

# ENHANCED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE PRE- SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

Play has been commonly accepted as the best language of communication with the pre - school children. In the playful interactions, they utilize play gadgets and materials in their learning environments. Teachers trained for this level have also strongly advocated and emphasized the play- way method with an environment richly enhanced with play gadgets and materials. This study therefore investigated the impact of enhanced learning environment and its implications on the language development and achievement of the pre-school children. Questionnaire was the instrument used to elicit data from one hundred and fifty five pre- school teachers. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents for the study from seven local council development areas of Ikorodu local government of Lagos state, Nigeria. Results were analyzed using simple percentages and correlation analysis. The findings of the study depict that the environment of the pre-school children should provide nourishment for the children's language and overall development and that the content and their learning styles should be quite different from those of the adults.

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**Keyword:** Enhanced environment, language development and achievement, pre-school children

## Introduction

The necessity and importance of early child education for a smooth solid transitive formal schooling has been stressed. This is because the pre – school education is responsible for determining whether young people get the right start or not. By the time children commence attendance in a pre – school setting; they have already had a variety of experiences and have developed in a number of ways. In order to utilize and build upon the learning especially for language development from those experiences that

they have taken from the home and its immediate environment, adults should provide children with a rich variety of play activities and other experiences in a stimulating and challenging environment. The focus should be to allow children to learn without experiencing a sense of failure. The sensorimotor stage of intellectual development is characterised by children learning from their environment through their senses (Piaget,1966). They gradually develop the ability to form images of objects not physically present and may develop primitive means especially those that concerns communications (Abeles, 1984).Most young children are interested in themselves and their environment. They are curious and like to explore, investigate, and create. They have a sense of wonder and amazement; they are developing concentration and a range of skills and competences; they enjoy stories, rhymes and music; and they enjoy physical plays and are becoming physically independent.

The absence of strong, affectionate and caring relationship may retard children's curiosity and consequently lead to intellectual, social and emotional problems (Osanyin, 2002).This implies that children need a loving and responsive environment with adults encouraging and supporting them, The earliest years of a child's education is fundamentally formative, and throughout the world, government and educators are investing their respective resources in the development and enhancement of learning opportunities for young children (CCEA,2003)

Language skills develop over the first five years of life through interaction with parents, teachers and care – givers. During the early years, listening and speaking are the primary ways that pre – school children learn new concepts and ideas, and express their thoughts through observation and feelings. In the Pre- school environment, children must develop as listeners and speakers in receptive (listening) skills. Language grows as children are exposed to completely new words or words that they already know that are used in new and different ways. In order to create a language rich classroom environment, pre –school teachers should, according to Hart and Risely (2002) engage children in external conversation; encourage children to tell and retell stories and describe events; discuss a wide range of topics; model use of new and unusual words; discuss word meaning; and focus on the expressions of ideas.

Learning style is a term that describes the activities and strategies through which children learn. These can be identified through exploration, experimentation and discovery. For instance, children love nature and make use of their natural and man – made environment in learning and in language development. According to Ross (2000), when children play with sand, water and mud, a lot of communicative and scientific skills are revealed. They also develop the skills of critical thinking and learn to solve diverse

problems which may not be possible inside the classroom (Ogunsawo, 2004). This implies that the teaching approach to these pre – school children should not be rigid or restricted. They should be allowed free observation, free play, free speech, free choice of toys and what to learn at a particular moment of time. Oshunbohun (1984) stressed that the best instrumental material appropriate and suitable for children of pre – school age are toys and games.

A learning environment presents learning as a life – long enterprise and enables children to discover appropriate value system that can be their compass for self – awareness and national consciousness. Existing buildings must be maintained and made functional by providing proper lighting, ventilation and good temperature condition for their effective and efficient utilization to ensure good working condition (Olagboye, 2004). Efficient time management is mandatory in order to make the school a pleasant, safe, and comfortable centre that will increase children’s attendance motivation and willingness to participate adequately in both curricular and co – curricular activities (Standing,1998). The purpose of organising for learning through a conducive and prepared environment is to make the best possible use of time, space and equipment so that children will be able to make use of the resources available. It is important that the learning environment presents the pre-school children with an attractive, challenging and safe environment.

Developmentally appropriate preschool programmes value play and learning experiences for children. Both indoor and outdoor are considered as equally essential (Wardle,2009). In these programmes therefore, outdoor play is not another time for children to blow off steam, or a sort of recess before going back indoors to get down to the serious business of learning; rather it is an opportunity for adults to learn more about children to know what they can do and what attracts their interest. Children need opportunity and places for swinging, sliding, rolling, climbing, jumping, throwing, kicking, riding and transporting under adults’ guidance and encouragement without excessive caution and restriction. In recognition of this essential need, Wardle (2009) asserts that an early childhood environment that lacks indoor gross motor play space and developmentally appropriate outdoor play equipment places a low priority on physical development in its curriculum.

