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IMPACT OF GENDER DIFFERENCE ON PUPILS' LITERACY SKILLS ACQUISITION THROUGH EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES IN PUBLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined interact effect of gender difference on pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State, Nigeria. The quasi-experimental design of pre-test, post-test, control group of 3x2x3 factorial design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 90 pupils aged five to six years old female students selected from six early childhood care centres in three LGEAs, Lagos State. The study was guided by one research question and one hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance. Multistage sampling technique was adopted in the selection process. The data were collected using Children's Literacy Skills Performance Test (CLSPT) and was validated through face and content validity and a test-re-test reliability method yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81. The study involved two experimental and one control groups. The experimental groups were exposed to rhymes and play intervention, while the control group received the conventional method of teaching for eight weeks. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistic of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics tool of Analysis of Covariances- ANCOVA to test the stated hypotheses. The study found that. there was no significant interaction effect of gender on in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State., ($F_{(1, 70)} = 0.063$, $p > .05$, $p\eta^2 = 0.0.001$). The study concludes that gender has a significant effect on literacy skills

in early childhood pupils, influenced by various factors which include educational facilities and other factors like socio-cultural, environmental, and others. The study recommends among others that Teachers should make sure that all educational facilities instructional materials used for instruction are free from gender stereotypes as this can cause lack of concentration, low self-esteem and low performance of the pupils.

Keywords: Gender, Literacy Skills, Educational Facilities

Introduction

Literacy development is a fundamental component of a child's overall development and it begins well before he or she enters school. Beginning at infancy, experiences that help pupils talk, read, and write, help them progress on their path to literacy and help set them up for success in school and life. Having a solid foundation in early literacy skills is critical to children's future reading performance, as literacy development is a dynamic process that builds over time. Early literacy development begins in the first three years of a child's life and supports their future language development, reading, writing, and overall learning. Language and literacy are developed from the first day of a child's life. As a child interacts with parents, siblings, families, teachers and classmates, their language skills develop Literacy can be loosely defined as the ability to read and write. Literacy skills are arranged from the knowledge of spoken language. It was a result of the communicating environment that children build and develop linguistics and the ability to communicate throughout their lives. The notion of literacy begins early and grows with life experiences couple with necessary educational facilities.

Literacy skills in pupils of early childhood education, comprised reading, writing, speaking, and listening, all these are interconnected and essential for academic success and communication of children which could be aide with relevant educational facilities. Literacy skill acquisition is vital for young learners as it enables them to understand texts and grasp written information through reading skills. It also involves decoding and understanding written words, sentences, and, eventually, complex texts through visual and audio-visual educational facilities. Reading also promotes vocabulary development, comprehension, critical thinking, and imagination. More so, literacy development is a core of a child's overall development and it begins well before he or she enters school. Beginning in infancy, experiences that help pupils talk, read, and learn to write help them progress on their path to adulthood and help set them up for success in school and life. Early literacy skills are crucial for children's future reading success. Literacy starts early and shapes language, reading, writing, and learning. Language and literacy develop from the first day of a child's life. A child-language skills develop as he interacts with parents, siblings, families, teachers, and classmates. Tsao

(2018) and Abidogun et al. (2020) believe that, children develop literacy skills by hearing the language spoken around them and that they develop literacy skills in different ways (Oduolowu, 2011).

Concept of Early Childhood Education

The concern of early childhood education is about foundation and prospect learning of the pupils. It equips them with essential skills and abilities from a young age. Additionally, it provides families and communities with valuable information and knowledge to support overall growth and development. In Early childhood care education, pupils learn when they play and interact with one another. Children are also taught academic concepts, such as alphabets, numbers which build their literacy skills and education that is comprehensive multiply areas. Some of these concepts are better understood when been taught with the require teaching aids - educational facilities. These areas are essential for the development of the mind-set of the children and it also contributes towards their progression. In line with Ola *et al.* (2022) presupposes that with regards to education, it is a fundamental human right, and an essential tool to ensure that all people realise their full potential. The children have to be well prepared to enter the education system at the formal level, this enhances teaching and learning; as well as facilitate the performance with the assistant of caregivers (Odebowale, 2019).

