

An Examination of the Role of Nursery Education on Primary School Pupils in Nigeria

ONIWON, H.O. EVELYN

Department Of Early Childhood Care And Education, School Of Education, Federal College Of Education
Okene, Kogi State

Abstract

This study examines the role of Nursery education among primary school pupils. The sole objective of the study was to find out the differences in academic achievement between primary school pupils who received nursery education and those who did not. Descriptive survey research design was adopted to achieve the study objective. Consequently, 20 primary one pupils from Christ the King Nursery and Primary school Okene, Kogi State ten each from those that received nursery education and those that did not receive nursery education participated in the study. Five generic frames – numeric skills, sentence construction, verbal expression, creativity and writing skills- were used to measure pupils' academic achievement. The result showed a marking difference between the two set of pupils with pupils who attended nursery schools performing better. The researcher thus recommends among others that the government of Nigeria should encourage parents to send their children to nursery schools.

Keywords: education, examine, nursery, and primary

1. Introduction

Nursery education is the foundation of learning because children who have a weak learning foundation can hardly perform as exceptionally intelligent students in their entire academic life circle. It is at this early stage of learning that children are developed for higher academic exercises. The foundation of education of the child is the preschools education which forms an integral part of his or her early education which may be formal or informal, usually given in an educational institution to children aged 1 to 5+ prior to their entering the primary school. This educational level of the child provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of the pre-school child. If child education can provide these vital necessities which are fundamental in human life, it is not therefore unlikely to have an important and strong relationship with the pupils' performance at the primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels Nakpodia (2011). Learning apart from a very rigorous exercise is procedural. If a child gets a particular step wrong or did not even get it at all, it becomes a very big problem to such a child. This makes nursery education very essential for the overall development of the education sub-sector. Nakpodia arguing further on the importance of early education maintained that the Universal Basic Education Act of 2000 cites Early Childhood Education (ECE), which has to do with pre-primary education given to children between ages one to five, as an integral part of basic education. It represents the first important step in achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA). The scholars notes that since it is the foundation for a life-long education, government is expected to be actively involved in providing it for the younger children but regretted that evidence on the ground has shown that parents, private individuals, religious bodies constitute the largest proprietorship of ECE, while government agencies provide a paltry 10%. Nakpodia and Achugbue(2012,p.140) summarise early education thus:

Formal education begins from nursery or pre-primary education which is the education given in day care centers and nursery schools to children aged between 0 to 6 years. It is enriched by the informal traditional upbringing given to the children of age 0 to 3 years which prepares them for school. The government is not directly involved in the establishment of day care centers and nursery schools.

Closely related to nursery or early education is the primary education. In some schools, both are operated together and this partly explains why we have names like, international Nursery and primary school, Akpai nursery and primary school among others. Primary education is the second most important stage of learning. At this stage of learning, school children begin to show very clear signs of the level of their intellectual capability and in some cases, the areas they are very good at. It is the stage of learning where the foundation that was built at the nursery level starts unveiling. It is important to add here that even though it is the general perception that nursery and primary education are very essential and complement each other, very little studies have been conducted to determine the value of nursery education to primary school pupils. This has created a research problem. This study thus seeks to examine the role of nursery education on primary school pupils.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Even though there is a general assumption that nursery education is very essential to the academic achievement of primary school pupils, scanty literature exist to provide empirical evidence to support or disprove this assumption. Also problematic is the near absence of studies that sample both primary pupils who attended nursery schools and those that did not attend to arrive at a conclusion. The problem this study

posed as question is what is the role nursery education among primary school pupils.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The sole objective of this study is to find out the role of nursery education among primary school pupils.