Hohmann &Weikart (2002) urged that the education of the young pre – school should be conducted by means of activities, needs, desires and delights which are common heritage of childhood. Play has been commonly accepted as the best language of communication with the pre - school children. In the playful interactions they utilize play materials. Teachers trained for this level have always strongly advocated and emphasized the play- way method with an environment richly enhanced with play materials. The play approach to learning in the early years has been encouraged through creation of play learning areas in the home, shopping blocks,

reading, sand, toys and water in the classroom. A child's play environment whether indoors or outdoors should be designed to teach children. However, the outdoor environment can accommodate higher levels of different kinds of noise than the indoor ( Ogunsanwo, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A reasonable and stimulating environment is the essential need of every child because it is through which the child is taught how to learn and develop basic conceptual skills. The learning environments of some of the present pre- schools do not meet the learning needs of the pre –school children especially in the area of language development and achievement. Children are not allowed free movement which would help to develop their physical needs and sensory – motor skills by not providing adequate spaces, play materials and gadgets for them. The major position concerning early childhood education therefore is that the environment should provide nourishment for the child's language and overall development; and that the content and the form of his education should be different from those of adults. This study therefore investigates the impact of enhanced learning environment on the language development and achievement of the pre-school children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

- 1 To determine whether the language achievement of pre-school children is dependent of learning environment.
- 2 To determine if availability of play gadgets influence pre-school children's language development.

### **Research Questions**

- 1 How does the conduciveness of the learning environment impact the language achievement of the pre-schoolers?
- 2 What impact does the provision of adequate play gadgets have on pre-school children's language development?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study would enlighten the pre-school teachers on the need for quality learning environment for good language development and performance. It is also believed that the findings of the study will enable the teachers realize the enormous benefits in adopting the play –based learning environment for language development and overall academic achievement.

Generally it will highlight the pre-schools on the importance of adopting moral informal, flexible and active child-centred teaching methods for appropriate language development and performance.

### Methodology

The study is a descriptive survey design. The instrument used is a questionnaire designed to find out the impact of enhanced learning environment on the language performance of the pre- school children.

The study was conducted in twenty randomly selected pre – schools in Ikorodu Local Council Developed Areas of Lagos State, Nigeria. Stratified Random sampling was used, and eight pre – school teachers were chosen from each school. In all a total of 155 pre – school teachers formed the subjects of the study.

### Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was used to gather data for this study. It was designed to elicit the responses from the pre- school teachers, on their perceptions about pre- school children’s environment and language performance.

### Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using percentages and correlation analysis using statistical package for social science (SPSS). Out of 175 questionnaires administered, 155 was collected and the analysis was based on the returned questionnaires.

<b>Conduciveness of the learning environment</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
Pre –schools located in highly developed areas like Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Lekki will have a better learning environment than those at Ikorodu, Kosofe and Shomolu area of Lagos State.	35 (25.81%)	80 (51.61%)	10 (6.45%)	25(16.13%) )
Ventilation of the classroom is relevant in determining a conducive learning environment	4 (2.58%)	5 (3.23%)	65 (41.93%)	81 (52.26%)
The language performance of children in a conducive learning environment will be above 75%	12 (7.74%)	14 (9.03%)	77(49.67%) )	52 (33.54%)
<b>Provision of adequately play gadgets</b>				
The degree of availability of play gadgets is a measure of conducive learning environment	0	24 (15.48%)	68(43.87%) )	63 (40.65%)
Play materials in the learning environment should be challenging to develop the children’s language performance	0	42(27.10%) )	60(38.71%) )	53(34.19%) )
Pre – school children should be given sufficient time to play with the available gadgets before language learning	9 (5.81%)	19 (12.26%)	115 (74.19%)	12 (7.74%)
The average language performance of a child in a learning environment with adequate play gadgets is about 75%	0	22 (14.19%)	87 (56.13%)	46 (29.68%)

Majority of the respondents, 35 (25.81%) and 80 (51.61%) strongly disagreed and simply disagreed respectively with the view that pre-schools located in highly developed areas like Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Lekki will have a better learning environment than those at Ikorodu, Kosofe and Shomolu areas of Lagos state. On the contrary, 10 (6.45%) respondents and 25(16.13%) agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, the responses on the claim that ventilation of the classroom is relevant in determining a conducive learning environment revealed that 81 (52.26%) strongly agreed, 65 (41.93%) agreed, 5 (3.23%) disagreed and 4 (2.58%) strongly disagreed respectively. Again, 52 (33.54%) opined that play is an important vehicle for learning as they strongly agreed with the statement and 77(49.67%) also agreed. Meanwhile, 14 (9.03%) and 12 (7.74%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with that position respectively.

