Theory and Practice in Child Development

https://tpicd.org

E-ISSN: 2791-9943

Volume: 4 Issue: 1 2024

pp. 57-75

A Tale of Two Childhoods: Exploring Holistic Development of Preschoolers in a Rural and Urban Community

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Article Info
Received: March 5, 2024
Accepted: May 30, 2024
Published: June 30, 2024

10.46303/tpicd.2024.4

How to cite
Olalowo, I. E., & Babalola A. E. (2024). A Tale of two childhoods: Exploring holistic development of preschoolers in a rural and urban community. *Theory and Practice in Child Development*, 4(1), 57-75.
https://doi.org/10.46303/tpicd.2024.4

ABSTRACT
Rural-urban disparities are facts that have continually raised significant discrepancies in the discussion of early childhood education, which encompasses all domains of childhood development. Literature abounds, especially on how these disparities have played out in the preschool environmental resources. Still, little is known comparatively about the development of preschoolers in rural and urban educational settings. This study aims to explore the holistic development of preschoolers in Ibadan's Rural and Urban Communities. We anchored the study on ecological systems theory. One research question and hypothesis were raised and tested. A multistage sampling procedure was adopted as a total sample for the study was 33 schools and 132 children in the selected schools. The Multiple Domain Development Observation Scale for Pre-primary Children was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages were used in order to answer the research question, while inferential statistics of the t-test were used to test the hypothesis. Children in rural centers (3.40) have improved physical development when compared to urban children (2.70); there is a significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children's physical development ($t = -2.612$; $df = 130$, $p<0.05$). This study affirmed that the holistic development of pre-primary children generally varies with respect to their developmental domains and school location. It recommended that children across settings should be given equal opportunities to explore their environment for improved holistic development.

KEYWORDS
Development, rural, urban, early childhood education, preschool children

INTRODUCTION

It is crucial to invest time and energy in early childhood. This is so because the early years are periods when children form relationships, experiences, and environments that will impact them throughout their lives. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) recognizes the pre-primary system of education as the educational institution formally mandated with the development of children. The importance of pre-primary education cannot be overemphasized as it enhances independence and helps curb excesses and inappropriateness in the development of children. Pre-primary education is vital to the child, parents, and society because it permits a smooth transition from home to school. It enables the child to feel free to interact with other people outside his immediate family members. Although (Oduolowu, 2011) noted that pre-primary education first featured in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977 and the subsequent editions of 1981, 1994, and 1998, Akintemi (2019) reported that the definition of pre-primary education as given in the 2004 edition of the policy document was as a result of the global recognition of the importance of early learning to the holistic development of children and the declaration that "learning begins at birth" at the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien, Thailand. Primarily, it can, therefore, be posited that pre-primary education in Nigeria aims at fostering holistic development (physical, affective, cognitive) of children right from birth.

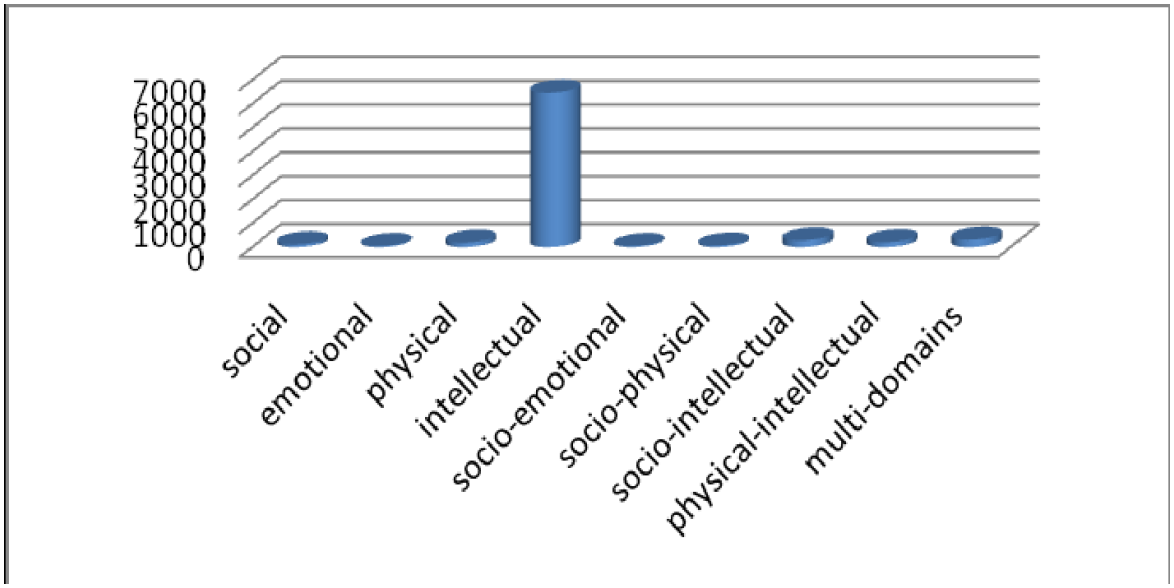
Children require equal educational support, opportunities, and services irrespective of their location to achieve holistic development. Nonetheless, the education system, especially at the pre-primary and primary levels, literally faces the challenge of equity in terms of educational provisions and regulation practices. In the multiplicity of the highlighted dividends of early childhood education programs, there are problems associated with developing the child holistically in the pre-primary class in Nigeria today which stems from the uneven focus being given to the domains of development (say intellectual over social and emotional, or physical over intellectual as the case may be and the reason for this could be orchestrated by any of the school environmental factors (Linda et al., 2002). Evenly and systematically developing each domain of the child is essential to a balanced, holistic development rather than focusing or building on just a single domain. Even though children are brought up in diverse yet specific physical and social environments (Olalowo, 2020), it should be the goal of every childhood stakeholder to have a child that develops in all known developmental domains which in Yoruba society is referred to as *omo to dape* meaning an all-round developed child (Salami, 2019).

