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EFFECT OF REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH ON NURSERY THREE CHILDREN'S INTEREST AND ACHIEVEMENT IN EMERGENTLITERACY SKILLS IN OSHIMILI SOUTH LOCAL EDUCATIONAUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the impact of Reggio Emilia approach on nursery three children's interest and achievement in emergent literacy. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted a quasi experimental pretest, post test, non equivalent control group design. The population of the study comprised all the 960 children in nursery 3 in the pre-primary sections of all the public primary schools in Oshimili South Local Education Authority, Delta State. A sample size of 150 children (79 males and 71 females) in four primary schools in Oshimili South Education Authority was studied. Two instruments, Emergent Literacy Achievement Test (ELAT) and Emergent Reading Interest Scale (ERIS) were used for data collection. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions while ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level. Results of the study revealed that Reggio Emilia approach had significant effects on the achievement and interest of nursery three children in emergent literacy It was recommended among others that Reggio Emilia approach should be adopted as one of the methods of implementing the pre-primary curriculum.

Keywords: Reggio Emilia approach, emergent literacy skills, interest, Nursery children.

Introduction
Education is the fulcrum that supports children in the realization of their potentials and also, brings about the development of any nation. Based on this, the quality of education given to children at the early stage of their lives constitutes bases for their future successes and consequently, the development of the nation. The importance of reading in the education of children cannot be over emphasized. According to Cunningham and Stanovich (2001), those who read well, read more and in the process usually gather a lot of experiences as well as language enrichment which give them advantage over their peers who cannot read. Obasi (2016) stated that the academic dilemma of children who cannot read are evident considering the fact that textbooks are meant to be read and understood. In addition, children need to read and understand examination questions in order to give correct answers. Reading therefore is a major factor for children's success or failure in school. In agreement Ranweiler (2004) saw reading as an essential tool for lifelong learning. She added that it is expedient for every child to develop the rudiments of reading.

The ability to read begins with the acquisition of emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy skills are the developmental precursors for reading and writing that young children gain prior to achieving conventional literacy (Philips & Lonigan, 2005). Children's success in school and late in life is to a great extent dependent upon their ability to read and write. Adequate acquisition of these emergent literacy skills at the nursery school level forms a precursor to success in reading and writing (Cunningham & Stannovich 2001). The nursery school years are very important in children's literacy development. Although, literary development occurs throughout life lime, the nursery school years are very critical for laying a sound bases for literacy learning through the teaching of rudiments of letters

(FGN, 2004). It has been observed that children who acquire emergent literacy skills early have advantage over their peers who do not. Children who demonstrate poor emergent literacy skill demonstrate reading problems when compared to their developing peers with rich acquisition of emergent literacy skill (Castles, 2013).

The importance of early acquisition of emergent literacy skills was stressed by Maduewesi (2006) that age five to eight are critical for children acquisition of emergent literacy and other language skills than subsequent years. At this age, the brain develops faster than any other part of the body according to Tanner cited in Ngwoke and Eze (2010). By implication pre-primary school children should be exposed to the acquisition of emergent literacy skills to prepare them for future reading proficiency and higher academic success.

One of the most important aims of pre-primary school curricula is the development of children's emergent skills as these are the bases for development of conventional literacy in later years. According to FGN (2004), pre-primary education is the education given to children in an educational institution prior to their entry into formal primary schools. Therefore, nursery three is established for preparing the child for the primary level education. Pre-primary education is saddled with the responsibilities of teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, shapes, and forms among others through play, preparing the child for primary level of education. Inclusion of the rudiments of letters as one of the aims of pre-primary education is not only to make the foundation solid but to help the pupils to acquire knowledge mid competences in the skills needed for actual reading. Before a child enters the primary level of education, the child must have acquired all the pre-requisite for permanent literacy. The first objective of primary education is inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. This is a pointer to the place literacy, that is, the ability to read occupies in the overall success of the education system.

Literacy develops naturally in a classroom environment that is organized purposefully, and where critical thinking is supported. Emergent literacy is based on the idea that children learn literacy as they come to it, rather than as it comes to them. Research has shown that preschools environment has many dimension that teachers needs to know about and that Reggio Emilia inspired preschools, offers a rich environment that satisfies children's interest, trigger their enquires and support their development and learning in relation to literacy (Inan, 2009). A number of studies have been conducted on Reggio Emilia approach and literacy development of children. These include one by Inan (2021) on understanding the Reggio Emilia - inspired literacy education, the study showed that Reggio Emilia inspired nursery schools, successfully accomplished healthy literacy development. This showed that children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach achieved better in literacy development than their counterparts.

The Reggio Emilia approach believes that children are capable individual that comes to school with wealth of experiences and knowledge and hence should be supported to communicate their ideas in a variety of ways. To the proponents, young children are powerful, active, and competent architects of their own growth, on the basis of their own particular experiences and level of consciousness. In a classroom where all resources and materials are thought provoking and inviting, the children are inspired to think critically and it provides children with a lot of learning opportunities that encourage them to explore, discover and solve problems on their own.