2.1 Literature Review

Nursery VS Primary Education in Nigeria

International agencies recognize the role of nursery education as a foundation for the educational system and the young. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in 1990 undertook a joint commitment to make an urgent universal appeal to give every child a better future. Also, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasized urgent priority to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for all children. Adenipekun (2004) documented eight reasons given at these fora in support of the provision of affordable, quality programmes of early childcare that are community based, and which are linked with health care and nutrition as part of an integrated approach to meeting the needs of the young child. These reasons include: (1) From conception of six years of age, children, according to research findings, undergo rapid mental, social and physical development to the extent that by the age of six, their brains would have developed to almost the size of an adult. (2) The convention on the rights of the child stipulates that children have a right to live and develop to their full capacity. (3) Moral and social values postulate that through children, societies pass on values and culture from generation to generation. (4) Supporting the development of the child physically and mentally leads to increased enrolment, improves performance and the society generally. (5) Provision of early childcare facilities and offer equal opportunities to children from both the privileged and disadvantaged homes. (6) A programme in early childhood development should be used as an entry point for other developmental activities which will benefit the entire community. (7) ECC (Early Child Care) projects should be linked with other developmental activities for women, nutrition, health, water and sanitation. (8) There is a growing demand for better ways of caring for children through an ECC project given the advancement in science and technology which now ensures the survival of many more children, thereby increasing population growth. It is very important to add here that the National Policy on Education (2004) also recognizes the centrality of nursery education.

The policy in Section 2, page 11 refers to “pre-primary education” in this document as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus prior to their entering the primary school. The Policy identifies the responsibilities of government at this level as the promotion and training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum and supervise and control the quality of such institutions. What this simply means is that the Nigerian government has equally provided a policy document guiding nursery education in Nigeria with a view to ensuring smooth transition to primary school. Jummai (2012) observes that primary school education is the foundation for formal learning in Nigeria.

To achieve functional primary education in Nigeria, the Federal Government in the National Policy on Education (2004) cited in Jummai (2012, p.662), sets the aims of primary education as follow: i. To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively; ii. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; iii. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribute to the life of the society; iv. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child; v. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment; vi. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity; and vii. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and craft of the locality.

Also in an effort to promoting primary education in Nigeria, The federal ministry of education has established a National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) with its headquarters in Kaduna. The state ministries of education have their own units of this board. Local government authorities also have their constituent bodies charged with the coordination of primary education matters along states and nationally formulated policies. The general objective of the establishment of Primary Education Commission is to ensure effective operation of primary education in the country with the ultimate aim of providing quality education to the pupils. The extent to which these objectives have been achieved is not subject to empirical.

2.2 Review of Related Empirical Studies

In this segment of the paper, the researcher reviewed relevant empirical studies either in content or design. First is study conducted by Olaleye, and Omotayo (2009) on “Assessment of quality in early childhood education in Ekiti-State Nigeria.” This study examined the concept of quality in early childhood education in Ekiti State. The researcher sought answers to the following questions: What is the quality of learning activities in

the nursery schools in Ekiti State? What is the quality of teaching staff in the nursery schools? To what extent have the proprietors/ proprietresses of nursery schools provided conducive environments for teaching and learning? What is the quality of learning outcomes in the nursery schools? To What extent have the parents been participating in the education of their children for quality educational programme? A descriptive survey research method was used to elicit information from 120 randomly selected respondents which comprises of teachers and head of the twelve pre-schools selected in Ado – Ekiti. The selection of the school was by stratified random sampling and criteria for selection include size of the school and approval by government. The instrument tagged Quality Assessment Questionnaire (QAQ) was used to collect data for the study.

The findings showed that learning activities in the pre-primary schools was averagely high. The individual scores of the items related to learning activities revealed skills as follows: (79.2%). Learning rudiment of numbers through play (75%) developing good health habit (66.7%) were considered by the researcher as both high. However low quality was recorded in the use of mother-tongue (4.2%) and opportunity to develop artistic and creative skills (35%). Indicator of quality of staff was found to be of low quality (19%). Having a good knowledge of children development was (39.2%). Opportunities for re-training and self-development was very low (20.8%). Interest in teaching the young ones (30.8%) was found to be low. Remuneration in terms of salary for teachers was revealed to be very low (26.7%). The result further revealed that the learning environment of the pre-schools using the subscale scores was fairly good (62.5%) and provision of adequate classroom space/ventilation (60%) was found to be average. Low quality was however found in respect of provision of water (29.2%). Findings also revealed that the quality of learning outcomes is averagely high with aspects of continuous assessment (62.5%). Records keeping (72.5%) parents having access to learning outcome (81.7%), assessment covering a broad range of children's learning activities (48.3%) while rewarding for good performance recorded high score (73.3%). Finally, the result of the study revealed that parents' involvement in the management of the pre-school was very low (40.8%). Opportunities for development Parents given adequate information about their children was found to be average while parents involvement in academic activities such as field trips, etc. was reported to be low (40%). Organization of parents' forum score was reported as average (55.8%) while parents' financial support for the school was low schools (29.2%).

