Effects of Caregivers' Training Programme on Preschoolers' Socio-Emotional Readiness for Transition From Kindergarten to Primary One in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study determined the effect of caregivers' training program on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one in Rivers State Nigeria. The study adopted quasi-experimental design with a population of 550 pupils and a sample of 111 pupils 48 (experimental) and 73 (control) drawn from the population using a multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection for this study was the Rating Scale for Observation of Kindergarteners and Primary One Pupils Readiness and Transition (RASOKIPOPRAT). Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 set as the level of significance. The findings revealed that caregivers' training program had a significant effect on pre-schoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one. Based on the findings it was recommended among others that local government education authority should adopt this training manual to help caregivers understand the meaning of socio-emotional readiness and then apply it in their school activities for proper development of the pupils.

Keywords: caregivers, socio-emotional readiness, transition, training manual

1. Introduction

The demand for readiness before transitioning to all levels of education has become intensified in the recent past; more importantly, as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs Target #4.2) have attenuated this reality. The hope that preschoolers will arrive from pre-primary to primary school: physically, socio-emotionally, cognitively ready with the right approaches towards learning is the target for the actualization of the sustainable development goal. Pre-Primary education builds the foundation for all educational achievements, which a child will acquire in life. It holds the key to a favourable educational trajectory. Pre-primary education is an early childhood programme that incorporates learning and play with a professional-trained adult. Children are most often enrolled in preschool between three and five years of age, although some schools are open to those as young as two. Preschools vary from conventional daycare because the emphasis is on learning and development, rather than on enabling parents to work or do other things (Swartout-Corbeil, 2015). Pre-school activities are designed to provide early childhood cognitive and social stimulation (Lee, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2011). The goal of these interactions is to encourage children to successfully make their transition to school and prevent poor outcomes like school failure, unemployment and poverty due to poor transition(Lunenburg, 2011). There are however mitigating factors, which may mar this desire for children in the preschool to arrive primary school ready

to learn. One of such factors is the capacity of the caregivers who enable preschoolers to get ready to transit to formal schooling.

Caregivers are persons who take care of infants and young children (World Health Organization, 2004). These may be adoptive parents of children or immediate family members interested in childcare and nurturing. In early childhood, care begins with parents particularly with mothers who provide social, nutritional and healthy support for young children. Nevertheless, the fact that so many women return to their jobs almost immediately after childbirth has made it difficult and transferred the responsibility for this service to childcare centres, where non-biological individuals play the role of healthcare (Mrazek, 2013). The level of commitment that preschoolers share with their caregivers stems from the sense that they are received and validated through daily interaction, which establishes a strong bond between the children and their caregivers. The degree of approval and affirmation of childhood feelings and desires bring children close to a significant adult. Warm, attentive affection perceived during interaction is seen by children as acceptance (Dailey, 2010). Caregivers affirm and support children by affirmation, in this sense by expressing their acknowledgement of feelings and wishes. Affirmation here is conveyed through nonverbal means of enjoyment and engagement and verbal expressions, which ensure that the feelings and thoughts of the child are true. Acknowledgement as a confirmatory aspect also includes a gaze, smile from a look of approval, lean towards a child, and the tone of voice of the adult present (Dailey, 2006, 2008). Caregivers endear themselves to the preschoolers at various levels of interaction but more importantly through the dynamics of the different categories of interventions during this last stage of the preschool year. Caregivers of preschoolers in the kindergarten have the duty of nurturing children with socio-emotional capacities to relate well outside the home.

Social readiness involves the ability of kindergarteners to relate well with others in the classroom context. This shows that children can communicate well with their peers and can take instruction from teachers without having to resist the instructions provided during the school time. Social skills are very important in transition as children transiting from pre-school to formal learning need self-esteem, the ability to develop positive relationships with parents and adults, concentration and persistence in demanding tasks, the ability to communicate emotions effectively, the ability to hear and be alert and to learn the skills required in the process of solving social problems (Bowman, Donovan, Burns, et. al., 2000; Shonkoff& Philips, 2000).

