



School Learning Environment and Pre-Primary Children's Reading Readiness in Early Childhood Development in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to determine the effects of school learning environment on pre-primary school children's reading readiness in their early childhood development in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The sample for the study consisted of two hundred and ten (210) children and forty two care-givers who were purposively selected from 42 schools in the study area. The research adopted a correlational survey research design and data was collected using Physical Learning Environment and Reading Readiness Questionnaire (PLERRQ) as its main instrument. To guide the study, three research questions were raised and three research hypotheses were proposed and tested at 0.05 levels of significant using descriptive statistic, frequencies percentage, mean scores, and inferential statistics (multiple linear regressions). The results indicated that the state of classroom environment is promotive of pre-primary school children's reading readiness. It was recommended that care-givers should be encouraged to ensure necessary activities in school. It also recommended that the necessary and concerned authorities should see to the environment of school classrooms and that of children's extra-curricular activities. Learning materials should also be provided in a manner which impacts positively on children's development.

Keywords: Learning Environment, Early childhood, Pre-primary reading Readiness

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

A healthy environment is the one which allows a child an opportunity to direct and modify inputs gleaned from his environment. It is one which provides encouragement by way of contingent feedback. It is one which nurtures the social, mental and language skills within the child. The human organism is constantly reacting to the environment. Man - environmental relationship is a two - way interaction. Man influences and produces changes in his environment. The environment on the other hand influences the individual depending on how the individual reacts to and perceives the environment. Children are influenced by their environment in diverse ways in line with their interpretation of and responses to the various elements in the environment. when one is deprived, the price is detraction is that of psychological imbalance. Such an imbalance makes maximum learning readiness in a child unattainable. A child is a deprived entity if its needs are not satisfied within and beyond an environment which he/she finds him/herself.

According to Young (1996) in Akindele (2012), about 50% of an individual's intelligence potential is developed by the time the person is 4 years age, thus implying that early childhood education learning experiences could have lasting and profound impacts on an individual's intellectual capacity. In Nigeria, the scope of the most recent educational reform (Universal Basic Education) has provision for early childhood education known as Early Child Development (ECD) centres and day care centres for kids between 0-3 years and preprimary schools for children between 3-5 years. Collectively, these two categories are known as pre-primary education. The purpose of this early childhood/pre-primary education include effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school; teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, and; preparing the child for the primary level of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). This implies that every child in this level of education should at least be equipped for the learning experiences which await them at the primary level of education. Looking at the goals of the

primary level of education implies that every new pupil should at least have been prepared to make meaning out of the print materials which would be used to teach them. Thus, meaning that every child who transits from the pre-primary level should at least be ready to make meaning out of reading whatever print materials they will encounter at the primary level of education. In a nutshell, prior to entry into the primary level of education, every child should have at least undergone numerous meaningful reading readiness learning experiences.

Reading readiness, according to Mason (2007) is the period when a child can be approached with reading preparatory activities, and when an instruction can be easily and profitably initiated with such a child. Going further, he also stated that readiness as a concept in the above stated context is concerned with the relationship between the abilities of the child and the abilities needed for the child to be successful with beginning reading. As for reading, it was stated as an individual's ability to recognize letters or group of letters as symbols which represent particular sounds and also make meaning or sense from the letters or groups of letters when in print or written form. From the brief explanations of the two concepts separately, it implies that reading readiness is concerned with a child's ability to be ready for learning experiences which involve reading and writing. According to Jiar and Johan (2008), the fundamental objectives of reading readiness include impacting the following abilities in children (i) recognition of various sounds, shapes and letters; (ii) differentiate between similar sounds, shapes and letters; (iii) understand what a book is and how to hold a book properly; (iv) understand what is read from a book; (v) develop basic verbal, visual and auditory reading skills, and; (vi) develop interest in using pencils, crayons and markers.

