

The School and Socio-Emotional Development of Primary School Children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined the role of the school in the social and emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor local government area, Rivers State. The study adopted the survey design, and population of was all the 820 teachers in public primary schools in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State. Simple random sampling was used to select seven schools and 105 teachers (60 females and 45 males) for the study. A questionnaire form was designed on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) with scores 4, 3, 2, and 1. The findings on the impacts of the school environment on the socio-emotional development of the primary school children showed that all the items (e.g. the school environment creates then atmosphere for child to build network of relationships) were accepted by the respondents, while teacher influence on the socio-emotional development of primary school children showed that all items (e.g. teacher-pupil relationship can help children with aggressive attitudes) were accepted by the respondents. Finally, the findings on how peer-influence affected the socio-emotional development of primary school children revealed that all items (e.g., children learn interaction skills from peers) were accepted. The study recommended that teachers should be trained and retrained on special skills such as classroom management, interpersonal management and ability to manage difficult situations.

Keyword: Emotional development, social development, school, primary school children

Introduction

Social-emotional development is a child's ability to understand the feelings of others, control their own feelings and behaviors, and get along with peers. In order for children to attain the basic skills they need such as cooperation, following directions, demonstrating self-control and paying attention, they must have social-emotional skills. Feelings of trust, confidence, pride, friendship, affection and humor are all a part of a child's social-emotional development (McAdams, 2001). Children's social and emotional skills are developing all the time. Skills may develop differently for different children. Children benefit from having many learning and practice opportunities. A child's social-emotional development is as important as their cognitive and physical development. It is important to know that children are not born with social-emotional skills. It is the role of the parents, caregivers, and teachers of children to teach and foster these abilities (Gross & Humphreys, 1992).

Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development has eight distinct stages, taking in five stages up to the age of 18 years and three further stages beyond, well into adulthood. Like Freud and many others, Erik Erikson maintained that personality develops in a predetermined order, and builds upon each previous stage. This is called the epigenetic principle. During each stage, the person experiences a psychosocial crisis which could have a positive or negative outcome for personality development.

The school environment is vital to the development of the child. The ideas, beliefs and knowledge that children have about who they are, what they can do and where they fit in society can be enforced by the school, and help to shape their understanding of themselves (Bornstein & Leventhal, 2015). Children base their self-concepts on feedback they receive from others as well as their own judgments. The kinds of things that primary school children take into account in developing their self-concepts include how well they are able to succeed with schoolwork and other activities, how they look, and how they get on with family and peers.

Peer influence can be a strong factor in the social and emotional development of the child (Amadi, China & Nubia, 2024). Friendships and relationships with other children become more important to children as they grow and begin to learn about getting along with others. Children who learn positive friendship skills have been shown to develop better relationships with others, which benefits their mental health and wellbeing (Manchanda, Stein & Fazel, 2023). This does not mean children will always want to play with others; many children like some time to do their own thing, but everyone needs a friend and the skills to be able to relate to others when they want to or need to.

Understanding how these variables combine to make the school an indispensable instrument in the social and emotional development of the child is vital to positive child outcomes. This is the interest of this study.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted the survey design to assess the opinions of teachers on the role of the school in social and emotional development of primary school children. Obio/Akpor local government area was the area of the study. Obio-Akpor is a local government area in the metropolis of Port Harcourt, one of the major centres of educational activities in Nigeria.

Population and sample of the study: The population of the study was all the 820 teachers in public primary schools in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State. The simple random sampling was used to select seven schools and 105 teachers (60 females and 45 males) for the study. The breakdown is given below.

Instrumentation: A structured questionnaire titled ‘Role of the School in the Social and Emotional Development of Children’ (RSSMDC) was designed on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) with scores 4, 3, 2, and 1.

Data analysis: The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation with average mean of 2.50 as decision rule.

Results: The results are presented in the tables below.

Research Question 1: What are the impacts of the school environment on the socio-emotional development of the primary school children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on the impacts of the school environment on the socio-emotional development of the primary school children

ITEMS	Male			Females		
	\bar{X} 1	SD	RMK	\bar{X} 2	SD	RMK
1. The school environment creates the atmosphere for child to build network of relationships	2.61	0.56	A	2.53	0.58	A
2. Children learn to interact from the school environment	2.54	0.67	A	2.61	0.66	A
3. The school provides opportunity for team work	3.53	0.72	A	2.66	0.84	A
4. Through social activities the children do new things with others	3.54	0.69	A	3.53	0.72	A
5. The school teaches the child how to tolerate others	2.64	0.58	A	2.62	0.57	A

Key: \bar{X} = Mean score; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **A**= Agree

The Table 1 above showed the mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female responses on the impacts of the school environment on the socio-emotional development of the primary school children. The data showed that all the items (1-5) were accepted because they had grand mean scores of 2.50 and above. The standard deviation ranged between 0.56 and 0.84 indicating that the respondents were not far from their opinions.

Research Question 2: How does the teacher influence the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on teacher influence on the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State?

