

Influence of Quality Early Childhood Education Centres on Social Interaction of Pre-Primary School Pupils in Kwara State

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Article Info

Keywords:

Quality
ECE Centre
Social interaction
Pupils
Social groups

ABSTRACT

Poor-quality Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC) can be detrimental to the development of children, as they may lead to poor social, emotional, educational, health, physical, and behavioral outcomes and the general well-being of children. However, this research examined the influence of quality ECEC centres on the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State. This study examines evidence on the influence of the quality of the ECE Centre on the Social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State. The quantitative approach was adopted for the study while data was collected through a Questionnaire on the Quality of the ECE Centre and Observation rating scales on social interaction. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage scores. The results revealed that quality ECE Centre positively influenced social interaction between pre-primary school pupils and the overall development of children. At the same time, the study recommends that schools provide excess hands-on materials and allocate more play time and well enough space for play activities to foster children's social interaction through quality ECE Centre, especially in Kwara State.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Children's early years have been globally accepted as the period for remarkable growth and tremendous development. It is the period during which children experience physical, cognitive, language-perceptual, and social-emotional development. What a child is exposed to during their early years greatly influences their overall development and future achievements. That is why Oduolowu and Olowe [1] opined that the early years are a period of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potential, during which adequate protection, care, and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. This justifies the reason why this period needed to be handled with all

special attention because it is a period that may have a positive or negative influence on the future achievement of the child. It is the period for the appropriate development needed for future achievement. Part of the skills expected to be developed during the early years is social interaction skills.

Of course, children learn at their own pace and learn best when appropriate materials are placed within their reach. This view may justify why the Federal Republic of Nigeria [2], in her policy on education, defined Early Childhood Education as the care, protection, stimulation, and learning promoted in children from birth to eight years in a crèche or nursery. It went further to explain that the rest of the educational system is built upon it and is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. Early childhood is a preparatory ground for the child's primary level of education. This is to say that it is a foundation that every other level of education rests upon. This can be best done by emulating how the Early Childhood Care Development Education (ECCDE) system ideally is expected to actualize its goals or what the achievement of ECCDE are; among these are to effect a smooth transition from home to school; prepare the child for a primary level of education; provide adequate care and security for the children while their parent is at work; inculcate social, moral norms and values; inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, arts, music and the use of toys, etc.; develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit; stimulate in the child good habits, including good health; and teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colors, shapes and forms through quality Early Childhood Education Centre (ECE).

The relevance of early childhood education to the overall development of a child is to inculcate social and moral norms and values; inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, arts, music, and the use of toys. Social interaction concerns the ability to exchange between two or more individuals. This interaction forms the basis for social structure and is crucial to each child's success. Children acquire skills that communicate and interact with their environment effectively. Children learn quickly when they demonstrate their capacity independently. Children's abilities to share, take turns, or control emotions and actions increase while playing games. Children's ideas and interests support the social interaction of children. Research shows that early-year learning occurs best in relationships and rich interactions. Children need to be stimulated and focused interactions on learning. Researchers find that boosting children's thinking skills through quality interactions is essential to learning.

According to Tender Care [3], interacting and playing with peers and adults presents immense learning opportunities for young children. Even toddlers and infants reap the cognitive and emotional benefits of interacting with others. The right socially interactive environment will help children develop strong language skills, creativity, social intelligence, and confidence. Interacting and playing with both peers and adults presents an immense amount of learning opportunities for young children. Even toddlers and infants reap the cognitive and emotional benefits of interacting with others. The right socially interactive environment will help children develop strong language skills, creativity, social intelligence, and confidence. Sandra [4] postulated that social interaction plays an

important role in learning, and interacting with others has proven to be quite effective in assisting learners to organize their thoughts, reflect on their understanding, and find gaps in their reasoning.

Furthermore, social interactions could be referred to as how we act and react to those around us. People or things around us form the basis of any relationship between two or more people from birth till we are no more. Jesse [5] postulated that social interaction is one of the most critical factors for the health and development of everybody, from young children to the elderly and that positive social interactions have a wide range of both physical and mental benefits, including increased cognitive ability, good mental health, communication skills, independence, and improved physical health, especially in older people.