The engagement of the children in early childhood education programmes is supposed to influence their reading readiness abilities in pre-primary schools. Yet, within the pre-primary schools, issues raised by researchers seem to imply that there are challenges facing children's reading readiness proficiencies. Akindele (2012) revealed that most schools did not have the necessary enabling resources to

ensure that children are impacted with the desired basic verbal reading readiness skills. For Andzayi and Ikwen (2014), based on the challenge of inadequacy of certain required resources, they discovered that children were found wanting in terms of some beginning reading skills which included oracy, English sight words, print awareness, phono-phenomic awareness, letter recognition and comprehension. In their own study, Shoaga, Akintola and Okpor (2017) found out that reading readiness proficiencies among pre-primary school children was very unappreciable due to the type of reading readiness activities which were employed. Lastly, Adeyemi and Adebanjo (2018) assessed pre-primary school children reading readiness and revealed very discouraging reading readiness levels amongst the children.

As a phenomenon, low reading readiness proficiencies could serve to challenge the transition of pre-primary school children to the primary level of education. Research has revealed that reading readiness proficiency in areas such as letter naming/sounding, phonemic awareness, and word reading are key predictors of “later in school” more conventional reading skills like oral reading fluency and comprehension (Irvin, Alonzo, Nese & Tindal, 2013). As stated earlier, children not only undergo a tremendous brain development period during the time they are in pre-primary school but also, a significant percentage of their intelligence potential is developed during the same period. Also, research has given substantial evidence that children’s early language experiences have a profound impact on their academic trajectory (Ilogho, 2015). Similarly, Anyaegbu, Umejiaku and Nwafor (2016) discovered that primary school pupils with poor reading habits mostly indicated that they did not have impactful reading readiness proficiencies in pre-primary school, thus their distaste for reading. Even in the developing child’s later stages of his/her personal endeavour, research has yielded forth substantive evidence that children who develop poor reading readiness proficiencies are at .the risk of inculcating antisocial tendencies during their teenage stage of life (Mustard, 2006 in Akindele, 2012).

There are many factors which could be connected with reading

readiness of preprimary school children. Research works have shown that their learning environment is inclusive in the factors which can influence their high or low reading readiness proficiencies in schools. Learning environment types are mainly home-based and school-based though some researchers usually separate school-based into school and classroom learning environments (Alabi, Oduwaiye & Fasasi, 2012). For avoidance of ambiguity, the learning environment which will be the focus of this investigation is that of the school (the classroom inclusive). A school's learning environment encompasses both psychological and physical factors of the learning process but the focus of this study is on physical factors which include state of pre-primary school's extra-curricular activities and adequacy of learning materials.

State of classroom environment is a physical factor which refers to the condition of a given classroom in terms of its aesthetics and appealing nature to children. From Bakken, Brown and Downing (2017), it was found out that the aesthetics of children's classroom environment could have long-lasting effects on the children's discipline levels towards learning while Adeyemi and Adebajo (2018) revealed that safe child-size furniture could enhance learning tendencies amongst children. State of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment is a variable which refers to the condition of the environment where the children are supposed to engage in extracurricular activities such as playing (swinging and climbing ladders), singing (music), and doing simple science. Ojuondo (2015) and Ogunyemi and Rangpot (2016) are some studies which have revealed that the condition of such environments could serve to predict criteria such as eagerness to participate, enthusiasm to learn and willingness to display hidden talents amongst children.

Lastly, adequacy of learning materials is a physical factor which refers to the availability of required learning materials for each child for each learning experience. Ashaver and Mwuese (2014) observed that adequacy of coloured books, drawings and diagrams had a profound impact on children's eagerness to participate in learning. Similarly, Pekdogan and Akgun (2017) found out that adequacy of educational

toys, books and labelled drawings aroused children's learning tendencies in pre-primary schools.