ECE helps children at the age of four to develop their mental capacity and improve their skills; abilities and knowledge of the environment outside their homes' domain (Ogunsanwo & Abidogun et al., 2020). The social requirements and development of a child begin to augment as he grows through accessing information and knowledge acquisition (Heckman, 2018; Lal, 2015; Morrison, 2012; Otieno & Ekine, 2019). A lot of individuals and groups have involved in nip on the board on how preventable the likely future challenges (Calman & Whelan, 2005). In addition, classroom setting improves the healthy situation and attentiveness in learning. While it is often said that quality education depends on a complex combination of factors that come together at the school and classroom levels, the most important of these factors is widely understood to be quality of educational facilities (Gbesoevi, *et al.* 2022)

Concept of Gender

The concept of gender in early childhood education is a crucial topic that influences children's development, identity, and well-being. Gender is a complex and multifaceted concept that shapes the lives of children from an early age. Gender identity, gender roles, and gender norms are some of the aspects of gender that influence how children perceive themselves and others, as well as how they interact with their peers, teachers, and families. Gender development begins in early childhood, as children start to form their sense of self and their understanding of the expectations, activities, and behaviours associated with being a boy or a girl in their society. Research shows that children's gender identity, the inner sense of

one's own gender, emerges around 18 months and most children identify as a boy or girl by the age of three (Solomon, 2016). However, gender consistency, the understanding that gender remains stable over time regardless of superficial changes in appearance or behaviour, does not develop until around 6-7 years old. During this period, children tend to adhere to rigid and stereotypical views of gender roles and norms, which are influenced by their family, culture, media, and educational environment which in turn can affect their performances academically.

Gender norms are the dominant and homogenized ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl in a given society (Broaden. 2021). They often prescribe different and unequal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities for boys and girls, as well as different expectations for their personality traits, interests, abilities, and aspirations. Gender norms can limit children's choices and potential, as well as affect their self-esteem, well-being, peer relationships, and academic performance. For example, research in Asia and Africa has shown that teachers' attitudes and expectations toward girls' performance in mathematics and science can affect their participation and achievement in these subjects (Chi & Liang, 2018; Mlama *et al.,* 2005). Thus, an investment in education for boys and girls, men and women with a good framework should be consistently acknowledged by the Government of any nation as a powerful vehicle for her citizens' advancement socially and economically (Ola *et al* 2022).

Literature Review

Concept of Literacy Development in Early Childhood Education

Literacy development builds confidence in children in all elements of communication: sounds, recognition of joined letters, reading, writing and several others. The role of educators is vital in guiding children at these stages on concepts that could help them thrive in the classroom. It is a language and reading foundation that is necessary for a child's support literacy. According to Lai, (2015), here are just a few reasons early literacy development is essential:

- **i.** Confident readers often experience fewer academic challenges and approach their education with confidence.
- **ii.** Proficient literacy in a classroom setting and outside disallows dependence and encourages growth.
- **iii.** Literacy development affects the way students communicate and problem-solve and enhance cognitive.

Phonological awareness is a way of keeping abreast the important of reading and bridging future of reading abilities; best done during pre-school because of the correlation with later reading and writing skills (Anthony et al., 2016, Sadler & McEvoy, 2013, Turan & Vegil, 2017). Children need to understand the form and function of written awareness (that is, the form and function of written language) and language in the development of early childhood care education literacy. Hence, children should grasp the form, function, and features of writing before starting

primary school (McGinty & Justice, 2019; Ezell & Justice, 2015). Studies conducted with early childhood education children Kelman, (2016) and Farver *et al.* (2017) indicated writing awareness as the strongest predictor of children's future reading skills. In sum, they are all integral of literacy advancement (Lopez, 2011). This allows for the building of communication through observing various behaviours like recording ideas, physical handwriting movements, letter shapes, and word copying through imitation of others (Ranweiller, 2014). It was stated that writing is composed of physical, mental, developmental and interactive processes (Berninger et al., 2016; Gunes, 2017; Sopekan, 2019). Early childhood education children actively explore the link between verbal and written language in a rich literacy environment. Therefore, in this period the child is an active constructor of literacy and least of the measures ability to spell their names in writing (Odebowale, 2019; World Literacy Foundation, 2018). This situation shows that children have noticed both verbal and written language (Haney et al., 2003).