This study is relevant to the current one because it investigated issues related to early child hood education, which is partly part of the current study. However, the researcher did not researcher failed to study the role of early child education on primary school pupils. The current will close this gap.

Eweniyi (2012) conducted a study on "Formal Kindergarten experience as a predictor of academic achievement of primary five pupils in English Language" The researcher tested the following hypotheses; There is no significant difference between the English language performance of pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience. There is no significant difference in male primary five pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of female primary five pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience. The academic performance of pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience were compared while their achievement was based on their performance in the English language tests. The sample consisted of one hundred and twenty pupils made up of forty eight pupils with formal kindergarten education and seventy two pupils without formal kindergarten education selected from ten public primary five classes. The sample consisted of boys and girls. The instrument used for data collection was English language achievement tests. The scores obtained from the tests were analysed using the t-test to find the significant difference between the means of the two groups. The results of this study revealed a significant difference between the English language performance of pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those with such experience. The result also showed a significant difference between the academic performance of male primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those without such experience and a significant difference between academic performance of female primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those without it. This study is very related to the current study just that the researcher paid attention to only one subject (English Language).The current study will fill the gap.

The study conducted by Olusanjo (2013) on "Differences in children's School success and family backgrounds: A comparative case study of pupils' performance in entrance examination in Ibadan, Nigeria" introducing a new dimension into this review. The researcher reviewed the socio-economic backgrounds of pupils from various family structures (Monogamous, polygamous, single-parent and orphan children) against their academic performances in Ibadan North-East municipality of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative data collection method. A total of two hundred and twenty pupils between the ages of 10 to15 in junior secondary schools were sampled, N=220 and 8 teachers were interviewed from the various pupils' schools. Findings from this study revealed that no significant differences existed in the pupils' levels of academic attainment and ethnic background, while a significant difference was found between the monogamous and polygamous pupils' religions across the various family structures observed. However, majority pupils' level of computer literacy was found to be poor. No significant differences were also recorded in the pupils' parents' educational achievement and occupational status, as the majority of the parents were found to be at the working

class level. The result this study though comprehensive failed to provide insights on the role of nursery education on primary school pupils.

The last study investigated here is the one conducted by Adesina and Okewole, (2014) on “Survey of teachers’ opinions on mother-tongue instruction in Nigerian nursery schools: implications for educational policy making.” This study was carried out to find out teachers’ views on the programme of mother-tongue instruction in nursery schools in Nigeria. Questionnaire was used to seek the teachers’ opinions on the issue of mother tongue as language of instruction in nursery schools in Nigeria.

The result showed that 70% of the respondents supported the use of mother tongue while 30% objected it. Also, that a programme of mother tongue instruction would allow students to easily interpret information obtained properly and correctly was supported by 65% of the respondents while 35% expressed contrary opinion. In the same vein, 72% of the teachers supported the opinion that the programme of mother tongue would make students use information efficiently and effectively while only 66% of the sampled opinions supported that the programme of mother tongue instruction would allow students to develop practical and manipulate skills easily and quickly, 34% of the respondents expressed contrary view. Furthermore, the data revealed that more respondents (55%) expressed opinions that the programme of mother tongue would provide student information with ease and accuracy when required whereas 45% of the respondents were against the opinion. 77% supported the view that the programme of mother tongue would make students acquire and develop desirable attitude towards people, his country, issues, etc., whereas only 23% of the respondents expressed contrary opinion.