On the issue of play gadgets, 68 respondents representing 43.87% of the active population agreed that the degree of play gadgets is a measure of conduciveness of the learning environment while 63 (40.65%) strongly agreed to the statement. On the other hand, an insignificant figure of 24 (15.48%) disagreed with the statement while no respondent goes for the strongly disagreed standpoint. Again, 53 out of 155 of the total respondents representing 34.19% strongly agreed with the notion that play materials in the learning environment should be challenging to develop the pre-school children's language and overall performance. On the same notion, 60(38.71%) agreed, 60(38.71%) disagreed and none of the respondents strongly disagreed on the statement. Concerning the statement about giving pre-school children sufficient time to play with the available gadgets, 17.74% representing 12 respondents and 74.20% depicting 115 (74.19%) of the respondents strongly agreed and only agreed respectively with the statement. While 12.30% representing 19 disagreed, and 12.26% representing 9 (5.81%) out of the respondents strongly disagreed respectively. The 29.68% representing 46 respondents of the active population strongly agreed to the proposition that the average language performance of a child in a learning environment with adequate play gadgets is about 75% and 56.13% representing 87 of the respondents simply agreed to it. On the contrary, 22 (14.10%) disagreed with the statement.

### **Correlation Analysis of the Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** Is there a relationship between conduciveness of learning environment and pre-school children's language achievement?

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	Remark
Pre-school child language achievement	3.213	0.396	155	0.527	0.000	Significant Correlation
Conduciveness of the learning environment	2.950	0.373	155			

**Dependent Variable:** Pre-school children's language achievement

The above table showed that there is a significant positive correlation between conduciveness of learning environment and pre-school child's language achievement. Hence, there is a positive impact of conduciveness of learning environment on pre-school child's language achievement.

### Research Question 2:

Is there a relationship between the provision of adequate play gadgets and pre-school children's language achievement?

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	Remark
Pre-school child language achievement	3.213	0.396	155	0.320	0.000	Significant Correlation
Provision of adequate play gadgets	3.059	0.421	155			

**Dependent Variable:** Pre-school children's language achievement

The provision of adequate play gadgets has significant relationship with the pre-school children's language achievement as expressed by the correlation coefficient in the table above. Therefore, it can be easily inferred that the availability of play gadgets will have significant impact on pre-school children's language achievement.

### Findings and Conclusion

From the results of the study, it can be inferred that conduciveness of learning environment has a significant impact on the level of pre-school children's language performance. Conduciveness is an expression of the comfort of the children in the classroom. The temperature and humidity must be favourable and comfortable for the learners. As the atmospheric condition changes in line with current season, so also must the teachers of early childhood practitioners change the nature of the environment accordingly. Thus, the importance of conduciveness of learning centres in the promotion

of all-round development of pre-school children cannot be over emphasized. These centres which are usually designated outdoor areas in a school help pre-school children to develop an appreciation for nature, exercise their bodies and form social ties especially through language expressions (Ogunsanwo, 2004; Osanyin, 2002).

Again, the study revealed that the provision of adequate play gadgets in the school environment has significant impact on the language performance of the pre-school children. When children are permitted to make use of the play gadgets in school, they are more highly motivated to go to school. Some schools however, only display the play gadgets without effective utilization. Children love to play. In many cases, a child's play is spontaneous. Children do not always need any adult or external prompting before they start to play. However, free play may not necessarily mean that play is completely free from adult intervention; rather it implies that when initiated by children, an adult may come in to guide them especially when play becomes purposeless or dangerous. Nevertheless, adults are not supposed to have a direct control over children's play while attention to process means that play gives more importance to the activities involved rather than goals (Ogunsanwo, 2004). Play-based learning offers significant gains both for the pre-school children and teachers. Therefore, pre-school children's learning styles should consist of activities that facilitate learning informally; hence, it is very imperative that an early childhood educator understands not only the word environment but also the relevance of its interplay in order to boost pre-school children's language and overall performance. The implication of this is that pre-school teachers should prepare the environment at all times; this is because children are biologically prepared to learn about the world. Thus, the natural child is seen as being nourished by his or her own creativity in play.

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