EFFECTS OF PRETEND PLAY ON PRE-PRIMARY PUPILS’ SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN BASSA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This paper studied effects of pretend play on pre-primary pupils’ social skill development in Bassa, Plateau State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects that pretend play activities would have on pre-primary pupils’ social skills; sharing and communication skills development. The study used the quasi experimental design. The population of the study consisted of 4,052 pre-primary pupils from 76 public pre-primary schools in Bassa Local Government Area and the sample of the study consisted of 40 pupils with 20 each in group A and group B respectively; which were the experimental and control groups. Two hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance. An instrument titled Social Skill Rating Scale (SSRS) was used for data collection and data obtained was analysed using One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of two independent samples. Results showed that social skills of pre-primary pupils were enhanced as a result of exposure to pretend play intervention. The study concluded that pretend play activities sharpen children’s social skill. It was recommended that pre-primary teachers should deliberately create pretend play opportunities for children to engage in spontaneous play with their peers in order that the requisite social skills required for the onset of formal schooling would be developed.

KEYWORDS: Pretend play, Pre-primary pupils, Sharing skills, Communication skills

INTRODUCTION
Early childhood education is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for development and lifelong learning. The enhancement of young children’s developmental skills for coping with life’s demands have however, largely focused on cognitive skill development in tensed teacher directed conditions.
in most early childhood education settings (Selzing-Musa, 2014; Haggai & Selzing-Musa, 2013), while other developmental skills in other domains receive little or no attention. Hence, the learning and the development of the young child is not holistic. Children need to be trained to acquire skills in all the other domains of development, one of which is the social developmental domain.

Social skills refer to the acquisition of acceptable and appropriate behaviours necessary for relating with people, and adopting such behaviours to individual’s unique personality. The social skills pre-primary pupils are expected to acquire include; ability to recognize social cues, interact positively with peers and adults through cooperation, taking turns and initiating and maintaining conversations (Carlson-Paige, 2012). The relevance of social skills lies in the fact that it forms the foundation for the growth of future behaviour and thought. These skills, when adequately built in pre-primary pupils, are likely to prepare children to successfully transit into more advanced interpersonal and reciprocal relationships.

It is important to develop skills in the social domain of young children because social skill is a foundational requirement for children to begin formal schooling and it forms the basis for forming positive relationships with others which is essential for success in future life (Korb, 2018). However, not enough is known about the emergence of peer relations in the preschool years and children are found to be socially unskilled.

Caregivers have tried to develop social skills in children through guidance in on-going interactions with peers, modelling, explicit intervention, and collaborative interaction and class meetings. But the minimum required social skills are still lacking in pre-primary children. Pre-primary children are learners who are five years old (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2014), who are being prepared for smooth transition to primary school. At this age, children are expected to begin to learn to positively interact with people around them. In the early years, the social skills which children are expected to begin to develop before the onset of formal education among others include: sharing, turns taking, establishing friendship, cooperation, and social awareness. For the purpose of this study however, the social skills that the research will focus on are sharing and communication skills.

Sharing skills includes agreeably giving one’s possession to others. Sharing is a way for young children to learn from each other and use their interpersonal intelligence; unfortunately, pre-primary pupils are yet to learn the skill of sharing.

Communication means expressing and receiving ideas and exchanging meaning between people. In communicating, ideas sent and received through gestures, pictures, and movements. Communication includes language which is the richest and most versatile means
of communication. Children need to effectively communicate so that they will be able to comprehend, speak and read words.

Pretend play is a subset of play activities characterized by an ‘as if stance’ (Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith, & Palmquist, 2013). It is a play type in which children intentionally project mentally represented alternatives into their play activities. Children, during play, act like different people in different times and places. Pretend play begins to emerge at age two and reaches its peak when children are in preprimary school. It is upon this premise that the study aims at examining the extent to which pretend play can develop social skills in pre-primary pupils.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Crucial as the development of social skills is to children’s development, social developmental deficits are common in young children. At age six, when children are transiting to formal school, they demonstrate difficulties in relating with peers in appropriate ways. Fourteen percent (14%) of children of nursery school age have social problems (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009). These difficulties are found to increase mental health risks, underachievement in academic performance and disruptive behaviours in classrooms.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the effects of pretend play on pre-primary pupils’ sharing skills.
2. find out the effects of pretend play on pre-primary pupils’ communication skills.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There will be no significant difference between pre-primary pupils’ sharing skills mean score in the experimental and control groups after exposure to pretend play.
2. There will be no significant difference between pre-primary pupils’ communication skills mean score in the experimental and control groups after exposure to pretend play.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used the quasi-experimental non-equivalent pre-test post-test design. This design is preferred for this study because the study is concerned with young humans, whose behaviours are likely to change or be influenced at any time within the study period, and thus, true experiment cannot be possible (Shuttleworth, 2018).

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of 4,052 pre-primary pupils of 76 public pre-primary schools in Bassa Local Government Area. Public pre-primary schools are public
linkages situated in public primary schools which are established to cater for the learning, development, care, nurturance, and protection of all young children before their entry into primary school. The school population comprises of boys and girls of the same socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

The sample for the study consisted of 40 (forty) pre-primary pupils of one selected preprimary school. Class A had 20 pre-primary pupils while class B had 20 pre-primary pupils from the same socio-economic backgrounds. The school sample was obtained by taking the available pre-primary schools in the locality which had pre-primary classes with two arms to serve as intact groups that constituted the experimental and control groups.

