

SCHOOL FACILITIES AS PREDICTOR OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S
SOCIAL SKILLS: A CASE STUDY OF EKITI STATE
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Abstract

This paper investigates how school facilities predicts preschool children's social skills in Ekiti State. The study was guided by two objectives which assessed the availability of school facilities in Ekiti State and examine the influence of school facilities on preschool children's social skills. These were raised into one research question and formulated into two hypotheses and these were: what are the available facilities in preschool in Ekiti State; there is no significant relationship between school learning corners and preschool social skills; there is no significant relationship between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills. The study adopted descriptive survey research method and the target population for the study was all the preschool and preschool teachers in Ekiti State out of which twenty-five (25) schools and fifty (50) pre-school teachers were randomly selected. Two instruments were used for the study namely Checklist on Available School Facilities (CASF) and Questionnaire on School Facilities Influence on Preschool Social Skills (QSFISS). Frequency count and simple percentage were used to analyse the research question while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Correlation and Chi-square (χ^2). The analysis of result ($r = 0.394$, $p < 0.05$) revealed that: there was a significant positive correlation between school learning corners and preschool social skills, there was a significant positive correlation between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills. The study concluded that learning corners are very crucial to socialization of preschoolers and it correlated with the social skills development of preschool children. Availability of school facilities played a great role in developing and furnishing social skills among preschool children. Conducive and well developed school playing ground are needed and

vital in establishing team work, interaction among others as a way of creating and reinforcing pre-school social skills. The researcher recommended that preschool centres and classes should be equipped with adequate and attractive school facilities so that each lesson can be taken with suitable and productive facilities that will reinforce social skills of the preschool children.

Keywords: Preschool, Preschool children, Social Skills and School facilities

Introduction

The goals and achievement of a person's life are affected by his behaviour in the society. Behaviour of a person with others in the society depends on so many factors out of which social skills form the backbone. Basically, social skills are behaviours that promote positive interaction with others (Lynch & Simpson, 2010). Social skills are life skills crucial for children to acquire (UNICEF 2012). It is one of the important skills which enables safe relationship for an individual within the society. Social skills transmits individual presence in the society and ensures adequate contributions to the society (Oyefeso & Adelakun, 2020). Acquiring social skills is a fundamental part of mental health. Social skills are set of skills that need ongoing refinements as children get older. Social skills are not something children has or doesn't have (Amy, 2021). They are skills that can be learned and strengthened with effort and practice. An individual retains appropriate social skills when she demonstrates unlimited abilities to interact and behave socially and effectively, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, making responsible decisions and handling challenging situations confidently with appropriate self-control (Reetu, Vandana & Purnima, 2016). Maryam, Abbas, Minpo, Mostafa and Mojtaba (2019) asserted that

social skills acquired at preschool age are the basis for future life success of the children.

Pre-primary education which can also be called preschool education is also known as early childhood education is about honing and moulding the holistic child which will eventually form the basis of their lifelong journey (Vicki, 2016). Preschool education is largely a post-colonial educational development programme. The semblances of it during the colonial era were the kindergarten and infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. As grouping for instruction in schools was not age-based during that period, some children aged six or even more could be found in some of the infant classes. With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need to put their children in nursery schools. The need grew higher as a result of this, and the increase in the number of working-class mothers, changes in the economic life that warrant women picking up jobs in order to improve and support their families and many Nigerian parents who travelled abroad and knew the importance of that level of education started patronizing the school and even get to start preschool.

The level of awareness of parents in terms of education gave an insight to most parents to see the need for preschool classes, where their children could be given preparatory lessons before they attain school age. Pre-primary education has now become a common educational practice in most countries of the world and Nigeria is not left out. Nations of the world make provision for preschool programmes of various types for children below the official school age (usually 6 years) mainly to prepare them for the rigors of primary education and beyond. Sitati, Bota and Ndirangu (2014) stated that the early years of a child's life are a time when it acquires concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These include the acquisition of language, perceptual motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy, problem solving skills, a love for learning and the establishment and maintenance of relationships. The National Policy on Education through the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012) recognized the need

for acquisition of all these skills and specified through National Policy on Education that preschool should be included in mainstream education.