Social skills include behaviour, which promotes positive interaction with others and the environment and includes empathy, involvement in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, interaction, negotiation and problem-solving (Lynch & Simpson, 2010). Children learn these skills from adults and other children who model and demonstrate in particular situations how to act (Ladd, 2005). The social skills that children learn as young people form the foundation of later childhood and adult relationships (Ladd &Burgess, 2001).The social skill, which children learn, has been categorized into two major aspects namely: socially competent behaviours, such as sharing and helping and a lack of negative behaviours, such as conflict and aggression (Fantuzzo, Sutton-Smith, Coolahan, Manz, Canning, &Debnam, 1995). In other words, children can be said to be socially skilled when they are able to share; when they are able to help their peers, and when they are able to avoid conflict and aggression against their peers during play and other activities.

Children have a hard time sharing their personal property because it means giving up what they treasure and making sacrifices of value. It is important to teach them how to share before they start formal schooling. Sharing can take various forms, namely: sharing attention, emotional sharing, sharing of information and sharing resources; but sharing is the other-oriented sharing that highlights altruistic nature in children. This method of sharing is naturally prosocial because it is dictated by the need, wish or negative emotion of others, and is used to alleviate the situation (Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols, & Drummond, 2012). In addition to learning how to share with others, preschoolers also require the prosocial skill of helping their peers. Helping can be considered as an instrumental or empathetic aid. Instrumental aid involves helping someone with an action-based intent such as retrieving a lost or out-of-reach object, which needs a fairly basic ability to represent the interests of others and target-oriented actions (Woodward, 1998). Empathic assistance is to intervene to change the negative emotional and inner state of others such as depression, suffering and hunger. This kind of help includes the assistant in a direct way, which necessarily requires an awareness of the other person's feelings and how the person is to help solve the problem. In children of about two years this capacity is already, being developed (Hoffman, 2007). Children also need to accommodate others by avoiding aggression.

Learning prosocial behaviour of sharing and helping are, on the one hand, important but learning also to accommodate others and avoid aggression is another aspect of socialization, which preschoolers need before they transit to formal school. Aggression has been found to negatively impact on preschool learning. Aggressive

children are rejected by their peers, overlooked by their teachers and have challenges in learning (Coie& Dodge, 1998). Aggression is a kind of action that harms or hurts others (Yektatalab, 2016). Aggressive behaviour is defined as an action directed at a particular person or object intended to harm or threaten and agreed on the aggressive intention of the act (Zeanah, 1993). Aggressive acts toward others are typically sub-divided into two categories: hostile and instrumental aggression. "Hostile aggression refers to instances in which the major goal is inflicting injury, whereas instrumental aggression involves using force or threat of force to achieve a nonaggressive end e.g., obtaining an object or gaining territory" (Zeanah, 1993, p. 4). Learning these social skills is equally dependent on the setting, whether the school is a government-owned institution or privately owned and run for profit.

Public schools are often more populated by a variety of preschoolers from different backgrounds, with fewer teaching staff, to manage learning while private schools have fewer preschoolers with caregivers who pay particular attention to the needs of the preschoolers. This explains why a close study of Nigeria's current trends observes parents' preference for a privately-owned educational institution for their children, rather than public institutions; private schools are being looked at to correct the problems and shortcomings due to many years of government involvement in school management(Adebayo, 2009).

Caregivers in these two settings have a responsibility to help preschoolers learn socializing behaviours, which foster effective transition. Helping preschoolers learn socio-emotional competences requires that the caregivers themselves know how to create the right kind of classroom context to facilitate this learning hence the need to train caregivers in this regard. Often caregivers are overwhelmed in managing energetic preschoolers and who can become unruly if they have not been effectively socialized to cope and work well with others. The caregivers, therefore, need a training programme to help their work. This programme helps them understand the socio-emotional challenges of preschoolers and the implications for their academic achievements. The Strategies for Teachers' Advancement of Readiness and Transition to School (S.T.A.R.T.S) as a programme is a training manual for enhancement of teachers' awareness of the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive readiness and learning approaches of preschoolers before their transition to school. The manual is aimed at preparing caregivers for the implementation of the One-Year Pre-Primary School Education Curriculum developed by the National Educational Research Council (NERDC), supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and published by the Federal Ministry of Education (FGN, 2014). The package has six sessions. The first session reflects on the developmental milestones of preschoolers for transition, the second to the fourth sessions look at the four domains of readiness namely: physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and attitudes to learning. The final session looks at the rapprochement between the training manual and the one-year pre-primary curriculum. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of caregivers' training programme on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one in Rivers state.