Factors challenging effective implementation/management of early childhood education in Nigeria were studied by Chidobi (2013) in a research work predicated on a descriptive survey approach. All pre-school teachers in Enugu State made up the population while 102 respondents who were randomly drawn gave responses to quantitatively designed posers whose inquiries included an assessment of the extent to which state of classrooms militated against children's adequate involvement in learning activities. Mean scores (with a reference mean) were applied to analyse the data and state of classrooms were found to exert a high extent of influence on children's adequate involvement in learning activities. This supposedly meant that the state of classrooms was found to exert a high extent of negative influence on adequate involvement of the children in learning activities

Adeniji and Omale (2010) examined the teaching of reading comprehension in primary schools in Nigeria by using a descriptive survey research design. Teachers of primary schools in Oyo State served as the population while 200 respondents who were randomly drawn gave responses to a questionnaire that elicited inquiries concerning the essence of enabling classroom environments to reading abilities of primary school children. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) served to analyse the data and about 80% of the respondents revealed that enabling classroom environments serve to promote children's learning and reading comprehension.

Nwabugo, Anyikwa and Olibie (2010) utilized an ex-post facto approach in a study which determined resource management and creative learning experiences in Nigerian Early Childhood Education Centres. Study centres in Anambra State encompassed the population while 200 centres (both public and private) were randomly sampled. A checklist was employed for data collection and one of the study's inquiries was to ascertain the number of schools that have adequate

extra-curricular activities' environment(s) for the children. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyse the data and the- result revealed that less than 30% of the schools (for each of private and public) had adequate play fields/facilities and/or areas for children's nap/resting.

Based on the above stated evidences from research works, it is premised that preprimary school children's reading readiness could be related to their' learning environment in schools. The variables of interest were the physical factors (state of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities and adequacy of learning materials). Thus, in line with the presupposition that learning environment could be related to preprimary school children's reading readiness in schools, this study investigated the extent to which learning environment correlates with pre-primary school children's reading readiness in Early Childhood Development Education in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State.

Research questions

To what extent do the following physical factors relate with pre-primary school children's reading readiness?

- a. State of classroom environment
- b. State of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment
- c. Adequacy of learning materials

Research hypotheses

There is no singular and composite relationship between the following physical factors and pre-primary school children's reading readiness

- a. State of classroom environment
- b. State of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment
- c. Adequacy of learning materials

3.1 Research design

A correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. The design is suitable for studies whose purpose is to ascertain how a given set of variables are correlated (any of positive, negative,

or no correlation at all). It is a design adopted when a study is designed to indicate the magnitude and direction of the relationship between a given set of variables (Idaka and Anagbogu, 2012). The design was adopted due to the perceived relationship between the study's variables. To be specific, the design was adopted due to the perceived relationship between school learning environment and pre-primary school children's reading readiness in schools.

3.2 Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all caregivers and pre-primary school children in Early Childhood Development Education Schools in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select the study's sample. First of all, purposive sampling was employed to select forty-two (42) schools in the area whose total children population is above 80. Next, simple random technique was used to select one pre-primary school classroom per each of the selected schools. This technique was adopted in order to ensure that the entire pre-primary school classrooms have an equal chance of being selected. Total enumeration was then made up of 5 (five) preprimary school children per centre and 1 caregiver from the selected pre-primary school class. Based on the description above, the total sample was 210 children and 42 caregivers.

3.4 Research instruments

The instruments used for the study was designed by the researcher. The instrument is the Physical Learning Environment and Reading Readiness Questionnaire (PLERRQ). The instrument is designed to have three sections. The first section (A) elicited responses on some demographics pertinent to the study (gender, average number of children taught per class and average number of periods children are taught per week). The second section (B) is designed to ascertain the following; (i) adequacy of children's learning materials, and; (ii) state/condition of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment in terms of its aesthetics and

appealing nature to the children’s engagement in activities such as playing, singing and doing simple science. The design of the inventory is based on the caregivers’ perceptions concerning the state/conditions of the children’s learning environment and the adequacy of learning materials. There are 2 sections and the number of items here are 18 (6 each for the 3 areas to be investigated). The response rubric for the inventory is based on the following pattern - strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The third section is designed to measure reading readiness amongst the children. For purpose of clarity and objectivity of scope, only the children’s psychological and intellectual readiness was measured. Thus the six items in this scale measured areas such as vocabulary, auditory discrimination, visual discrimination and mechanical reading.

