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Exploring the Impact of Learning Corners on Pupils' Learning Outcomes in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of learning corners on pupils' learning outcomes in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. It was guided by four research questions, all of which were addressed. The population included all kindergarten schools in Oredo Local Government Area, with a sample consisting of 200 trained teachers from both private and public preschools in the area. A validated and reliable questionnaire (reliability index of 0.89) was used as the instrument for data collection. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that learning corners significantly impact preschoolers' learning outcomes and that teachers extensively use children's learning centres in preschool teaching. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education. Based on these findings, it was recommended that preschool managers should ensure the provision of adequate and appropriate learning corners for preschool children.

Introduction

Early childhood education programs serve children aged 0 to 8. In Nigeria, the introduction of early childhood education (ECE) aimed to expand access to early childcare, particularly for children in rural and low-income areas. To achieve this, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in partnership with UNICEF, implemented a low-cost, community-based, non-formal daycare program (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; UNICEF, 2022).

Young children thrive on hands-on learning and play, making learning corners essential components of preschool classrooms. Research suggests that well-structured classrooms foster positive interactions among children, leading to improved learning outcomes (Bredekamp, 2020; Heisner & Lederberg, 2021). Early childhood classrooms are designed to support learning by encouraging both independence and cooperative play. They incorporate materials that reflect diverse backgrounds and feature learning corners or interest areas for exploration. These areas enable students to engage individually or in small groups, guided by teachers. Core skills, including reading, writing, and problem-solving, are reinforced across all corners through communication, exploration, and play (Pyle, Prioletta, & Poliszczuk, 2017).

The classroom environment conveys expectations and fosters independence and a passion for learning. Learning corners play a significant role in early childhood success by providing spaces for independent work and teacher-led group activities. Mapping the layout of the classroom, including scaled furniture models, helps optimize these spaces for learning (Schweinhart et al., 2019). Early childhood education seeks to nurture all aspects of a child's development. The early years (0-6) are crucial for building a strong foundation for adulthood, and stakeholders must ensure these stages are well-supported (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2012). High-quality early childhood education should be universally accessible, as it develops personal competence, confidence, and social responsibility in young learners (Edhuze, 2019).

Globally, early childhood education has shown positive outcomes, such as increased participation and teacher professional development, although progress remains slow (Olowe & Kutelu, 2014). Cognitive development, social-emotional growth, and self-regulation are fostered through play-based learning in kindergarten. Cognitive development, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and concept formation, is enhanced by hands-on activities. Child-directed learning centres help children use their imagination, fostering abstract thinking. Play-based activities like building with blocks also improve spatial awareness, abstract reasoning, and critical thinking (Pyle et al., 2017).

In addition to cognitive benefits, play-based learning offers social-emotional advantages, such as improved cooperation, peer relationships, and adherence to rules. Students in play-based classrooms often demonstrate supportive behaviours like helping, sharing, and respecting others. Story retelling, often acted out by students, strengthens social interactions. Self-regulation, defined as controlling impulses to achieve goals, is another key benefit of play-based learning, as it allows children to manage their behaviour, solve problems, and follow rules within a safe environment.

Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of play-based learning in enhancing children's development across various domains. Play-based learning fosters cognitive development, problem-solving, and critical thinking through activities that encourage children to explore and manipulate their environment. For instance, a study by McInnes, Howard,

Miles, and Crowley (2022) emphasized that structured play activities can significantly aid in the development of computational thinking in early childhood, making play a crucial tool for preparing children for more advanced educational challenges. Additionally, Loizou (2017) noted that socio-dramatic and imaginative play boosts children's ability to interact socially and emotionally, improving their communication and collaboration skills. These findings support the idea that play-based learning not only nurtures individual growth but also enhances social-emotional competence and self-regulation.

Furthermore, Jones, Okely, Hinkley, Batterham, and Burke (2016) highlighted the impact of physical play on gross motor skill development and physical activity in children, showcasing how various forms of play contribute to overall child well-being. Research also underscores the importance of teacher-guided play, as seen in McInnes, Howard, Miles, and Crowley's (2011) study, where teachers' understanding of play strongly influenced children's engagement and learning outcomes. This reinforces the critical role of trained educators in successfully implementing play-based pedagogies.

These studies suggest that play-based learning environments, when well-facilitated, provide a holistic approach to child development, blending physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth. This study aims to examine the impact of kindergarten learning corners on pupils' learning outcomes in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State.

Statement of the problem

Kindergarten is a crucial period for children, laying the foundation for essential skills and habits. Children aged 5-8 are highly receptive to educational and behavioural influences. The unique social, communicative, and interactive aspects of this age group present opportunities for holistic educational approaches. However, many kindergarten children face academic challenges, leading to poor comprehension of concepts and inadequate literacy and numeracy skills. Addressing these academic issues requires careful planning, but current curricula may not fully address all social concerns. Cultural and religious beliefs may influence children's education on these issues, and teachers may struggle to communicate effectively, further complicating the situation. Conventional teaching methods in kindergarten appear insufficient in achieving Nigeria's educational goals.

