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IMPACT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the impact of early childhood education on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. Population of the study was made up of 419 teachers comprising all the teachers in the 45 public primary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The sample size was 151 primary school teachers drawn using the simple random sampling technique. The research instrument for the study is a questionnaire titled "Impact of Early Childhood Education on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils Questionnaire" (IECEAPPSPQ). The instrument contained three clusters with 21 items that sought information required to answer the research questions. The internal consistencies of the items in the clusters were determined using Cronbach Alpha Method and an overall coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using mean. A mean cut off of 2.50 was used as the bench mark. It was revealed that early childhood education has positive impact on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area. It was recommended that Governments and private institutions should allocate sufficient funds to establish and maintain quality early

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childhood education programs, providing necessary resources, infrastructure and trained educators.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Academic Performance, Affective Performance, Cognitive Performance, Psychomotor Performance

Introduction

Early childhood education is a type of education prepared for preschool children. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) defined early childhood education as education given in educational settings for children aged 3 through 5 years in preparing their entry into primary school. Similarly, Wisdom (2017) affirmed that early childhood education, is an educational establishment or learning space offering education to children before they begin compulsory education at primary school. In the researcher's view, early childhood education is the education given to younger learners before the age of entering primary education. It includes: the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. These types of education settings are currently provided by private entrepreneurs.

The objectives of early childhood education as stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2014) include: effecting a smooth transmission from the home to the school; preparing the child for the primary level of education; providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work; inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on; develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; inculcating social norms; learn good habits, especially good health habits; and teaching rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc. through play. Early childhood education provides learning experiences for children and graduates them for enrollment into primary school.

Primary school, synonymous to primary education is a place where children's natural curiosity and enthusiasm for learning are nurtured and developed through a broad and balanced curriculum. The National Policy on Education (2014) posited that primary school is an educational setting which provides a kind of education given to children within the ages of 6-11 in an educational institution. Similarly, Oladimeji (2018) refer to primary school as an educational institution that provides foundational knowledge and skills to young children, preparing them for future learning. Primary school is an educational institution where children's educational foundations are laid. In the researcher's view, primary education is a school system in which children receives primary or elementary education from the age of about six to twelve, after preschool before secondary school.

The objectives of primary education as stipulated in NPE cited in Adebola (2019), includes: to inculcate permanent literacy and

numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society; mold the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child; develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment; give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity; provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality. Primary school is important to school children because it forms the foundation through which children build their literacy and numeracy.

Primary school exposes children to do different academic programmes such as literacy and numeracy. These activities then determine children's academic performances. Frank (2020) academic performance as refers to what the pupils have learned or what skill the pupils possess and is usually measured through assessments like standardized tests. According to Singh (2020) academic performance is typically assessed by using teachers "ratings, class tests and examination hold by the academic institution or by the educational boards. For the purpose of this study, academic performance is the scores obtained by a child in an examination which indicates his level of knowledge of a subject matter.

The researcher observed that children who perform academically excellent in primary schools were as a result of their initial exposure in early childhood education settings. Consequently, their excellent performances could be observed in affective and psychomotor developmental areas. In this regard, Okeke (2022) found that Nigerian preschoolers who received early childhood education showed significant improvements in cognitive skills such as attention, spatial awareness, and numerical understanding. Similarly, Adeyemi (2019) noted that early childhood education positively correlates with improved reading and mathematics abilities in primary school pupils. Affectively, early childhood education fosters emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and social skills (Onyechi, 2020). Okoro (2022) discovered that Nigerian preschoolers who participated in early childhood education programs demonstrated better emotional regulation, empathy, and cooperation with peers. Moreover, Eze (2019) found that early childhood education reduces aggression and anxiety in pupils, promoting a positive and supportive learning environment. Psychomotor-wise, early childhood education enhances fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and physical fitness (Nwosu, 2020). Ugwu (2022) observed that Nigerian preschoolers who engaged in early childhood education activities showed significant improvements in motor skills such as drawing, puzzles, and ball games. Additionally, Ogunyemi (2019) noted that early childhood education

promotes healthy habits, nutrition, and physical activity among pupils in different local government areas such as Awka South Local Government Area.