Evidence from research carried out in other countries revealed that emergent literacy skills and interest can be developed in children using appropriate techniques and methods. It has been observed that no one teaching method or approach is likely to be effective for all children. This study seeks to investigate the impact of Reggio Emilia approach on the emergent literacy skills acquisition and interest

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in reading of Nursery three pupils in Oshimili South Local Education Authority of Delta State.

Interest could be a factor in children's acquisition of emergent literacy skills. Interest according to Chen (2001) has a significant effect on a child's learning as it is identified as an important motivational construct that influence pupils' engagement and achievement in learning. In like manner, Ogbonna (2009) maintained that pupils' interest in any learning activity is sustained by the active involvement of the pupils in all aspects of the learning process. The study carried out by Nair, Yusof and Arumugam (2014) showed that the use of play based approach helped to arouse the interest of children in learning language compared with the conventional approach because play based approach enable children to enjoy and have fun during the activities. This will help their interest to increase and then enhance their language and literacy learning. It implies that interest in a particular activity or learning can bring about enhancement in the retention of what the child learnt from such activities.

Despite theoretical backing for the play based, hands on, experientially and technologically driven method, the common method of teaching especially in the public schools is learning by rote or recitation in unison. The teacher controls, monitors and interferes to maintain order and discipline in the class. Caregivers teach more with cane in their hands to enforce discipline with a stroke on the head of any child who misbehaves or fails to chorus any recitation properly. Consequently, children listen in fear and cannot concentrate for effective learning to occur. Added to this is the poor quality of teachers. A considerable number of teachers in nursery schools have limited, if any, formal training on child development. Even in-service trainings for such teachers are rarely organized because of lack of funds or interest by the government. Some of the teachers have no knowledge of how to implement the integrated early childhood curriculum or apply theories to learning. This result in poor standard interpretation of the curriculum thereby limiting the quality of education offered at the nursery school level.

This deplorable situation has led to researchers calling for urgent intervention through use of play based, child centered interactive approaches to see if there will be improvement in the learning outcomes of nursery school children. One of such approach is the Reggio Emilia approach. Birinci (2017) reported that Reggio Emilia has helped children to express themselves in endless ways, making use of various senses. The purpose of this study therefore, is to determine the effect of Raggio Emilia approach on the acquisition of emergent literacy skills and interest by nursery school children in Oshimili South Education Authority, Delta State. Specifically, the study seeks to.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the difference in the mean emergent literacy skill acquisition scores of nursery three children exposed to Reggio Emilia in teaching emergent literacy skills and those not exposed?
2. What is the difference in the mean interest to acquire emergent literacy skills of pre-primary school children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach and those not exposed?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach and those exposed to traditional approach.

Research Method

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design. This design was chosen because intact classes were used. Hence, there was no random assignment of research subjects into experimental and control group. The study was carried out in Oshimili South Local Education Authority. The choice of this area was necessitated by the researchers' observation that pupils in this area

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lack the basic emergent literacy skills and this has been traced to poor teaching approach such as repeat after me and memorization method. The population consisted of all the 971 (Nine hundred and seventy one) nursery three children from 23 (Twenty Three) Public nursery schools in the area of study. The sample of the study consisted of 150 nursery three children. Purposive sampling techniques was used to select 2 (Two) schools used for the study. The schools were divided into treatment and control classrooms. The treatment classroom was exposed to emergent literacy activities using child centred, play based reggio Emilia approach while the control classroom focused on teacher centred prescriptive activities. The treatment classroom was organized into defined spaces such as dramatic play, sand and water, understanding the world, mathematics, creative art and design, literacy, Home Corner, Construction reading den. In these spaces, materials such as books, letters, print, names, writing tools, paint, construction materials, animals, numbers, alphabet moulds. The children choose two spaces to go to and explore the resources. They can draw patterns, paint. Construct, arrange materials, trace their names, arrange materials to tell a story or write words on paper. The teacher inspires the children to engage in meaningful activities that support skill development. The instrument for data collection was researchers' developed instruments titled: Emergent Literacy Skills Performance Test (ELSPT) and interest in Reading Scale (IRS). The ELSPT consisted of forty multiple choice item testing alphabet skills, print awareness, phone mic awareness and vocabulary while IRS was developed to assess children's interest towards acquisition of emergent literacy skills through Reggio Emilia approach. The instrument was validated by experts in childhood education and measurement and evaluation. The validated instruments were subjected to field trial to confirm their appropriateness. The data obtained was analyzed using KR 20 method and internal consistency estimate of 0.94 was obtained for IRS was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha method and the internal consistency estimate of 0.81 was obtained.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the difference in the mean emergent literacy skill acquisition scores of nursery three children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach in teaching emergent literacy skills and those not exposed?