The sampling technique for the study was the purposive criterion sampling technique. This is a sampling technique in which the researchers selected a sample consisting of only those sampling units which meet the criteria for the study.

**Table 1: Sampled Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrument**

The Social Skill Rating Scale (SSRS) was used by the researchers to observe pre-primary school children’s social skills before and after the treatment. The instrument was made of two sections. Section A of the instrument consists of preliminary information of pupils (respondents); name of school, identification number of child, sex of child, age of pupil, and name of observer. Section B of the instrument consists of eight sub skills; four skills each for the sharing and communication sub skills of the social developmental domain. Some of the items under the sub sections are; child asks for toy, gives toys to peers when asked, speaks clearly to others and plays with other children.

**Validity and Reliability**

The content validity of the Social Skill Rating Scale was subjected to experts’ scrutiny. Four experts; two each from Test and Measurement and Educational Psychology evaluated the instrument and all agreed that the items of the instrument were appropriate and the instrument measured what it intended to measure.

The construct validity of the instrument was measured using factor analysis interpretation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] measure of sampling adequacy was .714, indicating suitability of the instrument for factor analysis.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through measure of internal consistency. Using Cronbach Alpha method of estimating reliability, the reliability coefficient
for the Social Skill Rating Scale, (SSRS) was .970. Data was analyzed with The One-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of two independent samples to test the hypotheses that were formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

Procedure for Data Collection

Administration of Pre-test

Pre-test was administered using the SSRS to determine pre-primary pupils’ levels of social skills before the intervention. The pre-test was administered by the researchers for possible comparison of pupils’ levels of social skills with after intervention.

Administration of Treatment

Pretend play opportunities were provided in the experimental group for children to engage in spontaneous activities for six weeks. The classrooms were arranged into learning centres and equipped with locally sourced toys and manufactured toys purchased by the researchers. Themes of the pretend play included transportation, petty trading, cooking, building and farming. The themes were changed weekly, with the last week engaging children in eclectic themed pretend play.

The control group was an intact group that was made up of one pre-primary class. For three days in a week for six weeks, pupils were engaged in teacher directed reading and storytelling sessions for 45 minutes. At storytelling and reading time, children were told stories by the teacher. This was to ensure that the control group engaged in teacher directed though fun activities that did not resemble the activities of the experimental group.

Administration of Post-test

Administration of the post-test was done using the Social Skill Rating Scale after six weeks of treatment. The post-test observation was administered by the researchers and research assistants in both experimental and control groups for 45 minutes for three days in a week. The post-test was administered in the same manner as the pre-test and the researchers and research assistants used the SSRS to rate pupil’s levels of social skills for possible comparison with the pre-test.

The scoring of the SSRS was done by assigning values to each scale on the extent of engagement of children in each social trait under study as children in experimental and control groups engage in their different activities. Social skills traits of pupils were scored as follows: Always-3, Sometimes-2, Seldom- 1, and Never-0.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 (Ho1): There will be no significant difference between pre-primary pupils’ sharing skills mean score in the experimental and control groups after exposure to pretend play.
Table 2: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Effects of Pretend Play on Pre-primary Pupils’ Sharing Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted mean</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted error</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted total</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that the critical P value of 0.0017 is less than the calculated F value of 11.33. The results on Table 2 indicate that the sharing skills of pre-primary pupils differed significantly as a result of the pretend play intervention. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between the sharing skills of pre-primary pupils who were exposed to pretend play and those who were not.

Hypothesis 2 (H02): There will be no significant difference between pre-primary pupils’ communication skills mean score in the experimental and control groups after exposure to pretend play.

Table 3: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Effects of Pretend Play on Pre-primary Pupils’ Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted mean</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>0.008260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted error</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted total</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the critical P value of 0.008260 is less than the calculated F value of 7.79. The results on table 3 indicate that the communication skills of pre-primary pupils differed significantly as a result of pretend play intervention. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is a significant difference between the communication skills of pre-primary pupils who were exposed to pretend play and those who were not.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first major finding of the study indicated that the sharing skill mean score of pre-primary pupils in the experimental group was higher than the sharing skill mean score of pre-primary pupils in the control group. In other words, after exposing pre-schoolers to pretend play intervention, they were seen to always ask for toys from peers, give toys to peers when asked, never snatch toys from peers and willingly surrender toy to their peers.

Secondly, the findings of the study revealed that the communication skill mean score of pre-primary pupils in the experimental group was higher than the communication skill mean score of pre-primary pupils in the control group. In other words, after exposing preschoolers to pretend play intervention, they were seen, to listen to their peers with more understanding, speak more clearly to others, seldom frown at peers, and always smile with others. Thus pretend
play intervention was effective in the development of social skill in pre-primary pupils in Bassa, Plateau State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study has shown that pretend play is effective in developing sharing and communication components of social skills, which are essential for success in future education and lifelong interaction in individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Social skills development should be accorded the same importance as cognitive skill development by caregivers, so that children’s preparedness for formal education at the onset of primary school will be adequate.
2. Pretend play opportunities be provided by caregivers in all pre-primary classes in order to have children engage in self-chosen and self-directed activities so as to spontaneously learn the requisite social skills for future academic and lifelong success.

REFERENCES