Even though findings with children from this region and globally have established that interaction between teachers and the children towards other domains of development provides sufficient stimulation for the children to have high cognitive development (Ikie et al., 2022). Literature inferred that preschool teachers, generally and specifically in Oyo State, have now placed too much emphasis on the intellectual domain in engagement with the children at the expense of other developmental domains (Salami, 2016). This, in turn, could inform a haphazard

development for the child. An empirical report regarding teachers' preparation of lessons with respect to domains of development reveals that the common and most emphasized is an intellectual domain which appeared in 84% of all the behavioral objectives examined. None of the other developmental domains appeared up to 5%.

Figure 1.

A chart of developmental domain emphasized in Preschool Teachers Daily Plan in Oyo State, Nigeria.



Source: Salami, 2016

The National Policy on Education, which serves as the working document for the Nigerian system of education, established the objectives of 1-year pre-primary education, all of which summarily address the holistic development of the child. The operational objectives of pre-primary education, as stated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013), are spelled out to include;

> *effecting a smooth transmission from the home to the school; Preparing the child for the primary level of education; Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work; Inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc; Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; Inculcating social norms; Learn good habits, especially good health habits and Teaching rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, forms etc. through play. (pg.5)*

Some of these outlined objectives could further be categorized under the development domains, for instance:

For Physical Development

- Effecting a smooth transition from home to school
- Providing adequate care, supervision, and security for the children while their parents are at work

For Intellectual Development

- Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music, and the use of toys
- Teach the rudiments of numbers, colors, shapes, forms, etc., through play.
- For Socio-emotional development
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit
- Inculcate social moral norms and values

All these put together, coupled with the fact that the school is a medium through which formal education is being delivered (Kools & Stoll, 2016), puts the school in a position of one of the institutions to be reckoned with in achieving whole-child development. However, if proper attention is channeled towards some factors related to the school, the child's holistic development could be optimally attained during pre-primary education. One of these factors includes the geographical location of the school environment, as it significantly determines the academic achievement of learners, distribution of educational resources, and posting of teachers, as some refuse to go to rural areas (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013; Owoeye & Yara, 2011).

School Location and Holistic Development of Children

School locations have been studied in various ways with respect to school, including in terms of per-pupil expenditures, the qualifications of the workforce, academic achievement, and the characteristics of the pupil body itself in terms of social capital. The location of school for preschool children can make or mar their developmental gains. Also, the location of a school determines the patronage such a school will enjoy to a very large extent (Jimoh & Oduolowu, 2019). This implies that there could be variations in the developmental gains of children owing to the locational factor of rural or urban distinct features. Oyo state is characterized by rural and urban geographical and demographic features that play significant roles in achieving the holistic development of children.