Thus, Nigerian educational administrators, policy makers and the then military government of Nigeria realized its needs for the country and gave it official recognition in the National Policy on Education through the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1977. The National Policy on Education through the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1976, 1981, and 1998) is a document that is intended to guide the Nigeria educational system from pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical levels and up to the tertiary level. The document presents National objectives which include: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

As stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), the purpose of pre-primary education includes, among others: effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school; preparing the child for the primary level of education; providing adequate care and supervising the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the market, offices, and so on); inculcating social norms; inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, among others; developing a sense of co-operation and team spirit; learning good habits, especially good health habits; and teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, among others, through play.

All over the world, education is the key to development (Oderinde 2005). This clearly demonstrates that education plays vital roles in the development of the individual, society and the nation as a whole (Olusola 2018). Alade (2004) observed that the primary concern of education is the elevation of human conditions. In this view, people are enabled to develop their knowledge and skills, adopt new behaviour and will be able to survive in the society through education. Pre-primary schools are different from traditional day

care centres in that there is emphasis in learning and development so as to prepare them for formal primary education (Mbise, 2000). The school years are meant to provide help for children's social training before formal school. In view of this, the school has important role to play in making the school home away from home to make the children see the need to be in school.

Preschool education is a foundation on which basic education should be founded. Preschool is the education given to younger children before the age of entering primary education (6 years) (Obiweluzor, 2015). Preschool education can promote positive developmental experiences and independence while also optimizing learning and development. The objective of early childhood education is to provide developmental support and care for children in their formative years so that they can acquire the skills necessary for future learning and academic performance in school (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2015).

For this to take place, there is need for a place called school (UNICEF, 2012). Stanton-Chapman (2015) put it that teachers play a key role in understanding opportunities for children in the classroom to gain important social skills. Oghuvbu (2010) in his own view defines school as a setup with main purpose of bringing pupils from different families together under one roof. Also, Nyandwi (2014) defines school as an institution designed for the teaching of pupils (or students) under the direction of teachers. Schooling has direct effects on children's educational achievement, their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge. These basic skills provide the foundation for later subjects.

Furthermore, Little Millennium (2016) ascertains that pre-primary education is essential for children as it is the building block for child's elementary education. Pre-primary education lays a healthy foundation for all round development of a child and prepares her for future education. Pre-primary education exposes children's inner skills so that the child can develop her personality, expresses her inner desires or talents in positive ways, exposes the creativity of the child by allowing the child to develop his

personality in a natural way, allows the child to adjust with her peers and learns to interact with outsiders by helping the child to develop independently outside her home (Little Millennium, 2016). Becoming independent is the first stage of growth. It is essential for the physical, mental, emotional and social growth of the child.

Moreover, in as much as social skills of children is being influenced by school, school systems require facilities such as ICT and multimedia centre, activity rooms, clinic, music and art room, classroom resources, recreational equipment among others are required for the pupils' development. School facilities must be sufficiently spacious, equipped with the right stuff, ensure adequate safety and well illuminated and also aesthetically pleasing because quality learning requires a safe, friendly environment, qualified and motivated teachers and instructions in languages pupils can understand (UNICEF, 2012).

As school facilities influence teachers' continuation, dedication, and exertion, they also influence students' health, behaviour, engagement, learning, and achievement progress (Inferior Avenue LLC 2018). Furthermore, school amenities in school contexts help to stimulate students to learn and interact with one another (Akomolafe & Adesua 2016). In support of this, Ajayi (2000) emphasised the importance of school amenities in improving teachers' work performance. This is going to invariably benefit students' social development. Recent investigations have emphasised the significance of school facility accessibility. Ajayi and Ayodele (2001) argue that the availability of school facilities is critical to establishing efficacy in the provision of instruction and monitoring in an educational system. They went on to say that their possession of crucial amenities such as schools, office space, workshops, athletic facilities, and so on is a great picture of the issues they will come across in the coming years. Despite these facts, experience has shown that most of these educational amenities that are crucial to successful preschool children developing socially appear to be inefficient in our primary educational institutions today; the ones which have been

made accessible appear to be of poor quality, some lack a maintenance culture, and others are in disrepair.