The quality of education received during early childhood has a profound impact on a child's future academic success, social-emotional development, and physical growth. However, there is a growing concern among educators and stakeholders about the effectiveness of early childhood education in Awka South Local Government Area. Specifically, there is a need to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of early childhood education on cognitive performance, affective performance, and psychomotor performance of pupils in the area. Despite the importance of early childhood education, there appears to be a gap in understanding its impact on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The impact of early childhood on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor performance of pupils is yet uncovered as the researcher has not come across a study of such kind, thus, a gap this study intends to fill. Therefore, this study investigates the impacts of early childhood education on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor performance of pupils in Awka South Local Government Area.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of early childhood education in Awka South Local Government Area remains a pressing concern, particularly regarding its impact on pupils' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor performance. Despite the critical role of early childhood education in laying the foundation for future academic success, social-emotional development, and physical growth, there is a noticeable gap in understanding impact of early childhood education on the academic performance of primary school pupils. Teachers, as key stakeholders, play a pivotal role in shaping pupils' learning experiences and outcomes. However, it is uncertain whether teachers in Awka South Local Government Area fully recognize the significance of early childhood education in enhancing cognitive skills, emotional intelligence, and physical development. The lack of clarity surrounding teachers' perceptions raises fundamental questions. Do teachers view early childhood education as essential for fostering problem-solving, memory, and language development? Are teachers aware of its impact on emotional stability, empathy, and social skills? Do teachers recognize the role of early childhood education in developing fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and physical fitness? This knowledge gap has significant implications for pupil development. If teachers' perceptions are misaligned with the benefits of early childhood education, it may hinder the effectiveness of educational programs and ultimately affect pupil outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions of the impact of early childhood education on cognitive, affective and psychomotor

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performance of pupils in Awka South Local Government Area. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the impacts of early childhood education on the cognitive performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area?
2. What are the impacts of early childhood education on the affective performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area?
3. What are the impacts of early childhood education on the psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area?

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. Population of the study was made up of 419 teachers comprising all the teachers in the 45 public primary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The sample size was 151 primary school teachers drawn using the simple random sampling technique. The research instrument for the study is a questionnaire titled "Impact of Early Childhood Education on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils Questionnaire" (IECEAPPSPQ). The instrument contained three clusters with 21 items that sought information required to answer the research questions. The instrument were structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1

The internal consistencies of the items in the clusters were determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics. The alpha coefficients got were 0.77, 0.74 and 0.79 for cluster I, II and III respectively, with an overall coefficient of 0.76 and these were adjudged adequate, and the instrument reliable. Data collected were analyzed using mean. A mean cut off of 2.50 was used as the bench mark. Items with mean rating of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed whereas items with mean ratings of below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed.

Results

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the impacts of early childhood education on the cognitive performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Fx	$\bar{X}$	REMARKS
1.		29	77	26	19	151	3.74	Agreed
	Early childhood education enhances problem-solving skills among children	116	231	52	19	566		
2.		16	88	14	33	151	2.57	Agreed
	Children who attend early childhood had good retentive abilities	64	264	77	33	389		

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3.	Early childhood education enhances language skills development through interactive learning among children.	23 92	67 201	26 52	35 35	151 380	2.51	Agreed
4.	Children who attend early childhood had refined spatial awareness and visual-spatial skills	44 176	49 147	32 64	26 26	151 413	2.73	Agreed
5.	Early childhood education enhances critical thinking skills among children.	22 88	79 237	40 80	10 10	151 415	2.74	Agreed
6.	Children who passed through early childhood education had good analytic skills to evaluate information	31 124	89 267	13 26	18 18	151 435	2.88	Agreed
	Mean of means						**2.86**	**Agreed**

In Table 1 the respondents agreed to all the items. It shows that early childhood education has positive impact on the cognitive performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

Table 2: Mean rating of respondents on the impacts of early childhood education on the affective performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Fx	$\bar{X}$	REMARKS
7.	Early childhood education fosters emotional intelligence in children	61 132	44 132	22 44	24 24	151 444	2.94	Agreed
8.	Early childhood education fosters social skills development in children	44 176	63 189	32 64	12 12	151 441	2.92	Agreed
9.	Early childhood education fosters affection for learning, promoting curiosity and exploration	47 188	72 216	15 30	17 17	151 451	2.98	Agreed
10.	Children who passed through early childhood education	23 92	67 201	26 52	35 35	151 380	2.51	Agreed
11.	Early childhood education behavioral problems to promote among children.	37 148	80 240	21 42	13 13	151 443	2.93	Agreed
	Mean of means						**2.79**	**Agreed**

