed a significant positive relationship between socio- emotional learning and school adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa West Senatorial Districts of Nasarawa State. This finding has agreed with the findings of Wichers (2021) which revealed that social emotional learning is a vital component of early childhood education, providing children with the essential skills they need to thrive in all aspects of their lives. Through play, exercises and storytelling *pre-school children are able to better express their feelings*, they get along better, show empathy for others. Reynolds (2021) also confirmed that children who acquire a strong emotional foundation skill in the early years can better manage everyday social interactions later in life It is critical for the development of overall brain architecture and has enormous consequences on their ability to learn.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that early childhood education is necessary towards enhancing school adjustment of primary school pupils in the area. Through early childhood education, a child's innate potentials and curiosity can be fully developed through preschool education. Early childhood/kindergarten education has a significant impact on children, giving them a solid foundation in primary/lower basic school and positively influencing their primary school adjustment as well as their academic achievement later in life.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the findings of this study:

1. There is need for training and retraining of early childhood education teachers by the Nasarawa State Government on how to effectively and successfully carry out the play based learning in their respective classrooms.

2. There is also need for Government at all levels and other relevant agencies to embark on sensitization campaign on the need for parents to first send their wards to early childhood education before the primary education looking at its importance in socio- emotional development of pupils.

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