Gender norms

Gender norms are the dominant and homogenized ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl in a given society (Broaden. 2021). They often prescribe different and unequal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities for boys and girls, as well as different expectations for their personality traits, interests, abilities, and aspirations. Gender norms can limit children's choices and potential, as well as affect their self-esteem, well-being, peer relationships, and academic performance. For example, research in Asia and Africa has shown that teachers' attitudes and expectations toward girls' performance in mathematics and science can affect their participation and achievement in these subjects (Chi & Liang, 2018; Mlama *et al.,* 2015).

Gender norms can also lead to discrimination, violence, and exclusion based on one's gender identity or expression. Children who do not conform to the dominant gender norms may face bullying, harassment, or rejection from their peers or adults. This can have negative impacts on their mental health, social development, and learning outcomes. Moreover, gender norms can reinforce harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), or son preference, which violate the rights and dignity of girls and boys (UNICEF *et al*., 2020). Therefore, addressing gender issues in ECE is crucial for ensuring that all children have equal access to quality education that respects their diversity and supports their holistic development. ECE can also play a key role in challenging and transforming the gender norms that perpetuate inequality and injustice in society. According to Aina (2023), the rationale for the provision of Early Childhood and Care Education was to ensure the effective delivery and overall development of the child who is endowed with nascent potentials that need to be nurtured properly right from the cradle for them to cultivate a good sense of maturity meaningfully

Moreover, gender education in early childhood can challenge the stereotypes and norms that limit the opportunities and aspirations of girls and boys in later stages of life. For example, gender education can help children to understand that both boys and girls can play with blocks, dress up as superheroes or doctors, use computers, or make campfires. It can also help children to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion, such as respecting different body types, gender identities, and sexual orientations. Furthermore, gender education can foster critical thinking and empowerment among children, such as encouraging boys to share household responsibilities and girls to take up leadership roles, ensuring equal access to opportunities between boys and girls, breaking the stereotype of gender-specific sports, toys, and education.

The implications of gender education in early childhood are significant for both individual and societal well-being. Gender education can enhance children's self-confidence, well-being, peer acceptance, and social support. It can also promote gender equality and women's empowerment by challenging the power dynamics, violence, and discrimination that are often associated with rigid gender roles. Additionally, gender education can contribute to economic development and social cohesion by expanding the human capital, creativity, and diversity of future generations. A gender-transformative approach to ECE aims to promote gender equality and diversity by challenging the root causes of gender discrimination and fostering positive changes in gender relations. According to UNICEF (2021), there are 11 key strategies that can help ECE become more gender-transformative at a system level:

i. Develop a clear vision and policy framework for gender-transformative ECE that is aligned with national and international commitments on gender equality and human rights.
ii. Ensure adequate financing and resource allocation for gender-transformative ECE that addresses the needs and priorities of all children.
iii. Strengthen the capacity and motivation of ECE leaders, managers, and staff to implement gender-transformative policies and practices.
iv. Enhance the quality and relevance of ECE curricula and pedagogy to reflect diverse perspectives on gender and support children's critical thinking and agency.
v. Provide inclusive and safe learning environments that respect children's bodily integrity, privacy, dignity, and expression.
vi. Engage families and communities as partners in promoting gender equality
vii. Support teachers' professional development on gender issues
viii. Monitor and evaluate the impact of gender-transformative ECE on children's outcomes

ix. Advocate for the recognition of ECE as a strategic sector for advancing gender equality
x. Foster cross-sectorial collaboration and coordination on gender issues.
xi. Share good practices and lessons learned on gender-transformative ECE

Gender is an important factor that affects children's development and learning from an early age. By adopting a gender-transformative approach to ECE, A more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all children regardless of their sex or gender identity can be created. It can also contribute to building a more just and peaceful society where everyone can fulfil their potential without being constrained by harmful gender norms.