Rural communities, particularly in Oyo State, Nigeria, present a distinct landscape where the challenges of holistic development and educational opportunities for children manifest uniquely compared to their urban counterparts. While vast open spaces define rural areas, they also harbor disparities in access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Understanding these differences is crucial for crafting inclusive policies and interventions tailored to the specific needs of rural communities, particularly concerning the holistic development and educational experiences of children. While urban settings have garnered significant attention in educational research, rural schools have often been overlooked and consequently misrepresented in the broader literature (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Mwaipopo et al. (2021) posited that despite the overwhelming importance of ECCE programs, the provision of good quality and equal ECCE services is still far from reality as such programs are mostly in urban areas. The socio-demographic characteristics of urban areas provide a platform for most private

school owners to establish and invest heavily in early childhood education centers in those areas. The fact that early childhood education is left to private school owners and individual families provides privileges for children from affluent homes to access quality early childhood education, mostly in urban centers when compared to rural schools.

This oversight not only neglects the unique challenges and dynamics present in rural educational settings but also perpetuates misunderstandings about the efficacy and implementation of inclusive practices in these contexts (Burton et al., 2013; McCabe & Ruppar, 2023). Rural-urban disparities are one fact that has continually raised their ugly heads in the discussion of early childhood education. With various interventions targeted towards the school system, it does not appear to command best practices among teachers, nor even make available the best environmental resources to rural areas. In most remote areas, the majority of those working with the child seem to be untrained, most of the identified developmentally appropriate practices are not to the knowledge of those to implement it to talk less of it being adhered to.

In putting thoughts into context for this study, a locational aspect of urban environments in Oyo State, Nigeria, can be conceptualized as an environment with a high population density, a high level of variety and beauty, and a high level of everyday engagement. On the contrary, rural areas are typically inaccessible and have a subsistence lifestyle, which is defined by a routine and burdensome nature and a limited variety of lifestyles. This is potent enough to limit the holistic development of children in rural areas as they need an enabling environment to explore and experiment. The location of pre-primary schools is important for the safe and proper distribution, utilization, and functioning of resources. The school should be located where preschoolers live, either in the village or settlement it serves or close to it. This will make interaction between school personnel, children, and parents easier and provide a greater chance to foster teamwork. Writing on the importance of location, Olalowo and Salami (2021) found that a school's location is one of the most influential factors in educational resource distribution. This tends to determine the level of academic achievement and other developmental domains.

Arnold et al. (2005) affirmed that learners in rural areas have low academic achievement, educational aspirations, and motivations. This was corroborated by the study of Macmillan (2012), which revealed that learners in rural areas do not prioritize academics and, as such, affect their academic achievements. However, Ashley et al. (2022) identified that learners in rural schools performed higher on the percentile ranking scale in the areas of cognitive achievements, such as reading and mathematics, than learners in Urban schools. This corroborates the findings of the 2019 NAEP reading assessment, as learners in rural schools outperformed their urban school counterparts with a mean difference of 180 to 173. This is also applicable to mathematics output, as rural schools had a mean score of 213, while learners in urban schools had 204.

In comparison with urban location, Ogunleye (2002) and Ndukwu (2002) established that urban students academically outperformed their counterparts in rural and semi-urban areas. Meanwhile, Ajayi (2006) established that that there is no significant difference between the academic achievement of pupils in rural areas and urban areas. So also, the North Carolina findings showed a non-significant difference in the cognitive gains of learners across rural and urban schools (United States Department of State Education, 2020). This implies that though there could be variations in the academic achievements of learners over space, the difference is not significant. From the foregoing, there is no consistency in the findings of learners' academic achievements in rural and urban settings. Furthermore, the reviewed studies focused on cognitive achievements at the expense of other domains, such as physical and affective domains. Thus, the current study examined the holistic development of learners in rural and urban settings in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Despite the inconsistency in the school location factors, the disparities in academic achievements of learners across rural and urban settings are attributed to various factors such as shortage of teachers and competent teachers, as many of the competent teachers preferred urban centers, the inadequate and poor state of social and infrastructural facilities, inadequate teaching aids in rural areas among others (Ikechukwu, 2021; Owoeye & Yara, 2011). Johnson and Strange (2005) reported that in terms of financial resources, pre-primary schools in rural communities receive fewer state and local resources in terms of per-pupil expenditures than schools in more wealthy/urban communities. Those in poor communities tend to go to schools with fewer resources, and those in affluent communities tend to go to well-resourced schools (Sawhill, 2006). Hence, it is important to consider the holistic development of children on an even basis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecological System Theory

