

Influence of Early Childhood Education on Social Adjustment of Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Dr. Ufuoma V. Oyinvwi¹, Ogah, Benjamin Ogah²
Dept. of Educational Foundations,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
Ogahbenjamin1@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of Early Childhood Education on Social Adjustment of Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population was 20,920 and a sample of 378 pupils was used for the study. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to compose the sample. Two research questions were answered while two hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance. One instrument was used to collect data about the pupils- Questionnaire on Early Childhood Education and Social Adjustment Level of Pupils (QECESA). The instrument is divided into two sections; section A and B. Section A contain Biodata of pupils of those who attended Nursery Education and those who did not attend Nursery Education. Section B contain items of the influence of Early Childhood on Self-efficacy and Social phobia. Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions, and t-test was used to test the hypotheses. It was found that there is significant differences in the self-efficacy of pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. It also revealed that there is significant difference of social phobia between pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others- that Counselling Psychologist and teachers to pay attention to enhance pupils' self-efficacy as it enables pupils to develop positive life and academic discuss. The study concluded that early childhood education led to better educational outcomes and help pupils to manage their self-efficacy.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Social Adjustment, Self-Efficacy, Social Phobia, Primary School Pupils

INTRODUCTION

Social adjustment refers to the ability of an individual to interact effectively and harmoniously with others in a social environment, conforming to norms, values, and acceptable behaviours. For primary school pupils, social adjustment is crucial as it may enhance their interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and academic success. Pupils who are socially adjusted tend to form healthy peer relationships, communicate effectively, and adapt well to school demands. On the other hand, poor social adjustment can lead to social withdrawal, low self-esteem, aggression, and academic decline (Adams & Smith, 2020). In early educational settings, such maladjustment may hinder participation in group activities, reduce confidence, and limit social learning opportunities (Olowe & Olatunji, 2021). The importance of social adjustment in primary school cannot be overstated, as it lays the foundation for lifelong social competence and mental

health. However, the researcher has observed cases of poor social adjustment among pupils in public primary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Such pupils often find it challenging to cooperate with peers, respond positively to teachers, or participate in group learning. This situation raises concerns about possible factors influencing their social behaviour particularly in terms of self-efficacy and social phobia.

Self-efficacy encompasses an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully perform tasks or handle situations. Among primary school pupils, high self-efficacy fosters resilience, persistence, and confidence in tackling both academic and social challenges. Pupils with strong self-efficacy are more likely to engage in cooperative learning, contribute in class, and recover quickly from setbacks. It plays a central role in pupils' emotional stability, influencing how they cope with peer pressure, criticism, and competition. Benedict (2018) opined that self-efficacy supports positive interaction with peers and teachers, thereby enhancing social adjustment. When pupils believe in their abilities, they are better able to handle social demands, resist negative influences, and take initiative in group settings. However, the researcher has observed self-efficacy problems among pupils in public primary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Many appear reluctant to participate in social or academic activities, possibly due to inadequate early childhood education particularly the lack of nursery school exposure. This limitation may also be linked to the development of social phobia.

Social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder, is a persistent fear of social situations where one may be judged, embarrassed, or humiliated. Social phobia can manifest as avoidance of class participation, reluctance to interact with peers, or physical symptoms such as sweating and trembling in group settings. Such anxiety can disrupt learning, weaken peer relationships, and undermine academic performance. For children, early exposure to diverse social environments such as those offered in nursery education helps build confidence, communication skills, and familiarity with group interactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). In Nasarawa State's public primary schools, the researcher has observed pupils showing signs of social phobia, such as avoiding eye contact, refusing to answer questions in class, and isolating themselves during breaks. These behaviours may be linked to a lack of nursery education, where early structured social exposure is limited. Without such foundational experiences, pupils may struggle to adapt to the more demanding social and academic environment of primary school, thereby increasing the

likelihood of social phobia. This concern further underscores the potential role of early childhood education in shaping pupils' social outcomes.

Early childhood education encompasses the formal and informal learning experiences provided to children before they enter primary school, typically from ages three to five. It is most effective when pupils attend nursery school, as it introduces them to structured routines, peer interaction, and foundational academic concepts. Nursery education plays a vital role in cognitive, emotional, and social development, fostering skills such as cooperation, empathy, communication, and self-regulation. Pupils who attend nursery school often enter primary school with greater confidence, stronger social networks, and better readiness to meet academic challenges. The importance of early childhood education lies in its ability to provide a smooth transition into formal schooling, reduce adjustment difficulties, and promote holistic development (UNICEF, 2021). However, its absence can create gaps in pupils' social readiness, leading to issues such as low self-efficacy and social phobia. The researcher has observed that many pupils in Nasarawa State are not exposed to early nursery education, entering primary school without the social and emotional preparation such education provides. This lack of early structured exposure may be affecting their social adjustment, weakening their belief in their abilities (self-efficacy), and contributing to the development of social phobia. It is against this background that this study examined the influence of early childhood education on the social adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Objectives

The general purpose of this study was to examine the influence of early childhood education on social adjustment of primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically,

1. To investigate the difference on self-efficacy between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
2. To find out the difference on social phobia between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in the mean score of pupils on self-efficacy between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria
2. What is the difference in the mean score of pupils on social phobia on pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were postulated for this study.