ITEMS	Male			Female		
	\bar{X} 1	SD	RMK	\bar{X} 2	SD	RMK
6. Teacher-pupil relationship can help children with aggressive attitudes	2.61	0.56	A	2.58	0.59	A
7. Teacher motivation skills can help the child learn to overcome difficult problems	2.74	0.66	A	2.71	0.67	A
8. Children social arbitration from the teacher	3.23	0.68	A	2.56	0.74	A
9. Teacher conflict management skills can help the child with managing interpersonal conflicts	3.14	0.65	A	3.03	0.62	A
10. The teacher helps children build social cohesion in the class	2.57	0.58	A	2.52	0.58	A

Key: \bar{X} = Mean score; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **A**= Agree

The Table 2 above showed the mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female responses on teacher influence on the socio-emotional development of primary school children. The data showed that all items (6-10) were accepted because they had grand mean scores of 2.50 and above. Also, the standard deviation ranged between 0.56 and 0.74 indicating that the respondents were not far from their opinions.

Research Question 3: How does peer-influence affect the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers on how peer-influence affect the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor?

ITEMS	Male			Female		
	\bar{X} 1	SD	RMK	\bar{X} 2	SD	RMK
11. Children learn interaction skills from peers	3.01	0.66	A	2.73	0.67A	
12. Children learn to be independent from their peers in school	3.64	0.66	A	2.81	0.62A	
13. Plays help children to learn how to manage disagreement	3.23	0.70	A	2.61	0.64	A
14. Children learn problem-solving skills from their peers	3.14	0.59	A	2.53	0.62	A
15. Group works enable children learn the importance of collective work	3.04	0.62	A	2.62	0.58A	

Key: \bar{X} = Mean score; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **A**= Agree

The Table 3 above showed the mean ratings and standard deviation of male and female responses on how peer-influence affect the socio-emotional development of primary school children. The data showed that all items (11-15) were accepted because they had grand mean scores of 2.50 and above. Also, the standard deviation ranged between 0.58 and 0.70 indicating that the respondents were not far from their opinions.

Hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the male and female teachers on the role of the school in the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State.

Table 4: T-test Analysis of the mean responses of the male and female teachers on the role of the school in the socio-emotional development of primary school children in Obio/Akpor, Rivers State

Paired Samples Test									
	Paired Differences					t _{cal}	t _{tab}	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	96% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1 Males									
Females	.0568	.27824	0.3232	-.01787	.12012	1.344	1.543	103	.152

The t-test result in Table 4 above revealed no significant difference between the mean responses of fathers and mothers at 0.05 level of significance, t-tabulated value of 1.543 > t-calculated value of 1.344 at the same level of significant, thus the hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

The findings on the impacts of the school environment on the socio-emotional development of the primary school children showed that all the items (the school environment creates the atmosphere for child to build network of relationships; children learn to interact from the school environment; the school provides opportunity for team work; through social activities the children to do new things with others, and the school teaches the child how to tolerate others) were accepted by the respondents. These findings are in agreement with earlier research. The importance of today's school is reflected in a sense that the school should be a community of growing up in which students feel successful and satisfied. Klarin (2006) noted that the school needs to be the place where children can show their knowledge, skills and capabilities, non-violently solve conflicts, learn in an interesting and creative way, develop cooperation and more successfully relations with others, to be more tolerant, and to use acquired knowledge and experiences in everyday life. Asher (2006) added that the school offers little children a free opportunity to explore.

More so, the findings on teacher influence on the socio-emotional development of primary school children showed that all items (teacher-pupil relationship can help children with aggressive attitudes; teacher motivation skills can help the child learn to overcome difficult problems; children social arbitration from the teacher; teacher conflict management skills can help the child with managing; interpersonal conflicts; the teacher helps children build social cohesion in the class) were accepted by the respondents. These findings are supported by Fox, Levitt & Nelson (2010) who noted that teachers promote socio-emotional skills in children, motivate students by using language that encourages effort and work, provides positive affirmation, or helps them to compare

a desired future with its present reality, promoting cooperative learning, set positive expectations and improve classroom management. However, Putnam, Sanson & Rothbart (2002) noted that poor teacher behavior such as favouritism, poor conflict management skills can have a negative influence on students' socio-emotional development.

Finally, the findings on how peer-influence affected the socio-emotional development of primary school children revealed that all items (children learn interaction skills from peers; children learn to be independent from their peers in school; plays help children to learn how to manage disagreement; children learn problem-solving skills from their peers; group works enable children learn; the importance of collective work) were accepted. These findings are in agreement with Bukowski and Hoza (2009) who developed a model of the peer relations in school through two basic dimensions of social functioning of persons that are in a way a mirror of children's social competences. When children are among their peers, they have better freedom of expression, and there is increased tendency to learn acceptable modes of interaction, team work and pressure management.

Conclusion

This study has revealed how the school environment, school-peer influence and teacher influence affected the socio-emotional development of primary school children. The social and emotional development of children is significant for their larger functions and relations as they grow up into adults. Hence it is necessary to focus on efforts that promote their social and emotional wellbeing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should be trained and retrained on special skills such as classroom management, interpersonal management and ability to manage difficult situations.
2. Schools should be encouraged to emphasize on the social and emotional wellbeing of the children.
3. The family and school should collaborate to attain desired goals of ensuring effective social and emotional development for primary school children.

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