SCHOOL READINESS AS CORRELATE OF ACADEMIC SKILLS OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated school readiness as a correlate of academic skills of pre-primary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Three (3) research questions were raised to give direction to the study, out of which one (1) was hypothesised. The research design adopted for this study was the survey research design based on a correlational approach. The population of the study comprised all one thousand five hundred and fifty-four (1554) Pre-primary class 1 pupils, and ninety-two (92) teachers serving as caregivers in 41 private pre-primary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The sample size for this study was one hundred and twenty (120) Pre-primary class 1 pupils and eight(08) teachers serving as caregivers in 4 schools selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. The research instruments for the collection of data for this study are the School Readiness Questionnaire (SRQ) and the Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ). The instrument was validated by three experts and reliability was done using Cronbach alpha statistics, the coefficients of 0.93, and 0.92 were obtained for School Readiness and Academic Skills respectively. The research instruments were personally given to the teachers to respond to the items on behalf of the pupils, this is because the teachers as the caregivers are familiar with these pupils, having always been with them for at least six (6) active hours per day which make them be in the best position to respond to the item in their stead. Research questions 1 and 2 were answered using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis 1 was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the level of school readiness and academic skills are high among pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government area of Edo state. It was also revealed that there was a significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills among pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government area of Edo state. Based on the findings from the study, the researcher recommended that Parents should always send their children to school when they are ready for school. The government should implement the law to make sure that only ready children are admitted to the school by sending officials of the Ministry of Education for routine checks on schools

Keywords: School Readiness. Academic Skills, Pre-Primary Pupils

Introduction

When a child is born, their instinctive actions like sucking on their mother's breast, grasping, smiling, and seeking closeness in her arms lay the initial foundation for connection. Yet, these innate attributes need further development and nurturing to thrive in the world. Hence, parents opt to enroll their children in various educational stages, starting from crèche to tertiary institutions.

Early childhood education encompasses the formative years from infancy to pre-primary school, playing a crucial role in a child's development. The focus on pre-primary education lies in establishing psychosocial foundations that prepare children for later abstract learning in primary schools. This developmental phase, typically

from ages 3 to 6, significantly impacts a child's physical, intellectual, and emotional growth. Success or failure during these early years can profoundly influence a child's lifelong learning and development.

Recognizing innate abilities and nurturing them through learning experiences provides children with a solid start toward a productive life. There's a widespread consensus that instilling education for sustainability should begin early. These early years form the bedrock for children to develop values, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that could endure through their lives. Early childhood education lays the groundwork for fostering sustainable values like resourcefulness, cultural diversity, gender equality, and democratic values.

As children prepare to enter school, certain attributes become crucial—such as independence, creativity, effective communication, and readiness to follow instructions. However, often, parents enroll their children without assessing these attributes, possibly due to work commitments or the belief that early schooling will facilitate childcare. Nevertheless, school readiness significantly influences a learner's development, impacting their academic skills, career trajectory, and societal contributions.

Learning doesn't begin at school entry; rather, preschool stimulation plays a vital role. Lack of readiness when starting school places children at a heightened risk of academic struggle, leading to long-term consequences. School readiness, encompassing cognitive, social, attention, and self-regulation skills, lays the groundwork for future academic success.

While hard work is essential for success, it's not the sole determinant. Academic skills—knowledge, strategies, and habits—are vital for navigating academic challenges. They facilitate learning content and equip learners to succeed in an academic setting. These skills are pivotal indicators of academic performance and often predict a learner's overall success in their educational journey.

Concept of School Readiness

School readiness is a term often used to describe a child's preparation for formal schooling. Although there's no consistent definition, it generally refers to the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for success in kindergarten or formal education settings (Duncan *et al*., 2007). This readiness encompasses cognitive, social, attentional, and self-regulation skills, laying the groundwork for future academic achievements. Research indicates a strong link between kindergarten cognitive skills and later elementary school success, with children entering school with stronger literacy and mathematics skills tending to achieve better in later grades (La Paro et al., 2000; Bodovski & Farkas, 2007; Duncan *et al*., 2007; Claessens *et al*., 2009). Moreover, prosocial skills in children often predict positive adult outcomes like graduation, attaining a college degree, and employment (Claessens *et al*., 2009).