1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for the study:

1. What is the effect of caregivers' training programme on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one?

2. What is the influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one?

1.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant effect of caregivers' training programme on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one.

2. There is no significant influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one.

2. Materials and Method

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design. Specifically, non-equivalent control group design was used. Research participants are not randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups and both groups take a pretest and posttest (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). The study was carried out in Oyigbo Local Government Area of Rivers state due to the teeming population of children and prevalence of preschoolers who transit every year from kindergarten to primary one unprepared to face the challenges of formal learning.

2.1 Participants

The sample comprised of 111 preschoolers 48 (experimental) and 73 (control). Purposive sampling technique was used to select 45 schools; simple random sampling was adopted to draw eight schools (4 public and 4 private); simple random sampling was used to draw one intact class from each school; then researchers randomly assigned 4 schools to experimental and 4 schools to control group.
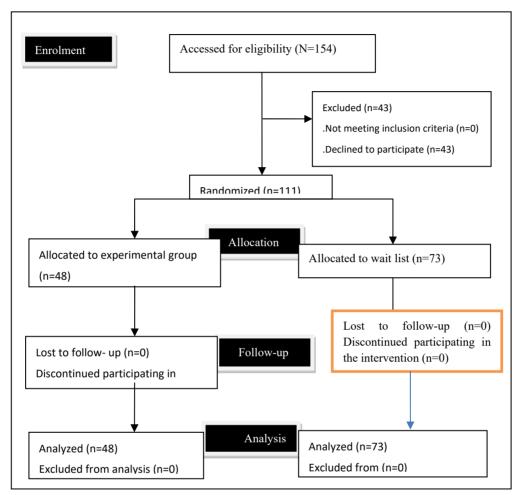

Figure 1. Flow diagram for Participants Allocation

2.2 Measure

A rating scale titled Rating Scale for Observation of Kindergartners and Primary One Pupils Readiness and Transition (RASOKIPOPRAT)developed by the researchers was used for the study. RASOKIPOPRAT had two sections, Section Ahighlightedpreschoolers' demographic variables while Section B had four clusters with 15 items each.   The observation rating scale had 60 items with response options of Always (4points), Often (3points), Seldom (2points), Never (1point). The instrument was validated by experts in Childhood, Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation discipline. Using Cronbach Alpha the rating scale had a high reliability coefficient of 0.83. The instrument was administered by the researchers to observe the behaviour of the preschoolers.

2.3 Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of mean was used to answer the research questions. The null hypotheses were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The decision rule: the null hypotheses were rejected when P-value was less than 0.05 otherwise, the researchers failed to reject the null hypotheses when P-value is greater than 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

3.1 Research Question One

What is the effect of caregivers' training program on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one?

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores of the Effect of caregivers' training program on Preschoolers'Socio-Emotional Readiness for Transition from Kindergarten to Primary One

Variable	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Diff
Teaching Strategies		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
Caregivers' Training programme	48	27.97	3.83	53.04	2.64	25.07
Control Method	73	28.41	3.28	36.02	2.91	7.61

Key: N = Number of Respondents,$\bar{X}$= Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

The mean gain or difference between the pre-test and post-test means was 7.61. For both groups, the post-test mean scores of the preschoolers were greater than the pre-test mean scores, with those taught using the caregivers' training programme (experimental group) having a higher mean gain than those taught using the conventional method (control group). This, therefore, implies that the caregivers' training programme seems effective in increasing preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one than when taught using the conventional method.

H_{01}: There is no significant effect of caregivers' training program on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one.

Table 2. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the Effect of Caregivers' Training Program on Preschoolers' Socio-Emotional Readiness for Transition from Kindergarten to Primary One

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	8434.876[a]	4	2108.719	275.433	0.00	0.90
Intercept	3292.949	1	3292.949	430.112	0.00	0.78
PreSMR	1.713	1	1.713	.224	0.63	0.00
Group	8201.774	1	8201.774	1071.284	0.00	0.90
Schooltype	6.074	1	6.074	.793	0.37	0.00
Group*Schooltype	35.245	1	35.245	4.604	0.03	0.03
Error	888.099	96	7.656			
Total	230736.000	111				
Corrected Total	9322.975	110				

Result in Table 2 shows that caregivers' training program had a significant effect on pre-schoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one, $F (1, 96) = 1071.284$, $p <.05$. Since the associated probability of 0.00, when compared with 0.05 set as the level of significance, was found to be significant because it is less, the null hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, the effect size of 0.90 indicates that caregivers' training program accounted for 90 per cent increase in the preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one.

