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**Influence of Home Environment on Preschool Children's
Cognitive Development in Lagelu Local Government Area of
Oyo State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

The home environment has been a very important factor in the upbringing of a child. Most children in pre-school age need an environment that is comfortable and stimulating to enhance their learning skills necessary for their development. Without a good home, it is likely that these children will not develop to their maximum capacity, especially in the area of cognitive development. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of home environment on preschool children's cognitive development in Lagelu Local Government of Oyo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample of the study consisted of two hundred and forty-five (245) parents and their children in the nursery sections of public and private schools in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. Two instruments were used for data collection; Parents' Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) and Preschool Children's Emergent Literacy Assessment (PCELA). The two instruments were validated. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.899 and Guttman Split- half coefficient of 0.572 was obtained, respectively. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages; simple regression test was used

to answer the research questions. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant joint influence of the four variables used (parents' education, motivation, style, and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of children. Parents' education and motivation were the only home environment factors that significantly influenced the cognitive development of preschool children; while parenting style and adequacy of educational materials did not. Only parents' education and motivation predicted preschool children's cognitive development. Based on the findings of the study, relevant conclusions were drawn. It was recommended that educational materials should be made available in the home. Parents should also try as much as possible to show positive attitude towards their children. Parents should always find time to visit their children at school at least on open days so as to know all the developmental aspects of their children.

Keywords: Home environment, Preschool children, Cognitive development

Introduction

The interior of the home and its immediate surroundings are the first environments children experience in their early years. Young children spend most of their time in the home. A home is a place where pupils live with their parents or guardian and it is the place where they are groomed. It is a place where the pupils begin to learn the norms and values of the society in which they find themselves. The home has a great influence on the child's psychological, emotional, social and cognitive states. The home affects the individual since the parents are the first socializing agents in an individual's life. It entails the provision of healthy, interaction, support, security, stimulation and protection given to the child from an early age to boost his intellectual and social competencies in future. However, very few Nigerian children are given such an opportunity to develop within these key factors to become the future adult acceptable to society. Most children in preschool age need an environment that is conducive to enhancing and stimulating their learning skills necessary for life. In most homes, these factors are not present as a result of the socio-economic factors that are prevalent in the country. These will have impact on the

cognitive development of the child at early age. However, information on these attributes is scanty or completely unavailable.

The home environment means the family background of children. It includes all the human and material resources present at the home that affect the children's education and living, such as the parent's level of education, their occupation, their socio-economic status and socializing facilities available in the house. Thus, the home is the basic institution for providing the child's primary socialization and laying the educational foundation for the child upon which the other agents of socialization are built. According to Pamela (2005), the education received by a child from parents at home is most likely to have a highly significant and dominant effect on the behaviour of the child later in life. What the child learns at home and how the family motivates him/her towards education contributes to the child's success or failure at school. These have been shown to be a major factor that influences the overall development of children. Within the home, children also have their early interactions with the members of their family, and availability and quality of resources for learning and playing largely determine the nature of these interactions (Pamela, 2005).

The home is also considered as a powerful factor that has influence on every child. It is consequential for child developmental outcomes, such as emotional and cognitive abilities, school readiness, pupil's attitude towards learning and academic achievement of every child. Collins (2007), as cited in Dzever (2015), avers that studies on the influence of home environments on developmental outcomes have focused on distal variables as the primary measures of home experience, such as family income, parents' educational level, marital status, parental involvement, economic status, family size, home location, family structure and peer group. In pupil's home environment, some factors that influence the cognitive skills of children include parental educational background, parents' occupation status, types and adequacy of instructional materials and parenting styles.

According to Anene (2005), the home is the single most significant environmental factor in enabling children to develop the trust, attitude and skills that will help them to learn and engage positively with the world - a process that starts at birth, if not before. It is the foundation from which babies and young children and youths can grow to achieve their full

potential. Good home learning environment provides the love, security, stimulation, encouragement and opportunities that help children to flourish. The quality of parent-child relationship is fundamental to children's longer-term development. Warmth, encouragement and absence of hostility are key elements in positive home environment. A good relationship between mother(s) and father(s) would go a long way in providing a happy environment for the successful education of the child.

Young children are not only growing physically during early childhood, but they are also growing mentally. Children of this age continue to advance their skills in observing and interacting with the world around them. They also make tremendous leaps in how they process, store, and use information. Their cognitive development can be seen in acquisition of literacy skills. The development of literacy skills among children does not begin with formal instruction at school. Rather, children learn how to read and write at home through interactions and exposure to literacy-related materials and facilities found in the home (Evans, Shaw and Bell, 2000). Through active interactions, children naturally develop verbal language skills by hearing others speak and also by observing the communication process naturally taking place at home (Evan et al., 2000). Children learn sequences of sounds (phonemes) in their language. Research has shown that phonemic awareness present during preschool is a strong predictor of later reading abilities (Lonigan, Burgess and Anthony, 2000).