The concept of school readiness has been viewed through different perspectives in education and child development literature. One view, the idealist/nativist perspective, suggests that children are ready for school when they reach a certain level of maturity encompassing self-control, peer relations, and ability to follow directions—a process

largely determined internally (Mbise, 2006). Conversely, the empiricist/environmentalist view emphasizes readiness based on what children know and how they behave, shaped by external factors such as what they've been taught (Mbise, 2006). In these constructs, solutions for a child's readiness issues often involve allowing more time for maturation or learning fundamental concepts in less demanding programs (Bentin, Hammer, & Cahan, 2010).

However, research challenges the notion that age significantly influences developmental progress. Studies indicate that schooling plays a more crucial role than age, with its effects on kindergarten performance being significantly stronger than those of age alone (Meisels, 2009). Additionally, any academic advantage associated with age upon first-grade entry tends to fade within a few years (Meisels, 2009).

Another perspective, the "social constructivist" model, views readiness through social and cultural contexts rather than as an endogenous process or a specific set of knowledge (Rubin et al., 2003). Research exploring school readiness profiles and academic achievement found that children with positive development profiles demonstrated higher academic achievement over time (Hair *et al*., 2006). Studies also established a significant correlation between school readiness and academic performance in later grades (Zyl, 2011).

The development of school readiness involves expanding a child's skills in various areas such as social interaction, play, language, emotional, physical, literacy, and fine motor skills, allowing teachers to further foster these abilities (Karnatak Science College Dharwad [KSCD], 2023).

Concept of Academic Skills

Though there is an extremely broad array of academic skills that can help learners to perform well in schools, depending on the level of education and its specific requirements for the purpose of this study, reasoning and concept development, reading, writing and Mathematics skills will be considered. This is because the study addressed the pre-primary school pupils and these skills are appropriate for their levels. Children are natural at reasoning and analysis. They want to solve problems, experiment and compare. Reasoning skills generally refer to critical thinking like analysis, evaluation and synthesis, they also include wider skills like more abstract thinking, creative thinking, information processing and problem-solving. Every time children ask questions, predict, classify, compare or evaluate, when they do this, they are practising analysis and reasoning. Concept development is understanding the characteristics, qualities and functionality of people, places and objects. As information is gathered, concepts become clearer.

Reading is an incredibly important part of the emotional and intellectual development in a child. Strong reading skills are likely to set children up for success later in life. Reading skills increase a child’s ability to learn across all subjects, not just in language and reading. When children have reading skills it can help them to master concepts of logic, judgement, and cause-and-effect relationships. When pupils have strong reading abilities, it can enable them to interpret and find meaning in everything they read and when they continuously improve these skills, they can develop the ability to communicate effectively through writing which in turn helps them to

succeed in their academic lives. Writing is the primary basis upon which a learner's intellect can be judged. It equips the child and communication and thinking skills, it fosters their ability to explain and refine their ideas to others. Writing skills filter the knowledge and brain to the point of value. Writing skills are likely to contribute to the future success of children because as they get older, they will be expected to show more sophisticated writing skills and to complete more sophisticated tasks through their writing.