1.1 Answers to the research questions

Research question one: To what extent do physical factor relate with pre-primary school children’s reading readiness?

TABLE 1.1: a. State of classroom environment and pre-primary school children’s reading readiness

Variables		Pre-primary school children			Total
		reading readiness			
		Poorly ready	Fairly Ready	Fully Ready	
State of classroom environment	Inappropriate	Count 18 Percent 63.6%	0	0.0%	22 100.0%
	Appropriate	Count 4 Percent 20.0%	7 35.0%	9 45.0%	20 100.0%
	Total	Count 18 Percent 42.9%	15 35.7%	9 21.4%	42 100.0%

The results as presented in Table 1.1a showed that, out of the subjects, 42.9% of the children were poorly ready while 35.7% of the children were fairly ready and 21.4% of the children were fully ready. The result further showed that, out of the subjects whose state of their classroom environment was inappropriate, 63.6% of the children were poorly ready while 36.4% of the children were fairly ready and 0.0% of the children were fully ready. The result further showed that, out of the subjects whose state of their classroom environment was appropriate, 20.0% of the children were poorly ready while 35.0% of the children were fairly ready and 45.0% of the children were fully ready. Apparently, the results showed that state of classroom environment is promotive of preprimary school children’s reading readiness.

Research question Two

To what extent do physical factor relate with pre-primary school children’s reading readiness?

TABLE 1.2 b. State of pre-primary schools’ extracurricular activities environment and pre-primary school children’s reading readiness

Variables		Pre-primary school children’s reading readiness			Total	
		Poorly ready	Fairly ready	Fully ready		
State of pre-primary schools’ extracurricular activities environment	Unfavourable	Count Percent t	17 48.6%	11 31.4%	7 20.0%	35 100.0%
	Favourable	Count Percent t	1 14.3%	4 57.1%	2 28.6%	7 100.0%
Total		Count Percent	18 42.9%	15 35.7%	9 21.4%	42 100.0%

The results as presented in Table 1.2b showed that, out of the

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subjects whose state of their pre-primary schools' extracurricular activities environment was unfavourable, 47.1% of the children were poorly ready while 38.2% of the children were fairly ready and 14.7% of the children were fully ready. The result further showed that, out of the subjects whose state of their pre-primary schools' extracurricular activities environment was favourable, 25.0% of the children were poorly ready while 25.0% of the children were fairly ready and 50.0% of the children were fully ready. Apparently, the results showed that state of pre-primary schools' extracurricular activities environment is promotive of pre-primary school children's reading readiness.

Research question Three

To what extent do physical factor relate with pre-primary school children's reading readiness?

TABLE 1.3: c. Adequacy of learning materials and pre-primary school children's reading readiness

Variables				Pre-primary school children's reading readiness		
				Poorly ready	Fairly ready	Fully ready
Adequacy of learning Materials	Inadequate	Count	18	12	4	
		Percent	52.9%	35.3%	11.8%	
	Adequate	Count	0	3	5	
		Percent	0.0%	37.5%	61.2%	
	Total	Count	18	15	9	
		Percent	42.9%	35.7%	21.1%	

The results as presented in Table 1.3c showed that, out of the subjects whose learning materials were inadequate, 52.9% of the children were poorly ready while 35.3% of the children were fairly ready and 11.8% of the children were fully ready. The result further showed that, out of the subjects whose learning materials were adequate, 0.0% of

the children were poorly ready while 37.5% of the children were fairly ready and 62.5% of the children were fully ready. Apparently, the results showed that adequacy of learning material are promotive of pre-primary school children’s reading readiness.

Ho₂: There is no significant singular and composite relationship between physical factors (state of classroom environment, state of pre-primary schools’ extra-curricular activities’ environment and adequacy of learning materials) and pre-primary school children’s reading readiness. This hypothesis was tested using Multiple Linear Regression analysis tested at .05 level of significance. The inter-correlation coefficient among the variables was presented in Table 4.3c while the composite contribution of all the independent variables on pre-primary school children’s reading readiness was checked and the result was presented in Table 4.3d.