Various studies have shown that most children who are successful in reading come from families with a literacy-rich environment (Aulls and Sollars, 2003). Moreover, a literate home environment also includes parents who value reading, because, by so doing, children get the impression that reading is an important activity. In addition to having a home with reading materials and where parents are involved in reading, parents create a literate home environment when they encourage their children to read regularly (Colker, 2009). Education begins at home, with parents leading the way; hence the cognitive development of any child cannot be separated from the home environment in which the child grows up (Fantuzzo, Tighe and Childs, 2000). A child that grows up in a good home environment will definitely exhibit high cognitive development. According to Lonigan, et al., (2000), early childhood is a significant

period for development of early cognitive and social skills. Early cognitive skills in preschool-age children strongly predict their school readiness and future academic achievement. It is, therefore, necessary to consider influence of home environment on cognitive development of preschool children.

Statement of the Problem

The home has a great influence on the child's psychological, emotional, social and cognitive state. The home affects the individual, since the parents are the first socializing agents in an individual's life. It entails the provision of healthy interaction, support, security, stimulation and protection given to the child from an early age to boost his intellectual and social competencies in future. However, unfortunately the Nigerian child is not given such an opportunity to develop within these key factors to become the future adult acceptable to society. Most children in pre-school age need an environment that is conducive to stimulating their learning skills necessary for life. The factors of home environment such as educational background, nutritional diet, parenting style, socio economic status and parental motivation have grave consequences on the cognitive development of the child. A critical look at the nursery section of private and public schools in Oyo State revealed some level of deterioration and backwardness. This study examined the influence of home environment, for example parental level of education, motivation, parenting styles and upbringing on the cognitive development of a child. Specifically, this study investigated the influence of home environment on preschool cognitive development in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the composite influence of home environment (parents' education, motivation, style and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of preschool children?
2. What is the relative influence of the home environment (parents' education, motivation, style, and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of preschool children?

3. Which of the home factors will predict the preschool children's cognitive development?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Ten schools were randomly selected to give equal chance to all the schools across the Local Government Area. 3 public schools and 7 private schools were purposively selected across the 14 wards of the local government area. A sample size of 250 parents and their children in the preschool section were involved in the study and were distributed across the 10 schools selected. The following research instruments were used: Parent Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) and Preschool Children's Emergent Literacy Assessment (PCELA).

The Parents' Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) is a self-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Sections A and B. Section A was on the demographic information of the parents (age, sex, educational status). Section B was divided into four sub-sections (A-D). Part two has four sub-sections (A-D). Sub-section 'A' contained items on educational level of parents; cluster 'B' contained items on parental motivation; cluster 'C' contained items on parenting style; while cluster 'D' contained items on adequacy of learning materials at home. The questionnaire was structured in the form of four-point Likert scale, coded as follows: Strongly Agree (SA)-4, Agree(A)-3, Disagree (D)-2, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.

Preschool Children Emergent Literacy Assessment (PCELA) was adapted from Dickinson (1997) and Justice and Ezell (2001) as cited in Bankole (2015). It has three parts, which were designed to measure preschoolers' level of emergent literacy. The first part contained introductory questions relating to oral language and literacy. This part determines how the child makes use of language(s), how the child speaks and his or her comprehension and production abilities in English. The second part assessed the child's phonological awareness skills and the third part was designed to measure the child's print awareness skills.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Parent Gender

Parent	Frequency	Percentage
Father	37	15.1
Mother	167	69
No indication	39	15.9
Total	245	100

The table above shows that there were 37 fathers in the study which accounted for 15.1%; 167 mothers, which accounted for 69%; and 39(15.9%) parents did not indicate their gender.

Table 2: Age of Parents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
25-35	39	15.9
36-45	164	66.9
46-55	5	2
No indication	37	15.1
Total	245	100

Table 2 indicates that there were 39(15.9%) parents with age 25-35, 164(66.9%) parents with age 36-45, 5(2%) parents with age 46-55 and 37(15.1%) parents did not indicate their ages.

Table 3: Qualification of Parents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
WASC	6	2.4
TCII	1	0.4
NCE	115	46.9
FIRST DEGREE	77	31.4
MASTERS	8	3.3
No indication	38	15.5
Total	245	100

As seen in Table 3 6(2.4%) parents had WASC, 1(0.4%) parent had TCII; 115(46.99%) parents had NCE, 77(31.4%) parents had first degree, 8(3.3%) parents had masters and 38(15.5%) parents did not indicate their qualifications.

Research Question 1: What is the composite influence of home environment (parents' education, motivation, style and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of preschool children?