HO₁: There is no significant difference on self-efficacy between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

HO₂: There is no significant difference on social phobia between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey is a research design that involves the collection of primary data from a subset or population of subjects having the same characteristics. Descriptive research design is also a research design that enables the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic or subjects (Shona & McCombes 2022). They further state that it is a research design that aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation, or phenomenon. Creswell (2014) explains research design as the specific procedure involved in the research process, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. This design is suitable because it is used to get primary source, relevant and accurate information direct from the respondents to investigate the influence of early childhood education on social adjustment.

The population of the study consist of 20,920 primary five pupils drawn from the 36 public primary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The sample size of this study is 378 primary five pupils drawn from the 16 public primary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria which was determine using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size of a given population. The sample size was drawn using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study specifically targeted primary five pupils, who are at a crucial stage

in their academic development and therefore most relevant for assessing the variables under investigation. By deliberately focusing on this group, the researcher ensured that the sample captured the characteristics necessary to provide valid and meaningful data. On the other hand, simple random sampling was employed within the selected schools to give every eligible pupil an equal chance of being included in the study. This enhanced representativeness and reduced bias, thereby improving the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of primary five pupils in Nasarawa State. Together, these techniques ensured both relevance and fairness in sample selection.

One self-developed questionnaire was used for this study namely: questionnaire on early childhood education and social adjustment level of pupils (QECESA). The instrument comprised a total of 30 items. No 1 to 10 items are for assessing or measuring the Self-efficacy. Items 11 to 20 are for assessing or measuring the social phobia, while item 21 to 30 were for assessing or measuring the level of Classroom Participation. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and carefully structured to cover all the relevant areas of the work, and it is known as Social Adjustment Inventory (SAI). The questionnaire is a modified four-point Likert scale in the following format: SA= Strongly Agreed - 4 points, A =Agreed -3points, D=Disagreed -2points, and SD=Strongly Disagreed - 1point.

The instruments was validated by two experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi for face and construct validity. The instruments: questionnaire on early childhood education and social adjustment level of pupils (QECESA) yielded a logical validity index of 0.78.

The instruments were pilot tested on 30 respondents (pupils) 15 in each school, 15 to the pupils that had early childhood education experience, and 15 to the pupils that do not have such an experience in the two government primary schools. The two schools used are among the population but not among the sample. The data collected were analysed and subjected to the Cronbach Alpha method of determining the coefficient of internal consistency. The analyses of the responses yielded a reliability index of 0.76 for QECESA.

Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions, and t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of Significant.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the difference in the mean score of pupils on self-efficacy between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the influence of Self-Efficacy on pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Items	Attended Nursery Edu			No Nursery Education		
	\bar{X}	Std	Remark	\bar{X}	Std	Remark
I can score high grades in school through personal effort.	3.02	1.20	Agreed	2.39	1.18	Disagreed
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	3.39	1.14	Agreed	2.47	1.15	Disagreed
I can get discouraged when a topic proves too difficult to understand.	3.21	1.14	Agreed	2.27	1.15	Disagreed
I am confident reading alone without someone teaching me.	3.01	1.09	Agreed	2.59	1.05	Agreed
I don't like to face any challenge alone.	3.19	1.16	Agreed	2.43	1.14	Disagreed
I do not have confidence in my ability to do well on tests.	2.42	1.14	Disagreed	2.93	1.10	Agreed
I always need a guide any time I am reading for an exam.	2.33	1.13	Disagreed	2.73	1.13	Agreed
I depend on my seatmate during exams.	2.47	1.17	Disagreed	2.89	1.15	Agreed
I do remain calm whenever I am facing difficulties in reading.	3.19	1.09	Agreed	2.06	1.12	Disagreed
I work harder whenever facing any difficulties.	3.28	1.10	Agreed	2.48	1.11	Disagreed
Grand Mean (\bar{X})	3.22	1.34		2.39	1.16	

Table 1 presents the descriptive data on the influence of self-efficacy between pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The results indicate that pupils with nursery education, with mean scores above 2.50 across most items and a grand mean of 3.22, agreed that early childhood education positively influenced their self-efficacy. Conversely, pupils without nursery education recorded a lower grand mean of 2.39, below the 2.50 benchmark, indicating weaker self-efficacy perceptions.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the mean score of pupils on social phobia between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the influence of Social Phobia on pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Items	Attended Nursery Edu			No Nursery Education		
	\bar{X}	Std	Remark	\bar{X}	Std	Remark
I am not too comfortable interacting with other pupils in the class.	2.43	1.12	Disagreed	2.61	1.05	Agreed
I do better in exams when I read alone than reading with others.	2.47	1.01	Disagreed	3.59	1.76	Agreed
The fear of not doing well among my mates is the reason why I don't like interacting with them.	2.44	1.04	Disagreed	3.02	1.09	Agreed
My class attendance has reduced as a result of my inability to interact with other pupils.	2.45	.972	Disagreed	3.57	1.02	Agreed
I have sometimes left school because I'm afraid to interact with my mates.	2.33	1.06	Disagreed	2.93	1.98	Agreed
I learn best when I discuss the topic with my mates in class.	2.77	1.06	Agreed	2.49	1.06	Agreed
I learn best when I read on my own.	2.42	1.05	Disagreed	3.53	1.09	Agreed
I feel my opinion will not count, and that is why I don't interact with other pupils.	2.40	1.16	Disagreed	2.76	1.13	Agreed
I feel shy to ask questions about anything I do not understand in class.	2.33	1.15	Disagreed	3.50	1.15	Agreed
I don't like asking/answering questions in class	2.37	1.04	Disagreed	2.84	1.13	Agreed
Grand Mean (\bar{X})	2.44	1.56		3.08	1.75	