Statement of the Problem

The meeting that the Nigerian Educational Research & Development Council (NERDC) had in August 2004 with the help of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) having experts and stakeholders in early childcare to agree on the minimum standard for operating preschool centres in an integrated way in Nigeria. The minimum standard among which are effecting smooth transition from home to school; inculcating in the child the best social norms; instilling in the child the need for cooperation with others and team support; etc. All aspects of child development are interconnected. Children's ability to learn new things is in her ability to interact with others around them and control immediate impulses. The inability of some children to develop the capacity to negotiate relationship with their peers in school makes them experience loneliness, feel rejected, moody and express sadness. This may have negative implication on their developmental well-being as they can most times withdraw from others. When children experience this kind of skills, they regard the environment as being hostile, unfriendly and cruel. Concerned children may develop mistrust for the society and pay the society back in the like of exhibiting anti-social behaviour such as truancy, fighting and bullying. Meanwhile, some researchers like Olusola (2018), Owoeye and Yara (2010), Harison (2020), Patilla (2021), Isawumi and Oyundoyin (2016) among others have shown that school facilities has influence on the academic success of preschoolers with little or no attention on the pre-schoolers social skills. Hence, this study sought to investigate how school facilities predicts social skills of preschool children in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the school facilities as predictors of preschool children's social skills in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. assess the availability of school facilities in Ekiti State

2. examine the influence of school facilities (learning corners, outdoor facilities) on pre-school social skills.

Research Question

The research question of the study is:

1. What are the available school facilities in Ekiti State?

Research Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between learning corners and preschool children's social skills.

H₀2: There is no significant relationship between outdoor facilities and preschool children's social skills.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design of correlational type. The population of the study consisted all the preschools in Ekiti State. A multistage sampling approach was adopted for the study. One senatorial district was selected from the three senatorial districts in Ekiti State, using simple random sampling technique. One Local Government Area (LGA) in the senatorial district was selected. From the selected LGA, twenty-five schools were selected using simple random sample technique. From the selected schools, two preschool teachers were selected from each of the selected preschool centres across Ikere local government. And this provided the twenty-five schools and fifty preschool teachers needed as respondents. Two research instruments were used for the study, namely: Questionnaire on Teachers' Awareness on School Facilities (QTASF) and Checklist on Available School Facilities (CASF). QTASF was used to know the awareness of the preschool teachers about school facilities while CASF was use to assess the availability of school facilities in preschool in Ekiti State.

The reliability of the instrument was subjected to Alpha Cronbach Reliability Coefficient which yielded 0.80 and 0.60 respectively. The data collected from the administration of the instruments was analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and regression analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the available school facilities in Ekiti State?

Table 1

S/N	School Facilities	Available (%)	Not Available (%)
1.	Abacus	25 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
2.	Digitally based alphabet	8 (32.0)	17 (78.0)
3.	Motion picture system	22 (88.0)	3 (12.0)
4.	Ventilated classroom	25 (100.0)	0(0.0)
5.	Playground and sports facilities	25 (100.0)	0(0.0)
6.	Well maintained toilet facilities	25 (100.0)	(0.0)
7.	Day care facilities	25 (100.0)	(0.0)
8.	Learning corner facilities	22 (88.0)	3 (12.0)
9.	Outdoor court	12 (48.0)	13 (52.0)
10.	Toys	20 (80.0)	5 (20.0)

What are the available school facilities in Ekiti State?

Table 1 shows the analysis of kind of school facilities available in preschool centres. The table revealed that the whole school observed (100%) have abacus in their schools, 78% did not have digitally based alphabet, 88% have motion picture system, the whole school observed (100%) have ventilated classrooms in their schools. Also, the whole school observed have (100%) playground and sports facilities in their schools, well maintained toilet facilities was

available, daycare facilities while 88% have learning corners in their schools, 52% of the schools observed has outdoor court while 80% of the schools has toys.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between school learning corners and preschool children's social skills in Ekiti State.

Table 2: Correlation analysis between school learning corners and pre-school social skills

		School Learning Corners	Social Skills
Spearman's rho School Learning Corners	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.394*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.042
	N	50	50
Social Skills	Correlation Coefficient	0.394*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.042	
	N	50	50

* = significant at the 0.05 level.

The result in table 2 shows the correlation between school learning corners and preschool social skills. The table indicates that there was a significant positive correlation between school learning corners and preschool social skills ($r =$

0.394, $p < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between outdoor facilities and preschool children's social skills.