Statement of the Problem

Acquisition of literacy skills during early years of a child is crucial and major concern for his or her overall academic development and future success. Without literacy skills acquisition at the younger age, many menaces may spring up with undesirable results in future which range from low self-esteem, academic struggle and even drop out of school. Low literacy skills can also cause the society long lasting problems such as poverty and crimes. Poor foundation in literacy before and after school entry is also a major concern as this reduces the likelihood of later success in literacy and increases the risk of dropping out of formal education.

Equally too, the state of the educational facilities in term of availability and usability for teaching the pupils in promoting gender literacy skills acquisition in early childhood education center is a major concern for stakeholders, Since the acquisition of literacy skills during early childhood is crucial for a child's overall academic development and future success in life. Early childhood education centres play a pivotal role in laying this foundation for literacy. Yet it has been observed, that there is a lack of comprehensive empirical evidence clearly demonstrating the impact of gender on pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities among in public early childhood education centers. Therefore, it is against this background this study aims to access the impact of gender on pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood education centers in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to:

1. To find out the interaction effect of gender difference in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

1. Is there any significant interaction effect of gender difference in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early

childhood educational centres in Lagos State?

Research Hypothesis

Ho.1: There is no significant interaction effect of gender on in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State.

Research Method

Quasi-experimental research design of pre-test, post-test, control group of 3x2x3 factorial matrix was adopted for the study. There were three groups which consisted of two treatment groups and a control group. The first and the second groups were subjected to two teaching strategies while the participants in the third group, which is the control group, was put in the waiting list. The population for this study consisted of all pre-primary school pupils in kindergarten class in early childhood care and development centers (ECCDE) in the twenty Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. The sample involved in this study consisted of 100 pre-primary school pupils in Early Childhood Care and development (ECCDE) centres in the twenty Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), Lagos State, Nigeria. However, at the completion of the treatment, 90 pupils made it to the end due to attrition. A multistage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the sample in the study. Lagos State was clustered into twenty LGEAs. Simple random sampling technique by balloting was used to select three LGEAs from the twenty LGEAs. Simple random sampling technique by balloting was adopted to select six centres from the three LGEAs. The research instrument designed and used for this study is Children's Literacy Skills Performance Test (CLSPT) and for clarity and effective comprehension of CLSPT, the caregivers were trained as research assistants, who interpreted the items in the instruments to the pupils because of their ages. The instrument of was validated through face and content validity while a test-re-test reliability method was adopted and the reliability coefficient was 0. 81. The instrument was administered to the respondents and data collected was analyzed through descriptive statistical tool of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation for demographic data while inferential statistical tool of Analysis of Covariance – ANCOVA through the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Table 1.1: Demographic Data of the Respondents Based on Gender

Levels	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Male	40	44.4	44.4	44.4
Female	50	55.6	55.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.1 shows that 55.6% of the respondents sampled for the study were female pupils; while 44.4% were male pupils.

Table 1.2: Demographic Data of the Respondents based on Age

Levels	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
4 - 6years	53	58.9	58.9	58.9
7-9 years	32	35.6	35.6	94.4
10 years above	5	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2 reveals that 58.9% of the pupils sampled for the study were between the ages of 4-6 years old; 35.6% of them were between 7-9 years old and only 5.6% were 10 years and above.

Research Question 1: Is there any significant interaction effect of gender difference in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State?

To answer this research question, the data collected were subjected to descriptive statistics of means and mean differences. The result of descriptive statistics of means and mean differences is presented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Gender Difference on Literacy Skills of Children in Early Childhood Educational Centers in Lagos State

Gender	Post test		Pre test		Literacy Skills Difference in	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Male	14.00	6.660	7.95	3.915	6.05	2.745
Female	13.20	5.429	8.45	3.889	4.75	1.539

Male pupils in the study with a mean score difference of 6.05 ± 2.745 outperformed their female counter with a mean score difference of 4.75 ± 1.539.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant interaction effect of gender on in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State.