Table 4: Composite Influence of Home Environment (Parents' Education, Motivation, Style and Adequacy of Educational Materials) on the Cognitive Development of Preschool Children

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2382.559	4	595.640	10.855	.000 ^b
	Residual	13169.033	240	54.871		
	Total	15551.592	244			

R= 0.319 R²= 0.153 Adjusted R= 0.139
a. Dependent Variable: cognitive development
b. Predictors: (Constant), Adequacy, Education, Motivation, Style

Table 4 above shows that there was a joint influence of the independent variables (parents' education, motivation, style, and adequacy of educational materials) on the dependent variable (cognitive development) (R = 0.32). This led to the fact that the independent variables accounted for 13.9% of the total variance in the preschool children's cognitive development (Adjusted R = 0.139). This influence was significant ($F_{(4,240)} = 10.86; p < 0.05$).

Research Question 2: What is the relative influence of the home environment (parents' education, motivation, style, and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of the preschool children?

Table 5: Relative Influence of Home Environment (Parents' Education, Motivation, Style and Adequacy of Educational Materials) on the Cognitive Development of Preschool Children

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	52.776	6.179		8.541	.000
	Education	-1.165	.272	-.284	-4.280	.000
	Motivation	1.366	.356	.268	3.837	.000
	Style	-.370	.349	-.077	-1.058	.291
	Adequacy	.124	.294	.032	.421	.674

a. Dependent Variable: cognitive development

Table 5 reveals that parents' education ($\beta = -0.28$; $t = -4.28$; $p < 0.05$), parents' motivation ($\beta = 0.27$; $t = 3.84$; $p < 0.05$) were the only independent variables that had significant influence on the cognitive development of the preschool children. Parenting style ($\beta = -0.08$; $t = -1.06$; $p > 0.05$) and adequacy of educational materials ($\beta = 0.03$; $t = 0.42$; $p > 0.05$) did not significantly influence the cognitive development of the preschool children.

Research Question 3: Which of the home factors will predict the preschool children's cognitive development?

From table 5 above, it is evident that only parents' education and motivation predicted the preschool children's cognitive development.

Discussion of the Findings

The results showed that there was a joint influence of the home environment factors (parents' education, motivation, style, and adequacy of educational materials) on the cognitive development of the preschool children. This is in line with Evans (2003), who asserts that home environment has been shown to be a major factor that influences the overall development of children. Within the home, children also have their early interactions with the members of their family. Availability and quality of resources for learning and playing and the way the parents deal

with the children largely determines the nature of these interactions. The possible explanation for the result is that the favourable home environment created by the parents place the children at an advantage to do well cognitively.

Parental level of education and parental motivation are the only factors that influenced the cognitive development of the children, while parental style and adequacy of educational materials did not influence the cognitive development of the children. According to Abolarin (2014), parents' level of education is very important for the performance of their children. This is because most educated parents appreciate more the need to provide learning materials for their children, which can stimulate them to learn and perform better in school.

The finding on motivation, which is another critical component of cognitive development, is in line with the work of Richburg and Fletcher (2002), who found this home factor very special and important because motivation from parents was responsible as the driving force for the behaviour that they often demonstrated at home and at school. This positive motivation probably encouraged the children to develop positive attitude to their studies with available learning materials at the children's disposal.

The results of this work negated most of the literature reviewed on parenting style and adequacy of educational materials in the home. Ofofu-Asiamah (2013), who did his research work among the Hindus in India, found that the parents used authoritarian type of parenting style to train their children and this greatly helped on the cognitive development of their children. Also Williams and Rask (2003) identify the use of instructional materials as an important factor in learning and cognitive development of children.

In this study, work only parental education and parental motivation predicted the cognitive development of the children.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that home environment factors influenced cognitive development of the preschool children. Prominent among the home environment factors were parental education, and parental motivation. Educational status of the parents and

children's cognitive development have a close relationship. This is because education makes them realize the importance of being educated. They stand a better chance to support their children for better academic achievement. On parental motivation, it was found that children who received encouragement and motivation from the family performed better in school than their counterparts from families where such encouragement and motivation were not given.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following are recommended:

- i. Provision of educational materials at home: Educational materials should be made available in the home. These include toys that can help develop the reasoning skills of the child. Educative story books should also be made available to children at home to help promote their reading skill, which, in turn, will help them in language development. Parents can also get educative cartoons, DVDs or CDs for their children to watch. This will also help in their reasoning and cognitive development.
- ii. Parental encouragement: Parents should try as much as possible to show positive attitude towards their children. Parents should praise their children when necessary, and show interest and love in their academic pursuit and progress. This will improve the performance of the child.
- iii. Constant evaluation: Parents should always find time to visit their children at school at least on open days so as to know all the developmental aspects of their children. These development aspects comprise physical, cognitive, emotional and language developments.

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