TABLE 1.4: Inter-correlation among the physical factors and pre-primary school children’s reading readiness (N=42)

Variables	1	2
Pre-primary school children’s reading readiness	1.00	
State of classroom environment	.699 *	1.00 0
State of pre-primary schools’ extra-curricular activities’ environment	.546 *	.687 *
Adequacy of learning materials	.704 *	.357 *

*Significant at .05 level of significance; Critical r-ratio=.257.

The result in Table 1.4 showed that the inter-correlation among the variables revealed that state of classroom environment ($r^{.699}$; $p<.05$), state of pre-primary schools’ extra-curricular activities’ environment ($r=.546$; $p<.05$) and adequacy of learning materials ($r=.704$; $p<.05$) had significant positive relationship with pre-primary school children’s reading readiness since all the calculated r-ratios are

greater than the critical r-ratio of .257.

Discussions of findings

For the findings of hypothesis one it revealed that state of classroom environment is not only indicative of pre-school children's reading readiness, but also showed that there exists a significantly positive relationship between the two variables. The finding is in line with Adeniji and Omale (2010) who reported that majority of respondents revealed that enabling classroom environments serve to promote children's learning and reading comprehension. The finding also agrees with Chidobi (2013) discovered that state of classrooms was found to exert a high extent of influence on children's adequate involvement in learning activities. For the findings of hypothesis indicated that state of preprimary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment is not only connected with preprimary school children's reading readiness but also there existed a significant relationship between state of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment and pre-primary school children's reading readiness. The study agrees with Nwabugo, Anyikwa and Olibie (2010) who revealed that in schools which had inadequate play fields/facilities and/or areas for children's nap/resting, the programme had an insignificant impact on the children's learning experiences. In their assessment of play activities' implementation as a correlate of children's academic performance in preschools, Andiema, Kemboi and M'mbonne (2013) revealed that the availability of the extra-curricular activities' environments did have a significant influence on the children's academic performance. Shogoa, Akintola and Okpor (2017) studied the impact of outdoor learning activities on pre-schoolers' educational development and revealed statistically significant differences between the control and the experimental groups of children used for the study with the children's usage of extra-curricular activities' environment(s) having a significant effect on their educational development.

For the results of hypothesis three revealed that adequacy of learning materials is an indicator of pre-primary school children's reading readiness and also, adequacy of learning materials has a significant

relationship with pre-primary school children's reading readiness. The finding agrees with Odhiambo (2013) who revealed that in such schools where instructional materials were more adequately supplied, children performed better as a result of their exposure than their counterparts in schools with relatively lesser supply thus depriving them of exposure to such.. Lastly, Ogunyemi (2016) examined effect of instructional materials on early childhood learners' acquisition of oracy skills and revealed that those who .were taught with instructional materials did appreciably better than those who were not taught with instructional materials.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between and predictability of school learning environment on pre-children's reading readiness in early childhood development. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were reached. State of classroom environment is indicative of pre-primary school children's reading readiness, state of pre-primary schools' extracurricular activities' environment is connected with pre-primary school children's reading readiness and adequacy of learning materials is an indicator of pre-primary school children's reading readiness.

In addition,. Also, state of classroom environment has a statistically significant relationship with preprimary school children's reading readiness, there is a significant relationship between state of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment and pre-primary school children's reading readiness, adequacy of learning materials has a significant relationship with pre-primary school children's reading readiness. Lastly, the composite contribution of the physical factors of state of classroom environment, state of pre-primary schools' extra-curricular activities' environment and adequacy of learning materials was revealed to have a significant predictability on pre-primary school children's reading readiness.

Recommendations

1. Caregivers should see the need to be as friendly and as cordial as possible to their children despite the seeming

- challenges which they may face during the course of their teaching.
2. The necessary and concerned authorities should see the need for the environment of schools' classrooms and extra-curricular activities' environment to be design in a manner which will ensure that they impact positively on children's development.
 - 3 Learning materials should be provided for in a manner which will ensure that they also impact positively on children's development

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