3.2 Research Question Two

What is the influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one?

Table 3. Pre-test and post-test Mean scores of the influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one

Variable	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Diff
School Type		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	
Public	64	27.87	3.48	43.12	9.45	15.25
Private	57	28.64	3.50	42.38	8.10	13.74

Key: Number of subjects/respondents, $\bar{X}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 3 showed that post-test mean score of pupils in public schools (M = 43.12, SD = 9.45) was higher than that of the pupils in private schools (M = 42.38, SD = 8.10).

H$_{02}$: There is no significant difference in the influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one.

Table 2 also showed that there was no significant influence of school type on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one, F (1, 96) = .793, p = 0.37. Since the associated or exact probability value of 0.37, when compared with 0.05 set as the level of significance, was found not to be significant because it is greater, the null was not rejected.

4. Discussion of Findings

The result of the study shows that the caregivers' training program was effective in increasing preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one than the conventional method. There was a significant effect of caregivers' training program on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one. In addition to the physical readiness demonstrated by preschoolers in the experimental group, there was a corresponding socio-emotional readiness as well due to the caregivers training program.

Preschoolers were able to demonstrate their socio-emotional readiness as their sense of self-awareness had grown to the level where they were able to appreciate how they viewed themselves in relation to others and how they regulate their behaviour and emotions (Brenner, 2011). Socio-emotional readiness plays a dominant factor in preschoolers' readiness to learn in formal education because it is the capacity they demonstrate to work well with others, and participate in group dynamics within the classroom context. This view agrees with researchers (Bowman, Donovan, Burns, et. al., 2000; Shonkoff & Philips, 2000) who argue that social competence is very important in transition because children who have to transit from preschool to formal learning need to have confidence and the capacity to develop good ties with peers and adults and to focus on challenging tasks and succeed in them; the ability to effectively express emotions in solving social problems. Altruistic sharing is the most powerful form of sharing that makes children's pro-social behaviour touch other people (Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols, & Drummond, 2012:2). Consequently, if preschoolers were able to share common objects with peers, take turns to use common toys, request and distribute items from peers in a cordial way, are praised and shown attention when they share something with peers, modelled as an example to peers for sharing with other children in the class, then the caregivers training program has been effective.

In their readiness to help their peers, preschoolers engaged in activities that demonstrated helping skills among peers, helped their classmates in particular needs in the class, took responsibility for their actions, showed sensitivity to the other children's feelings, suggested creative ways of helping others in the class. The help of preschoolers is compared to empathy, which involves the helpers directly with the one being helped that inherently requires an understanding of the other person's emotional state and how to help them solve the issue (Hoffman, 2007).

Aggression has been observed to have a negative impact on the learning of preschoolers. \Aggressive children are avoided by their peers, ignored by their teachers and have difficulty with learning (Coie& Dodge, 1998). The preschoolers avoided bullying and other distracting actions in the classroom especially during play, disapproved bullying actions among peers especially during play, managed conflicts among peer during play and group work, spoke calmly to peers in the classroom, respected differences in other members of the class. To this extent, the caregivers training manual can be said to be effective.

The finding of the study shows that school type had little influence on preschoolers' socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one. There was no significant influence of school type on preschoolers'

socio-emotional readiness for transition from kindergarten to primary one. The preschoolers in both public and private schools showed an equal measure of restraint from aggressive behaviour and willingness to share and help. The environment of the public schools notwithstanding, the preschoolers were well-behaved, comported, avoiding aggression as much as possible and ready to learn.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

It was concluded that the training manual should accompany the One-Year Pre-Primary School Education Curriculum. This is because many teachers at the level of education have not seen the curriculum and even when they have it, are not aware of the implications of socio-emotional readiness for a successful transition to primary school. It was therefore recommended that:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Ministry of Education, adopt this training manual to help caregivers understand the meaning of readiness and transition and socio-emotional readiness in particular.

2. Local Education Authorities could organize workshops and seminars, which will enhance the capacity of teachers to help children get ready socio-emotionally and transit from preschool to primary one.

3. Organize a workshop for private school proprietors on the need to prepare their school environment to enable children to develop socio-emotionally before they enter formal school.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

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