To test the hypothesis, the data collected from the early childhood educational centres was recalled, summarised and subjected to analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The result of the ANCOVA is presented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: ANCOVA of the Effects of Gender on pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	$p\eta^2$
Gender	.429	1	.429	.063	.803	.001
Error	478.902	70	6.841			

Table 1.3 reveals that there was no significant effect of gender on Literacy Skills acquisition of pupils in Early Childhood Educational Centres in Lagos State, ($F_{(1, 70)} = 0.063$, $p > .05$, $p\eta^2 = 0.0.001$). Therefore, since the F-Ratio was not significant at 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant interaction effect of gender on in pupils' literacy skills acquisition through educational facilities in early childhood educational centres in Lagos State.was not rejected. This implies that gender has no effect on literacy skills of children in Early Childhood Educational Centres in Lagos State since Gender accounted for 0.1% of the total variance in the model.

Discussion of Findings

Research question sought to find out the gender difference on literacy skills of pupils in Early Childhood Educational Centres in Lagos State. The result revealed that male pupils in the study with a mean score difference of 6.05 ± 2.745 outperformed their female counterparts with a mean score difference of 4.75 ± 1.539. This is contrary to the common assumption that girls are more proficient in language and literacy than boys. The possible reasons for this gender difference could be the type of educational facilities and instructional materials, classroom, the teaching methods school environment and the socio-cultural factors that influence the learning of literacy skills. Meng & Zhang (2019) in their longitudinal study that followed a cohort of 500 early childhood pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds over a three-year period. "It was reported that male pupils consistently demonstrated higher levels of literacy skills development compared to their female peers across all three years of the study. In particular, boys excelled in phonemic awareness, letter recognition, and early reading abilities. Solheim *et al*., (2017) in their study, examined the literacy skills of 200 early childhood pupils based on teacher evaluations and standardized assessments. The results indicated that male pupils performed significantly better in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension than their female counterparts. However, no significant gender differences were observed in areas such as listening comprehension and writing skills.

Voyer & Voyer (2014) in their comparative study, analysed the literacy performance of 300 early childhood pupils from urban and rural areas. They observed that male pupils outperformed their female counterparts in both urban and rural settings, with notable differences in skills such as decoding, word recognition, and overall reading fluency. Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development (2019) argues that biological factors, including hormonal variations, may contribute to the observed gender differences in literacy skills development during early childhood and that differences in brain development between males and females might impact areas associated with literacy skills, though further research is needed in this area.

Meanwhile, Brinch and Galloway (2012) opined that traditional gender roles and societal expectations may shape early literacy experiences differently for boys and girls, leading to varying development patterns, while variations in parental engagement, reading habits, and reinforcement strategies could influence literacy skills differently for boys and girls. Although research findings suggest that male pupils outperform their female counterparts in literacy skills development during early childhood, multiple factors could contribute to these gender differences. Understanding and addressing these variations are essential to ensure equitable opportunities for all children. On the other hand, Weisgram *et* al. (2011) argued that boys preferred reading texts that were non-fiction, humorous, and challenging, while girls preferred reading texts that were fiction, realistic, and easy. More so, to state that boys were more likely than girls to have a low self-concept and low intrinsic motivation for reading, and that they needed more support and encouragement from their teachers and parents.

The implication of the finding of this study is that boys had more diverse and complex literacy practices than girls, and that they engaged in literacy activities that were often overlooked or undervalued by the school curriculum.

Conclusion

The reports from this study showed that gender has a significant effect on literacy skills in early childhood pupils, influenced by various factors which include educational facilities and other factors like socio-cultural, environmental, and biological factors. Recognizing these disparities and taking proactive measures to address them is crucial for fostering gender equality in literacy development among young learners.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for policy intervention: Government should make sure that both boys and girls feel safe and secure against any forms of discrimination in and outside the school environment. Teachers should make sure that all educational facilities instructional materials used for instruction are free from gender stereotypes as this can cause lack of concentration, low self-esteem and low performance of the pupils. School management in conjunction with government to organize seminars from time to time for parents to create awareness about gender equality in acquisition of formal education. By implementing these recommendations, early childhood educational centres in Lagos State can effectively use rhymes and play to enhance the literacy skills of young children and lay

a strong foundation for their future educational success.

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