It was found out that 51% out of the sampled teachers went against the opinion that the programme of mother tongue instruction would face the problem of general unacceptability by the parents of the students taught with the programme while 49% agreed with the opinion. While majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that the multilingual values of Nigeria would not allow the programme of mother tongue to work properly only 25% of the respondents disagreed with the opinion. 52% of the teachers opined that there would be problem of training and retraining of teachers if the programme of mother-tongue instruction is to work, 45% of the respondents disagreed. This appears strange. One would normally expect a lower percentage on the negative side. Whereas, 26% of the sampled opinions support the view that the problem of inadequate teaching/learning resources would confront the programme of another tongue instruction, 79% of the respondents however expressed contrary opinion. Furthermore, 65% of the sampled teachers indicated that there would be no problem of curriculum development in some subjects especially science subjects, whereas only 35% envisaged that there would be problem. Seventy five percent of the respondents disagreed with the opinion that the programme of mother tongue instruction would be uneconomical while only 27% of the people disagreed. Ninety two percent of the respondents expressed the fear that only one local language would be adopted in Nigeria, whereas only 8% of the teachers did not see any problem along the line. The missing gap among is the absence of a study that investigated the role of nursery education on primary school pupils. The current study will fill this gap.

3.3 Methods

This study adopted descriptive survey research design to investigate the subject matter. Descriptive survey is usually the most suitable when the objective is to explore, describe or explain the characteristics of a group (Babbie 2013 and Wimmer and Dominick 2013). To properly measure the role of nursery education on primary school pupils, the researcher purposively selected 20 primary one pupils from Christ the King Nursery and Primary school, Okene, Kogi State. Among the 20 pupils, ten attended nursery school while the remaining 10 began from primary school. The researcher chose primary one pupils because that is the transition class from nursery school to primary school. As a follow up, the researcher then delineated five areas within which to measure the role of primary education on the pupils. These are numerical skills, spelling drill, sentence construction, verbal expression, creative skills and writing skills. It should be noted that for easy identification, the pupils who attended primary nursery school before were named group A while the other pupils who did not attend nursery school were named group B. Both set of pupils were asked the following questions:

1. What is 11+ 7?
2. What is 16-9?
3. Spell the following words: Lion and School
4. Make simple sentences with Lion and School
5. Why do you eat food? (this question was meant to test the verbal expression of the pupils)
6. Draw an orange
7. Write the English alphabet. (This question was meant to test the writing skill of the pupils)
8. Write 1,2,3 up to 50 (This question was also meant to test the writing skills of the pupils)

4 Results/ Discussion

The result of this study is hereby presented. It should be noted that in respondents’ demographics were not relevant for the study. The result of this study showed that among the 10 pupils who attended nursery school

before progressing to the primary school, nine of them got the answer to the first question correctly as against two from those who began from the primary level. With regards to question two, all the pupils from group A got it while only four pupils from group B got the answer correctly in that regards. Also, eight of the group A pupils spelt Lion correctly as against three of group B, all the group A pupils spelt school correctly as against six group B members. Also, seven group A pupils made simple and correct sentences observing the law of concord as against one from group B. The result also showed that in terms of expression, the group A pupils were more expressive, coordinated and confident. As the pupils were speaking, the researcher was observing them with particular attention on three indicators as fluency, composure, and choice of words and confidence. At the end, it was discovered that pupils from group A were far more composed than those from group B. The result also showed that the pupils from group A were far more creative than those from group B. This is because, the orange drawn by those from A was assessed by an independent person and in the final analysis, the scores of those from group A were higher. It should be noted that each pupils' drawing was rated over 10 and the average score of pupils from group 8 while that of those from group B was 4. The same procedure was followed in measuring the writing skills of the pupils and in the final the average score of group A was 7 while that of group B was five.

What this means is that pupils who attend nursery school are more likely to perform better than those who do not. The result of this study is consistent with that Eweniyi, (2012) who reported that children who received kindergarten education perform better in English Language than those who did not.

5. Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that nursery education is very essential in the academic performance of primary school pupils. It is also the conclusion of the researcher that pupils who attend nursery schools are more likely to perform better academically than those who do not. It is however regrettable that access to nursery education has been largely limited to children of the rich. Children especially those from the village do not have access to nursery education. What they have is primary schools owned by the Local Government Education Authorities which teachers are either inadequate, poorly equipped, non committal or a combination of all. For effective nursery education in Nigeria, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

- The government should adopt extra measures in making sure that all children have access to nursery education. Such measure should including grant aiding existing nursery schools, or establishing at least five nursery schools in each of the local government areas in Nigeria.
- Parents should always enrol their children for nursery education.
- Owners of nursery schools should make their charges affordable so that children of the poor can afford.
- Subsequent studies should be conducted to determine nursery school enrolment among children in rural areas in Nigeria.

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