Mathematics is one of the most basic and fundamental areas of life. Mathematics intelligence is used from the moment a child is born, When Mathematics skills are acquired and improved on, it can determine the quality of life. Mathematics skills involve understanding numbers, counting, solving number problems, measuring, estimating, sorting, noticing patterns, and adding and subtracting numbers among others. Children start learning mathematics skills from the time they are born. This learning happens from watching and experiencing numeracy in action, especially in everyday play and activities. A lack of Mathematical skills can affect cognitive development in other areas of life. Research has shown a connection between being competent in Mathematics and success in school (Sarama *et al* 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The trend of sending children to school early in Nigeria often arises from parents' demanding work schedules, leading them to believe that school provides childcare while they are occupied. However, this practice overlooks the crucial aspect of assessing whether children are physically and mentally prepared for formal education. Unfortunately, this rush to enroll children in school without considering their readiness can significantly impact their academic performance and overall experience. When a child isn't adequately prepared for school, they may struggle to keep up with the demands of formal learning alongside their peers. This mismatch can result in feelings of failure, discouragement, and diminished self-esteem, potentially leading to long-term negative effects on their academic skills. Such situations might also traumatize the child, making it challenging for them to adapt to the pace and requirements of a classroom setting. Research, such as the Brookings report referenced in Lynnette's work (2020), indicates that children who commence their schooling with higher levels of readiness tend to achieve more success academically and are less likely to drop out of high school. This information prompts the researcher's interest in investigating the correlation between school readiness and the academic skills of pre-primary school children in the Egor local government area of the State. This study aims to shed light on the impact of readiness on the academic development of children in this specific region.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

i. What is the level of school readiness among Pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?
ii. What is the level of academic skills among Pre-primary school children in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

iii. What is the relationship between school readiness and academic skills among Pre-primary school children in Egor Local government Area of Edo State?

Hypotheses

Research question 3 was hypothesized as follows: the hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills among Pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the survey research design based on a correlational approach. This design was chosen because the study seeks to establish the relationships between School readiness and academic skills of pre-primary school children in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The sample size for this study was one hundred and twenty (120) Pre-primary class 1 pupils and eight (08) teachers serving as caregivers in 4 schools selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. In stage one, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the four (04) schools which constitute 10% of the total number of Primary schools in the Egor Local Government Area. In stage two, a systematic random sampling technique was also used to select one class from each of the four schools selected. In stage three, a disproportionate sampling technique was also used to select thirty (30) pupils and two teachers each from the four classes selected. The research instruments for the collection of data for this study are the School Readiness Questionnaire (SRQ) and the Academic Skills Questionnaire (ASQ). The questionnaire was made up of two sections, A contained questions on the bio-data such as the name of the school, class of the pupil, and age, and B consisted of items for School Readiness and Academic Skills respectively.

The instruments were validated by three experts and reliability was done using Cronbach alpha statistics, the coefficients of 0.93, and 0.92 were obtained for School Readiness and Academic Skills respectively. The research instruments were personally given to the teachers to respond to the items on behalf of the pupils, this is because the teachers as the caregivers are familiar with this is because the teachers as the caregivers are familiar with these pupils, having always been with them for at least six (6) active hours per day which make them be in the best position to respond to the item in their stead. The researcher educated the teachers on the importance of the instrument and how a sincere response would be of immense benefit to the stakeholders including them.

Research questions 1 and 2 were answered using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis 1 was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

What is the level of school readiness among Pre-primary school pupils in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of School Readiness Among School Pupils

ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remarks
SCHOOL READINESS. The child;			
Start conversations with invited guests	2.63	0.95	Often
Investigates new learning experiences on his/her own.	2.75	0.94	Often
Manages routines, like going to the toilet	3.22	0.85	Often
Looks after his/her belongings, like putting their bag away.	3.15	0.84	Often
Keeps trying to work things out, even when the activity is challenging	2.94	0.87	Often
Asks questions about changing circumstances, like a change in routine.	2.63	0.98	Often
Manages routines, like brushing his/her teeth.	2.99	1.00	Often
Recognizes risks, like running on a wet floor.	2.80	1.06	Often
Demonstrates the ability to use new tools effectively.	2.76	0.94	Often
Problem solves, like finishing a puzzle.	2.67	1.00	Often
Makes meaning with words and gestures.	2.62	1.06	Often
Joins in conversations, answers and asks questions.	2.87	1.05	Often
Asks for help with reading.	2.90	0.99	Often
Recognizes shapes in different contexts.	2.97	0.97	Often
Identifies items and counts in order.	3.01	1.00	Often
Cluster	42.95	7.42	

Table 1 presents a cluster mean of 42.95 and a standard deviation of 7.42. With the cluster mean surpassing the normative mean of 37.5, it suggests a notably high level of school readiness among Pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State.