Table 1: Mean analysis of emergent literacy skills of nursery three children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach and those exposed to conventional approach

Treatment	Pre-test			Post-test		
	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD	Mean Gain Score
Reggio Emilia approach	90	10.68	5.30	36.94	3.79	26.26
Conventional approach	60	10.81	3.59	21.41	7.46	10.60

Table 1 shows that the nursery three children who were exposed to reggio emilia had pre-test mean emergent literacy skills rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 10.68, SD = 5.30) and post-test mean emergent literacy skills rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 36.94, SD = 3.79). However, those who were exposed to conventional approach had pre-test mean emergent literacy skills rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 10.81, SD = 3.59) and post-test mean emergent literacy skills rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 21.41, SD = 7.46). Mean gain ratings of 26.26 and 10.60 for the two groups respectively indicate that the nursery three children who were exposed to reggio emilia had higher post-test mean emergent literacy skills rating than those exposed to conventional approach. Moreover, the post-test standard deviations of 3.79 and 7.46 for the two groups of nursery three respectively indicate that the variation in the individual ratings of the nursery three children exposed to conventional approach is higher

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than that of those exposed to reggio Emilia approach meaning that conventional approach did not favour the nursery three children as did the conventional approach.

Research Question Two: What is the difference in the mean interest to acquire emergent literacy skills of nursery three children exposed to reggio Emilia approach and those not exposed?

Table 3: Mean analysis of interest in emergent literacy among nursery three children exposed to reggio Emilia approach and those exposed to conventional approach

Treatment	Pre-test			Post-test			
	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD	Mean Score	Gain
Reggio Emiia	90	21.38	6.24	39.67	16.04	18.29	
Conventional approach	60	22.06	7.22	28.05	9.87	5.99	

Table 3 shows that nursery three children who were exposed to reggio Emilia approach had pre-test mean interest of ($\overline{X}$ = 21.38, SD = 6.24) and post-test mean interest rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 39.67, SD = 16.04). However, those who were exposed to conventional approach had pre-test mean interest rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 22.06, SD = 7.22) and post-test mean interest rating of ($\overline{X}$ = 28.05, SD = 9.87). Mean gain ratings of 18.29 and 5.99 for the two groups respectively indicate that the children who were exposed to reggio emilia had higher post-test mean interest rating than those exposed to conventional approach. However, the post-test standard deviations of 16.04 and 9.87 for the two groups of the children respectively indicate that the variation in the individual ratings of the children exposed to reggio Emilia approach is higher than those exposed to conventional approach. In other words, the nursery three children's interest in emergent literacy was not fairly improved across the group members.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study were summarized as follows;

1. Nursery three children in the experimental group had higher post-test mean emergent literacy skills rating. Further analysis revealed a significant difference in the mean emergent literacy skills ratings in favour of children in the experimental group.
2. Nursery three children in the experimental group had higher post-test mean interest rating in reading. Children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach had higher post test mean interest rating than those exposed to conventional approach.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study revealed that nursery three children exposed to the Reggio Emilia approach achieved more in emergent literacy skills acquisition. The Reggio Emilia approach had significant effect on the emergent literacy skills acquisition of the children. The findings confirmed that of Inan (2021) who found out that play based education in Reggio Emilia inspired preschools, successfully accomplished healthy literacy development in preschoolers. Reggio Emilia approach has an environment that can support the learning and development of emergent literary skills among nursery school children. Children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach are given rich and playful environment that satisfies them, interest them and triggers their learning (Inan, 2009). The children's higher achievement after being exposed to Reggio Emilia approach could be attributed to these rich and playfully environments. The children had opportunities to participate actively in literacy activities as each of them pursued their varying interests under the guidance of their teachers. The improvement therefore confirmed that nursery three children who were taught emergent

literacy skills using Reggio Emilia approach enhanced acquisition of these fundamental skills that serve as precursors to conventional reading at primary school level.

The findings showed that children exposed to Reggio Emilia approach had higher interest in emergent literacy than those exposed to conventional approach. This finding confirmed that of Nair, Yusof and Arumugam (2014) who found that the use of play based approach helped to arouse the children's interest in learning language. This agrees with Chen (2001) who stated that interest has a significant effect on a child's learning as it is identified as an important motivational construct that influence pupils' engagement and achievement in learning.

Conclusion

Children are curious about their world and have the potential to learn from all that surrounds them. No one teaching method or approach is likely to be effective for all children. In a classroom where all resources and materials are thought provoking and inviting, children are inspired to think critically, explore, discover and solve problems on their own. Teachers play dual roles of learning alongside the children, get involved in group experiences as guide and resource, observe and track children's progress and reflect on their teaching and what they learn. Reggio Emilia inspired classrooms can offer children such a rich environment. It will help to stimulate children's curiosity and observation, help them to explore the world around them, create a love for learning, and develop their imagination and creativity through activities like drawing, painting, modelling and skills of co-operation. The children can also develop skills of co-operation and teamwork. This will definitely result in accomplishing a successful and healthy literacy development for children.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and their implications, the researchers make the following recommendations

1. The study has shown that Reggio Emilia approach is very effective in emergent literacy skills acquisition and interest in reading of Nursery school children, teachers should therefore enhance children's emergent literacy skills and interest in reading using Reggio Emilia approach because of its ability in inculcating literacy skills and attracting children's interest in reading.
2. Seminars, workshops and training should be organized for in-service teachers to increase their awareness on how to apply Reggio Emilia's approach in their teaching.
3. The government should provide funds for provision of materials and resources in pre-primary classrooms.

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