Research indicates that learning corners can effectively educate children about academic issues and has proven successful in many developed countries. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the impact of learning corners on primary pupils' information acquisition in Oredo Local Government Area. This study aims to explore the extent to which learning corners influence pupils' information acquisition, attitudes, and disposition towards learning.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. How do learning corners relate to preschoolers' learning outcomes?
2. How do teachers use children's learning centres activities in teaching in pre-schools?

3. What are the strategies for enhancing preschoolers' performance through effective learning corner study methods?
4. What is the relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education?

Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all public and private kindergarten schools in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State. A sample of 200 trained preschool teachers was randomly selected from 40 preschools. Among these teachers, 167 (83.5%) were female, and 33 (16.5%) were male. Additionally, 115 (57.5%) had less than ten years of experience, while 85 (42.5%) had ten years or more.

Data were collected using a questionnaire which consisted of 23 items divided into three sections. Section A gathered demographic information about the respondents, Section B contained items designed to elicit responses from the participants, and Section C focused on specific aspects of the study. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), with corresponding weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1.

The instrument was validated by three experts in Early Childhood Education at the Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. The Cronbach alpha reliability statistic was used to determine the reliability, resulting in an index of 0.89. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions one to three, while research question four was addressed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Results

Research Question One

How do learning corners relate to preschoolers' learning outcomes?

Table 1: The Extent Learning Corners Relate to Pre-Schoolers' Learning Outcomes

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
Integrate games and songs in the classroom learning activities to allow pupils to gain mastery	3.93	0.26	Always
Allow all learners to play with toys of their choice despite their gender to retain facts	3.81	0.39	Always
Teachers plan for lessons such as role plays to strengthen learners during play	3.67	0.47	Always
Teachers interact fully with learners during play to enhance safe play	3.84	0.37	Always
Observe learners' play and assess their participation in play	3.88	0.33	Always
Engage learners in outdoor play activities such as running, jumping and playing with a ball outside the classroom to arouse their interest	3.65	0.48	Always

Use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in instruction to impart knowledge	3.82	0.39	Always
Use television, video and/or Computer play activities during instruction to buttress my points to pupils	3.79	0.41	Always
Cluster	**30.39**	**1.09**	

Table 1 indicated that respondents consistently integrate games and songs into classroom activities to help pupils gain mastery. They ensure all learners, regardless of gender, can play with toys of their choice to aid in fact retention. Teachers plan lessons that include role plays to reinforce learning during play, interact fully with learners to ensure safe play and observe and assess learners' participation in play.

Additionally, teachers engage learners in outdoor activities such as running, jumping, and playing with a ball to spark interest. They use creative activities like coloring ocean animals (with crayons, coloured pencils, or cut-out ocean animals) to impart knowledge and incorporate television, video, and computer play activities to reinforce lessons. The cluster mean of 30.39 suggests that learning corners significantly impact preschoolers' learning outcomes.

Research Question Two

How do teachers use children's learning centres activities in teaching in pre-schools

Table 2: How Teachers Use Children's Learning Centres Activities in Teaching in Pre-schools

5. Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
Integrate games and songs in the classroom learning Activities	3.79	0.41	Always
Allow all learners to learning corners with toys of their choice despite their gender	3.77	0.45	Always
Teachers plan for lessons such as role learning corners to strengthen learners during learning corners	3.67	0.47	Always
Teachers interact fully with learners during learning corners to enhance safe learning corners	3.81	0.39	Always
Use dramatic learning corners during Instruction	3.77	0.42	Always
Use nature and science learning corners activities in instruction	3.76	0.43	Always
Use television, video and/or Computer learning corner activities during instruction	3.83	0.38	Always
Observe learners' learning corners and assess their participation in Learning corners	3.68	0.47	Always

Engage learners in outdoor learning corner activities such as running, jumping and learning colouring with ball outside the classroom	3.84	0.37	Always
Use creativity-colouring of ocean animals (crayon, coloured pencil, cut-out ocean animals) activities in Instruction	3.88	0.33	Always
Cluster	**37.76**	**1.39**	

Table 2 reveals that respondents consistently integrate games and songs into classroom activities. They ensure all learners, regardless of gender, can engage with toys of their choice in learning corners. Teachers plan lessons that include role-playing in learning corners to reinforce learning, interact fully with learners to ensure safe play, and use dramatic play during instruction.