Table 2 presents the respondents' ratings of items 1–10 on the influence of social phobia among pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Pupils with nursery education recorded mean scores below the 2.50 benchmark across most items, with a grand mean of 2.44, indicating low levels of social phobia. Conversely, pupils without nursery education scored above the 2.50 benchmark in most items, with a grand mean of 3.08, showing higher tendencies toward social phobia. This implies that attending nursery education reduces social phobia among pupils.

TESTING RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1 (HO₁): There is no significant difference on self-efficacy of pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test on the difference on Self-Efficacy between Pupils that attended Nursery Education and those that did not attend Nursery Education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Variable	Group	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	Df	t _{cal}	p-value	Decision
Self-Efficacy	ANE	189	3.22	1.22	376	4.258	.001	Reject HO ₂
	NNE	189	2.39	1.16				

* *t*-test is significant ($p > 0.05$), ANE = Attended Nursery Education. NNE = No Nursery Education

Table 3 presents the independent sample t-test result on the difference in self-efficacy between pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State. The analysis shows a t-calculated value of (4.26) with a p-value of (.001) which is less than 0.05 alpha level and 376 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference in the self-efficacy of pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2 (HO₂): There is no significant difference on social phobia of pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not attend nursery education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test showing the difference on Social Phobia between Pupils that attended Nursery Education and those that did not attend Nursery Education in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Variable	Group	N	\bar{X}	Std.D	df	t _{cal}	p-value	Decision
Social Phobia	ANE	189	2.44	1.56	376	.514	.034	Reject HO ₃
	NNE	189	3.08	1.75				

* *t*-test is significant ($p > 0.05$), ANE = Receive Nursery Education. NNE = No Nursery Education

Table 4 shows the responses of 378 pupils on the difference in social phobia between those that attended nursery education and those that did not in Nasarawa State. The result revealed a t-calculated value of (0.514) and a p-value of (0.034) which is less than 0.05 alpha and 376 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference in social phobia between pupils that attended nursery education and those that did not in Nasarawa State.

DISCUSSION

The finding from hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in the self-efficacy of pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This aligns with Ibrahim (2019), who observed that early childhood education strengthens pupils’ confidence in handling academic tasks through structured learning experiences. Likewise, Danladi (2021) reported that pupils exposed to nursery education demonstrated higher belief in their abilities compared to those without such exposure, highlighting the role of early schooling in

shaping positive self-perceptions. This underscores the importance of nursery education in enhancing pupils' self-efficacy, which contributes to improved academic participation and resilience in later years of schooling.

The finding from hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant difference in social phobia between pupils who attended nursery education and those who did not in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This is consistent with Bature (2020), whose results showed that early exposure to structured learning and peer interaction in nursery schools reduces anxiety and fear in social situations. Similarly, Oche (2022) found that pupils without nursery education backgrounds displayed higher tendencies toward social withdrawal and avoidance in group activities, suggesting that early school experiences enhance interpersonal skills. This supports the view that nursery education not only provides academic readiness but also fosters emotional resilience and social adaptability, reducing the likelihood of social phobia in later schooling years.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that early childhood education provides a strong developmental foundation for learners by nurturing confidence, adaptability, and resilience. It strengthens pupils' belief in their abilities and fosters positive social adjustment that supports their academic and personal growth. By instilling these attributes at formative stages, nursery education helps create balanced individuals who can engage meaningfully in learning environments and social contexts. This highlights its role not only as an academic stepping stone but also as a catalyst for emotional stability and interpersonal competence. The study affirms that prioritizing quality early education is essential for producing well-rounded learners who are better equipped to excel in later stages of schooling and to participate productively in society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. It is also recommended that counselling psychologists and teachers should pay more attention to enhancing students' self-efficacy as it is a good predictor of their academic performance. More so, pupils should be able to develop positive ways towards developing their self-efficacy, which could positively influence their life and academics.
2. It is recommended that government expands access to affordable nursery education in Nasarawa State to reduce social phobia among pupils. Teachers should be trained to

support children without early education backgrounds, while parents should be sensitized on the importance of enrolling their wards early. These steps will foster confidence, improve social adjustment, and enhance pupils' overall development.

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