Table 3: Correlation analysis between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills

			Outdoor Facilities	Social Skills
Spearman's rho	Outdoor Facilities	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.383*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.035
		N	50	50
	Social Skills	Correlation Coefficient	0.383*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.035	
		N	50	50

* = significant at the 0.05 level.

The result in table 3 shows the correlation between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills. The table indicates that there was a significant positive correlation between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills ($r = 0.383$, $N = 50$, $p < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Discussion of Findings

Findings in research question 1 revealed that 100% of the schools observed has ventilated classrooms, abacus, play ground facilities and well-maintained toilet facilities. While 88% has toys, 78% have digital based alphabet, 88% have motion picture system and 52% have outdoor court. This result shows that school facilities are moderately available in the preschools in Ekiti State. which did not support the result of Iroegbu (2016) who posited that many schools resource materials and playthings are inadequate. Meanwhile Asikhia (2010) concluded that adequately well prepared school facilities determine the amount of learning that can take place in a learning institution. Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2013) supported this statement that school is designed to provide learning space and learning environment for pupils. Also, Tierney (2017) supports this that social skills in children developed on playing ground becomes lifelong skills that are carried forward into their adulthood.

Also, the findings in hypothesis 1 revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between school learning corners and preschool social skills. This was in line with the assertion of Gerdes et al. (2013) that the learning corners can promote language development and socialisation as well as cognitive learning if it is set up intentionally to foster these skills. One of the best

ways to do this is for children to sit at tables rather than at individual desks. Once children get into a classroom setting, they need to sharpen their social skills through their interactions with their teacher, their classmates and learning environments. Preschool teachers need to teach social skills through play and fun and learning corners provide the opportunity. The learning corners help pupils to be sharper and smarter in terms academic growth and social relation with use of learning materials further buttressed the finding of Kostelnik et al. (2015) that children who are socially healthy tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher learning outcome than less socially healthy peers. Children's social health affects their overall development and learning. The learning corners needs to incorporate natural materials and objects. Having materials in the classroom that are made of natural materials (wood, living plants, natural lighting, and windows) has an impact on the atmosphere of learning.

Hypothesis 2 revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between outdoor facilities and pre-school social skills. The finding agreed with assertion of Adekunle (2021) that children learn the value of controlling impulses and curbing aggressive behaviour in a social setting in the classroom through interaction with the teachers and the medium of teaching that is the facilities. Learning new skills requires practice, trial, and error. Pre-school centers should provide a safe and comfortable setting for children to try things with and practice social skills such as sharing, cooperation, taking turns, and showing respect for others. Outdoor facilities are used not only for teaching, but also for impacting basic

health and social habits. Teaching social skills among pre-schoolers is better learnt when adequate and appropriate facilities are used to explain concepts and behaviour that has to do with social skills development. This is the reason why Briggs (2019) affirmed that learning will be meaningless to a learner that feels bored when a teacher instead of physically exemplifying what is been taught will resort to under utility of appropriate facilities. Dramatic play or “playing pretend” allows children to experiment with various ideas and to better understand abstract thinking. Playing and interacting with others allows children to gain inspiration and insight from other minds in order to master new concepts in a fun and creative way.

Conclusion

Based on the result of findings in the study, the researcher concluded that the availability of school facilities is low in most of the preschools in Ekiti State. Also, there is a positive correlation between school learning corners, outdoor facilities, and preschool children's social skills in Ekiti State. Therefore, availability, accessibilities and usage of teaching facilities played a great role in developing and furnishing social skills among preschool children. Conducive and well equipped school playing ground are needed and vital in establishing team work, interaction among others as a way of creating and reinforcing pre-school social skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. Head teachers and preschool owners should ensure that spacious and conducive playing ground are provided in their schools such that effective interaction can be established between pupils, teachers and environment for optimum social skills development.
2. Preschool centres and classes should be equipped with adequate and attractive school facilities so that each lesson can be taken with suitable and productive facilities that will reinforce social skills of the pre-school children.
3. Regular and continuous training on modern teaching facilities for preschool

age children should be organized for preschool teachers to keep them abreast of the new invention in teaching facilities in pre-schoolers' classes.

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