Interactions include physical movements, conversation, playing together, sharing, cooperating, and much more. Interestingly, early social interaction is beneficial for child development. The right environment can help children develop strong language skills, creativity, empathy, communication, and confidence which could set a pace for every other development of a child throughout adulthood. Children benefit most when teachers engage in stimulating interactions that support learning and are emotionally supportive. Interactions that help children acquire new knowledge and skills provide input, elicit verbal responses and reactions, and foster engagement in and enjoyment of learning [6].

This is to say that interactions could happen among toddlers when a teacher intentionally plans and carefully thinks about how she approaches and responds to children. Supportive interactions could help children develop a strong sense of well-being and security. Going to the developmental psychologist, cognition leads to the conclusion that competence arising from the child-parent relationship, facilitators and her environment, and social adjustment result from a child's experience in peer interactions [7]. Young children engage in playful acts with a stranger, taking turns pressing the buttons on a toy, rolling a ball back, and handing toys to each other [8]. It might be the medium through which a child could acquire and exhibit interaction.

Turn-taking is a vital communication skill for children to learn, as it is one of the fundamentals of positive and successful interaction. Interaction with a child should produce many turn-taking opportunities, and this can be achieved by facing children, being at their level, and making eye contact. Gwen [8] tested this simple tactic on 1- and 2-year-old; the children seemed to flip a switch. The babies began to respond to their new playmates as people helped and shared with them. There was no such effect if children merely played alongside the stranger. Kaufman and Flanagan [9] also posited that toddlers who played games with quality materials improved their ability to interact and imagine another person's perspective. The above result interests the researcher to research the influence of quality ECE Centres on the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State.

The primary function of ECE centres in this work is to foster social interaction among toddlers to aid every other development at their early stage. The emphasis of this paper is to prevent toddlers from being deprived socially. When a child is socially isolated, as it is a basic human need, the body will perceive the situation as a

threat. However, a high level of isolation is regarded as a threat and could deprive the child of interactions in her early years and adulthood. Socially isolated children are at increased risk of health problems in adulthood [10].

Studies on social isolation have demonstrated that a lack of social relationships negatively impacts brain structure development [11]. It is argued that experiencing social interaction is vital during childhood development. However, for numerous reasons, many children cannot participate in or experience social interaction that is crucial for their well-being and development. The absence of social interactions has been shown to affect child development in various ways. For example, previous research has revealed that socially isolated children tend to have lower subsequent educational attainment and part of a less advantaged social class in adulthood and are more likely to be psychologically distressed in adulthood [12].

Researchers are still contemplating the concept of “quality” in ECE. Judgment of quality includes values. Education and training of teachers on how to handle children with care, considering each child unique, could determine quality ECE. ECE lies in the definition of quality and the instrument used to measure it. Social interaction outcomes are often the most critical dependent variable in assessing high-quality ECE. Quality education generally refers to meeting the standard or expected learning that aids in competing globally, that is, practicing the ideal thing in an ideal situation. It could also be seen as an extent to which educational performance is perfected. High-quality education depends on teachers' quality, instructional strategy, proficiency, content, and assessment in which learning takes place. Ahmed [13] believes that Minimum quality standards for education are common in low and lower-middle-income countries. To him, the scope and use of such are determined by the country's level of development. It monitors, evaluates, and inspects the quality of education provision to improve accountability in education.

This study was anchored on the socio-cultural theory by Lev Vygotsky. The theorist asserted that learning is an essentially social process in which the support of parents, caregivers, peers, and the wider society and culture plays a crucial role in developing higher psychological functions. Sandra [4] cited Vygotsky, who was interested in how cultural elements that a particular society deems necessary, such as customs, beliefs, skills, and values, are passed on to new generations. His socio-cultural theory declared that social interaction within the family and with knowledgeable community members is the primary means by which children acquire behaviors and cognitive processes relevant to their society. The theory is relevant to the study's variables (dependent, independent, and moderating variables). This was why the selection of ECE in this context is thus an essential part of the development process. The work of the school's quality assurance standard agencies is also based on the BRMS manual [14]. Quality Education is based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), Education for All (EFA), and Humanitarian Charter to represent universal goals for helping children achieve the right to live with dignity [15].