Research Question Two

What is the level of academic skills among Pre-primary school children in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Academic Skills Among School Children

ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remarks
Reasoning and Concept Development. The child;			
Matches like objects, mainly identical objects or matches objects by shape and colour	3.29	0.84	Often
Develops object permanence and understands that objects continue to exist even when out of sight	3.05	1.01	Often
Shows interest in tinkering with objects by taking things apart and putting them back together	3.00	0.94	Often
Explores with elements of nature, such as sand and water	2.79	1.15	Often

Remembers short sequences of events of 2 to 3 steps	2.82	0.98	Often
Reading. The child;			
Holds a book properly and turns the page	3.30	0.94	Often
Understands that words convey the message in a story	3.50	0.73	Always
Recognizes the first letter of their own name	3.20	0.94	Often
Know some letter names	3.42	0.83	Often
Knows the main character in familiar stories	3.24	0.87	Often
Writing. The child;			
Holds a writing tool with a fist or finger grasp	3.35	0.82	Often
Draw with a variety of tools (crayons, pens, pencils)	3.35	0.86	Often
Scribble-writes in a linear fashion	3.10	0.92	Often
Makes marks and refers to them as “my name”	2.95	1.07	Often
Imitating vertical and horizontal strokes	3.03	0.99	Often
Maths. The child;			
Identifies some shapes such as circle, square and triangle	3.25	0.85	Often
Recognizes and matches small quantities to the number words 1,2, and 3	3.16	0.97	Often
Can count on help although might make mistakes	3.10	0.99	Often
Understands the order of the day and begins to use some time words such as ‘morning’ and ‘night’	2.97	1.07	Often
Shows interest in patterns and sequences	2.59	1.04	Often
Cluster	62.52	9.08	

Table 2 reveals a cluster mean of 62.52 and a standard deviation of 9.08. With the cluster mean surpassing the normative mean of 50.00, it indicates a notably high level of academic skills among Pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills among Pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government Area of Edo State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics of School Readiness and Academic Skills Among School Children

	N	Pearson ‘r’	Sig (2-tailed)	Remark
School Readiness	120	.373	.000	Significant
Academic Skills				

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 3 presents a Pearson r-value of .373 and a p-value of 0.000. At an alpha level of 0.05, given that the p-value is lower than the alpha level, the null hypothesis stating no significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills is rejected. Thus, a significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills is established. The r-squared value of 0.1391 indicates that school readiness contributes to approximately 13.9% of the total variance in pupils’ possession of academic skills.

Discussion of Findings

The initial finding indicates a high level of school readiness among pre-primary school children in Egor Local Government Area, potentially attributed to increased exposure through various media like television and the internet. Such exposure aids in the development of fundamental skills crucial for school readiness, aligning with KSCD's (2023) perspective on how readiness facilitates teachers to expand and enhance a child's abilities across various domains. Their assertion that learners with foundational skills progress faster in school is upheld by this finding.

The second finding highlights a high level of academic skills among pre-primary school children in the area, likely influenced by improved access to the internet and educational programming on television. This contrasts with earlier times when such resources were less accessible due to financial constraints. This finding resonates with Chetty *et al.'s* (2011) discovery that early academic skills strongly predict future outcomes like college attendance and financial stability.

The third finding emphasizes a significant link between school readiness and academic skills among pre-primary school children in Egor Local Government Area, echoing Claessens *et al.'s* (2009) observation that stronger early mathematics skills correlate with higher future academic achievements. Additionally, Hair *et al*. (2006) revealed that positive developmental profiles in school readiness relate to enhanced academic success over time. Zyl's (2011) research findings on the correlation between school readiness and academic performance in Grades 1 and 4 further support this relationship.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the level of school readiness and academic performance are high among pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government area of Edo state. It was also revealed that there was a significant relationship between school readiness and academic skills among pre-primary school children in the Egor Local Government area of Edo state.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Encourage parents to ensure their children are well-prepared for school before enrollment.
2. Schools should assess children for readiness before admission.
3. Advocate for government policies ensuring readiness assessments before admitting children to schools, possibly through routine checks by education officials.

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