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In Table 2, 5 items (7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) had mean score of 2.50 and above indicating agreed. It shows that early childhood education has positive impact on the affective performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

Table 3: Mean rating of respondents on the impacts of early childhood education on the psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Fx	$\bar{X}$	REMARKS
12.		16	88	14	33	151	2.57	Agreed
	Children who passed through early childhood education had fine motor skills through activities like drawing and writing.	64	264	77	33	389		
13.		23	67	26	35	151	2.51	Agreed
	It enhances gross motor skills development among children	92	201	52	35	380		
14.		44	49	32	26	151	2.73	Agreed
	Children who passed through early childhood education had hand-eye coordination and dexterity	176	147	64	26	413		
15.		22	79	40	10	151	2.74	Agreed
	Children who passed through early childhood education had spatial awareness and orientation	88	237	80	10	415		
16.		31	89	13	18	151	2.88	Agreed
	Early childhood education enhances posture through physical education among children	124	267	26	18	435		
17.		23	67	26	35	151	2.51	Agreed
	It promotes physical fitness and health, establishing a foundation for lifelong well-being.	92	201	52	35	380		
18.	Early childhood education develops fundamental movement skills, such as running, jumping, and throwing in children	44	63	32	12	151	2.92	Agreed
		176	189	64	12	441		
	Mean of means						**2.77**	**Agreed**

In Table 3, all the items including the mean obtained mean rating above the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating agreed; it shows that early childhood education has positive impact on the psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area.

Discussion of Findings

Impacts of early childhood education on the cognitive performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

The findings of the study showed that early childhood education has positive impact on the cognitive performance of primary school

pupils in Awka South Local Government Area. This finding is in consonance with the findings by Okeke (2022) who found that Nigerian preschoolers who received early childhood education showed significant improvements in cognitive skills such as attention, spatial awareness, and numerical understanding. Similarly, Adeyemi (2019) noted that early childhood education positively correlates with improved reading and mathematics abilities in primary school pupils.

Impacts of early childhood education on the affective performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

The findings of the study showed that early childhood education has positive impact on the affective performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area. To support this result, Onyechi (2020) posited that affectively, early childhood education fosters emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and social skills. Besides, the findings by Okoro (2022) discovered that Nigerian preschoolers who participated in early childhood education programs demonstrated better emotional regulation, empathy, and cooperation with peers. Moreover, Eze (2019) found that early childhood education reduces aggression and anxiety in pupils, promoting a positive and supportive learning environment.

Impacts of early childhood education on the psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area

The findings of the study revealed that early childhood education on the psychomotor performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area. To support this result, Nwosu (2020) agreed that psychomotor-wise, early childhood education enhances fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and physical fitness. In addition, Ugwu (2022) observed that Nigerian preschoolers who engaged in early childhood education activities showed significant improvements in motor skills such as drawing, puzzles, and ball games. Additionally, Ogunyemi (2019) noted that early childhood education promotes healthy habits, nutrition, and physical activity among pupils in different local government areas such as Awka South Local Government Area.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that early childhood education have positive impact on academic performance of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area.

Recommendations

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

1. Governments and private institutions should allocate sufficient funds to establish and maintain quality early childhood education programs,

providing necessary resources, infrastructure and trained educators.
2. Early childhood education should be made accessible and affordable for all, regardless of socio-economic background or geographical location, through subsidized programs, scholarships or community-based initiatives.
3. Educators should receive comprehensive training and ongoing professional development to effectively implement early childhood education curricula, incorporating best practices and innovative teaching methods.
4. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to participate actively in their child's early education through workshops, parenting programs and regular communication with educators, fostering a supportive learning environment.
5. Early childhood education curricula should be aligned with primary school standards, ensuring a seamless transition and continuity of learning. Regular assessments and evaluations should be conducted to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement and inform instructional decisions.

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