Overall, standards of education will contribute to different aspects of quality education. For example, compliance with school infrastructure and environment might promote the learners' safety, health, and general well-being [13] and foster positive

interaction among toddlers, but if the qualities are not met, learning outcomes may be affected. Generally, quality of education supports the harmonization of education provisions and can improve each child's positive interaction and behavior. Program Quality is crucial in how much children benefit from early childhood programs. High-quality programs enhance children's development and learning. Poor-quality programs do not. Establishing a high-quality program is not intuitive, nor is it automatic. We know that regardless of good intentions, many children in the United States and throughout the world attend poor early learning programs [16]. This has prompted a call to identify, define and practice that characterize high quality as an essential step in expanding the availability of such programs to young children.

2. METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. It was considered appropriate because of its ability to determine the influence of quality ECE centres on the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State. The targeted population comprises 53,867 Pre-primary school pupils in public and private schools in Kwara State, while the sample consists of 50 respondents. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in this study. The first stage involved randomly selecting 3 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kwara State. The second stage involved the random selection of 2 public primary schools and two private ones in each LGAs. The third stage randomly selects five pre-primary school pupils from selected public and private schools. Overall, the total number of participants selected for this study was 60.

Out of 60 questionnaires distributed, the researchers retrieved 50 (24 males and 26 females), which were finally used in the study. The questionnaire was the major instrument used in the study to elicit information from the respondents related to the study's variables. The self-developed instrument was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two researchers in Educational psychology and experts in research and statistics. After all these people had given their suggestions and made necessary corrections to the instrument. After the instrument's validity, twenty (20) copies of the instruments were administered to pre-primary school pupils in Oyo State to test for reliability. The test-retest method was used to determine the instrument's reliability coefficient, and the two instruments' reliability coefficient index was 0.85 and 0.75, respectively. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC) and t-test were used to analyze the data.

Statement of the Problem

The need for social interaction development of children is an educator's concern. Quality Early child care is indeed appreciated globally as the right of children. The place of Quality Early child care in developing various skills in children can never be overemphasized. The development of social skills in children in the early years and future achievements is a broad concern, especially in early childhood. Many studies used one or the other to develop different skills in children. Researchers have been seeking an answer to how qualities of ECE can be used in developing social interaction skills in children.

Quality education enables all learners to realize their capabilities to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance well-being. He further says that learning outcomes are required to vary according to context, but at the end of the basic education cycle, they must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills, including awareness and prevention of disease. Quality education must be inclusive, relevant, and democratic [17].

Some of the studies were carried out to address the development of different skills without the use of quality ECE, many studies according to research have examined different kinds of programs ranging from (crèche, playgroup, kindergarten, and so on) and their influences on the pre-primary school pupils' domains of development. None of the studies have examined the use of quality ECE on children's social interaction in Kwara state, which would, in turn, mean using indoor and outdoor structures to build social interaction in the pupils. Therefore, based on the preceding, the study investigated the influence of quality ECE on the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were postulated for this study:

- H₀1: There is no significant relationship between quality Early Childhood Education Centres and social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State.
- H₀2: There is no significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender.
- H₀3: There is no significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on location.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Distribution of the Responders Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	24	48.00
Female	26	52.00
Total	50	100.00

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on gender. Twenty-four of the respondents representing 48.0%, were male, while 26 were female, representing 52.0% from the analysis above. Female respondents were more in number than male respondents.

Table 2. Distribution of the Respondents Based on location

Location	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	31	62.0
Urban	19	38.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 2 shows the distribution of responders based on location. Thirty-one of the respondents representing 62.0%, were from rural areas, while 19 of them, representing 38.0%, were from urban areas, the table above. Respondents from rural areas were more in number.

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between quality Early Childhood Education Centres and social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State.