Additionally, they incorporate nature and science activities in learning corners, observe and assess learners' participation, and engage them in outdoor activities such as running, jumping, and playing with a ball. Creative activities like coloring ocean animals (using crayons, coloured pencils, or cut-out ocean animals) are also used in instruction. The cluster mean of 37.76 indicates that teachers extensively use children's learning centers in preschool teaching.

Research Question Three

What are the strategies for enhancing preschoolers' performance through effective learning corner study methods?

Table 3: The Strategies for Enhancing Preschoolers Performance Through Effective Learning Corners Study Methods

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Remarks
Provision of appropriate indoor and outdoor learning corners safe Environments	3.92	0.27	Agree
Teachers must model learning corners and introduce learners to new learning corners opportunities	3.86	0.35	Agree
Teachers must ensure proper time management to ensure learning corners is inculcated in Instruction	3.68	0.47	Agree
Authorities making available learning corners materials for learning corners activities	3.81	0.39	Agree
Ministry of Education must organize in-service training for teachers on the inculcation of learning corners in Instruction	3.73	0.45	Agree

Table 3 indicates that respondents agree on several strategies to enhance preschoolers' performance through effective use of learning corners. These strategies include providing safe indoor and outdoor learning environments, teachers modeling and introducing new learning opportunities, ensuring proper time management to integrate learning corners into instruction,

authorities supplying materials for learning corner activities, and the Ministry of Education organizing in-service training for teachers on incorporating learning corners into their teaching methods.

Research Question Four

What is the relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education?

Table 4: Pearson r of the Relationship Between Learning Corners and Pre-Schoolers Academic Performance in Early Childhood Education

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Remark
Learning Corners Academic performance	100	0.916	0.000	Significant

The table shows a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.916 and a p-value of 0.000. This implies that there is a strong positive relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education. The r-squared value of 0.839 indicates that learning corners account for approximately 83.9% of the variance in preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education.

Discussion of findings

The study revealed that learning corners significantly impact preschoolers' learning outcomes. This finding aligns with Premium Researchers (2023), who found that a well-organized classroom with designated learning corners helps children learn and stimulates constructive interactions, thereby improving their learning outcomes. It also corroborates the Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI) project (2022), which observed that a high-quality learning environment, including well-structured learning corners, promotes better academic and social-emotional development. Additionally, it supports the Harvard Graduate School of Education's (2019) study, which highlighted the long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education environments that often include learning corners.

The study also indicates that teachers extensively use children's learning centres in preschool teaching. This finding is consistent with Pianta et al. (2021), who observed that high-quality early child care, including the use of learning centers, increases children's readiness for school and narrows the achievement gap. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC, 2018) also reveals that arrangements made in learning centers significantly contribute to developing children's language, literacy, and mathematics skills.

Furthermore, the study identified strategies for enhancing preschoolers' performance through effective learning corners. These strategies include providing safe indoor and outdoor learning environments, teachers modeling and introducing new learning opportunities, ensuring proper time management to integrate learning corners into instruction, authorities supplying materials

for learning corner activities, and the Ministry of Education organizing in-service training for teachers on incorporating learning corners into their teaching methods. This aligns with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2024), which urged changes to preschool curricula to improve equity and support high-quality early education in the U.S., and ThoughtCo. (2021), which suggested that authorities supply materials for learning corner activities. It also aligns with UNESCO (2022), which emphasized the importance of proper time management to integrate learning corners into instruction, and Riches (2022), who suggested that teachers' model and introduce new learning opportunities.

The study also showed a strong positive relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education, accounting for approximately 83.9% of the variance in preschoolers' academic performance. This finding is consistent with Schweinhart et al. (2019), who opined that learning corners play a significant role in early childhood success by providing spaces for independent work and teacher-led group activities. Mapping the layout of the classroom, including scaled furniture models, helps optimize these spaces for learning.

Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, it was concluded that learning corners significantly impact preschoolers' learning outcomes. The study also indicates that teachers extensively use children's learning centres in preschool teaching. Additionally, it identified strategies for enhancing preschoolers' performance through the effective use of learning corners. Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between learning corners and preschoolers' academic performance in early childhood education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) should enhance pre-school inspections by employing qualified early childhood education inspectors. This will ensure that the curriculum at the early childhood education (ECE) level is developmentally appropriate.
2. Pre-school teacher training programs need to be strengthened to ensure that teachers are well-versed in constructivist teaching approaches, such as mediation and thematic teaching, which are play-oriented strategies. This will help teachers move away from traditional direct teaching methods.
3. All preschools adhere to the Early Childhood Development (ECD) guidelines. This will prevent the use of lower primary textbooks in preschool settings and ensure that the instructional materials are age-appropriate.
4. The MoEST should ensure that developmentally appropriate learning resources are available for young children. Preschools that admit very young children (2-3 years old) must provide adequate and suitable facilities to cater to this vulnerable age group.

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