Table 3. PPMC Analysis showing the relationship between quality Early Childhood Education Centres and social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils

Variable	Mean	SD	N	r	Sig.	Remark
Quality ECE	21.72	25.131	50	.672	.000	S
Social Interaction	60.32	48.061				

Table 3 shows the significant relationship between the quality Early Childhood Centre and the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State ($r=.672$, $p<0.05$). The result indicated a positive relationship between the Quality Early Childhood Centre and the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State. The hypothesis is therefore rejected in light of the result since the significant value is less than 0.05. This means that Quality Early Childhood Centre significantly influences the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender

Table 4. t-test Analysis showing the significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig.	Remark
Female	26	11.52	-.023	49	.173	NS	-.023
Male	24	10.71					

Table 4 shows the significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender. The finding revealed no significant difference ($t = -.023$; $df = 49$; $p > 0.05$). The hypothesis was, therefore, not rejected in light of the result since the significant value is more than 0.05. This implies that female pupils' social interaction (Mean= 11.52) is not significantly different from male pupils (Mean= 10.72). This means there is no significant difference in the influence of Quality Early Childhood Centre on the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender.

Research Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on location

Table 5: t-test Analysis showing the significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on location

Location	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Rural	31	12.31	4.264	.015	49	.082	NS
Urban	19	13.05	4.583				

Table 5 shows the significant difference in the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on location. The finding revealed no significant difference ($t = .015$; $df = 49$; $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis was, therefore, not rejected in light of the result since the significant value is more than 0.05. This implies that rural pupils' social interaction (Mean= 12.31) is not significantly different from urban pupils (Mean= 13.05). This means there is no significant difference in the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on location.

3.2. Discussion of Findings

The findings of research hypothesis one revealed that there was a significant relationship between quality ECE Centres and social interaction among Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State. This finding is in line with Gwen [8], who tested interaction among children aged one and two using tactic games and discovered that children seemed to flip a switch.

Research hypothesis two's findings revealed no significant difference in the social interaction of Pre-primary school pupils in Kwara State based on gender. This is in line with the finding of Martin and Diana [18], who found that the incident of general activities and social interaction of both males and females has no significant difference and has flight components of behavior.

Findings in research hypothesis three showed that there was no significant difference in children's social interaction based on location. This finding is in line with Ulf [19], who found that social and cultural theorists concluded that infants indeed point to exciting events that share their interests. This is to say that types of equipment/materials displayed for children sometimes do not interest them; they look for an alternative to be engaged. This is why it is essential to place children in an enabling environment. Also, Chih [20] concluded that the location of an individual is associated based on the function of their area. Contrarily Mccracken [21] concluded that there was no significant difference in schooling in rural and urban areas when there were materials to engage children.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Many children spend most of their time burning their energy through play, particularly in their early years. Children are restless in their early years, but unfortunately, little or no attention has been given to how to influence children to play to foster or encourage social interaction among toddlers. Quality ECE Centres prompt questions, tolerance, curiosity, and positive interaction and teach children activities to pursue the new concept. It is essential for teachers, parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders of early

childhood education to understand how children grow and learn social norms, skills, and interactions instead of academic performance only, which has always been a significant concern. This would go a long way to reducing or ending not being socially endowed.

It was discovered that toddlers were already conversant with the little available materials; children like to interact with materials and peers because it allows each child to move around to burn his/ her energy. Most of them found interaction interesting when exposed to appropriate materials. The sound and melody made from appropriate materials captivated each child's interest to participate in other learning domains and interact verbally, ranging from one to two, and more words to communicate with both young and adults. Quality ECE centres allow children to demonstrate creativity and foster verbal and non-verbal interaction among toddlers in the Kwara State Area of Kwara State. From the findings of this study, it is concluded that the quality of the ECE Center positively influences the social interaction of pre-primary school pupils.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. It is important to make more provisions for Quality materials, qualified teachers/caregivers, spacing, structure, and learning processes to improve and increase the number of quality centers in Kwara State.
2. Government must ensure that all the primary schools in the state have ECE Centres attached to them as directed by the federal government of Nigeria and that the federal government should provide adequate age-appropriate facilities to the said centers to improve the quality of learning outcomes in ECE centers
3. Counseling psychologists and educational stakeholders should ensure that ECE curricula are distributed to all preschools and make provision for functional supervisory teams to ensure that the recommended policies on preschool establishment are implemented accordingly.

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