The ecological systems theory was created by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005) to describe how a child's environment and everything inside of them affects how they develop. According to him, the theory contends that a child's development is influenced by a variety of environmental systems as well as by the interactions between those systems. According to how he saw things, the interaction between the environment and the child and the child's influence on the environment is reciprocal (Krishnan, 2010). According to this idea, the child develops within a complex system of relationships that are influenced by various levels of the external environment (Berk, 2008). These systems include the micro-system, which includes the child's interaction and activities in his/her immediate environment. At this level Child's interaction is influenced by adults, parents, and other members of the community. The meso-system is the second level, which comprises connections between Microsystems such as home, school, community, and child-care centers. Hence, a child's academic achievement is premised on activities that take place in the learning environment as well involvement of parents in school

activities. Other systems include the exo-system, macro-system, and ever-changing system (Berk, 2008)

This theory is considered appropriate to this study in the sense that the type of environment a child is exposed to will influence the kind of developmental interactions that occur there as well as the exposures the child could attain, which will go a long way in determining what makes up the holistic development of the child. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the level of holistic development of Ibadan preschool children in rural and urban communities as well as establish the difference in development across domains.

Research Question

The following questions were answered in this study

What is the level of pre-primary school children's development as observed in rural and urban settings of Ibadan in terms of

a. Physical domain;
b. Intellectual domain, and
c. Socio-emotional domain?

Hypothesis

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children in their:

a. physical development
b. Intellectual development and
c. Socio-emotional development.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study was part of a larger program of mixed-methods research designed and conducted from 2019-2021, comprising different clusters of population, including special needs and regular preschoolers. This study presents the aspect of the study situated within a descriptive survey research design that focuses on regular children. This design aims at providing a description of a phenomenon without manipulation and controlling variables (Salami & Isah, 2017).

Sampling

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted so that an accurate sample would be arrived at for the study. A multistage sampling procedure entails the use of two or more stages of sample selection (Taherdoost, 2016). Hence, the large population size of this study necessitates this procedure to provide access to target participants. Furthermore, a stratified sampling technique was used to divide 11 local governments in Ibadan land into two, which will cover the urban settlements (five Local Government Areas) and rural settlements (six Local Government Areas). Following approval from the ethical review board of the institution as of the time of gathering this data, a simple random sampling technique was used to select one local government from

the two clusters to serve as the rural and urban locations, respectively, through balloting. A proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select a total of 20% each out of the public pre-primary schools from the selected Local Government Areas. A random sampling technique was used to select four preschool children in the pre-primary class from each of the schools selected. At the end of the selection, the total sample for the study was 33 schools and 132 preschool children. Informed consent was obtained from parents of identified children and teachers in the selected schools before administering the instrument and observation process.

Instrumentation

The 5-point rating scale of the Multiple Domain Development Observation Scale for Preschool Children (MUDDOSPC) served as the research instrument developed, validated, and used for data collection in this study. This instrument, adapted from the Ounce Scale (Gloria, 2014) and the High/Scope Child Observation Record (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2003), was modified to suit the Nigerian context and focus exclusively on pre-primary children. The original standardized scales, designed for children in other countries and covering development from infancy to preschool, required adjustments to be relevant and effective for evaluating Nigerian pre-primary students, excluding the infancy and toddler stages. It has two sections; the first section deals with demographic information while the second section focuses on domains of development, which includes ten items on physical development, intellectual development, and social and emotional development, respectively, making a total of thirty items for the section. Face, content and construct validity were done with the help of preschool teachers, and consultation with relevant literature. Split-half technique was used to check for the reliability coefficient which yielded the result of 0.89.

Data Collection

The data collection involved two observation phases conducted by researchers and 33 trained research assistants from a university early childhood education program. In the first phase, each research assistant was randomly assigned to a school to work with preschool teachers, observing selected children from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm over four days (excluding Fridays). For the second phase, research assistants were reshuffled to different schools to ensure diverse observations. Both phases followed the same observation procedure. Identifying information was excluded from the instruments, and data were securely stored for researcher access only.

Data analysis

International Business Machines (IBM) SPSS statistics version 29.0. was used for descriptive and inferential statistics of collected data. The descriptive statistical analysis involves frequencies, simple percentages, means and standard deviations. The descriptive statistics provided an opportunity to describe the data in a meaningful way and report them as they are for easy interpretation rather than drawing inferences. Adeleke (2017) conceptualized descriptive statistics as a procedure to organize, summarize, and describe quantitative data. Moreover, the inferential statistical tool of t-test was imminent in this study to be able to draw conclusions

from sample size to the entire population and this was achieved through testing of stated hypotheses

RESULTS

The results derived from the descriptive analysis of the data gathered for this study are presented in the tables below.

Analysis of Demographic Information of Pre-primary Children

Table 1.

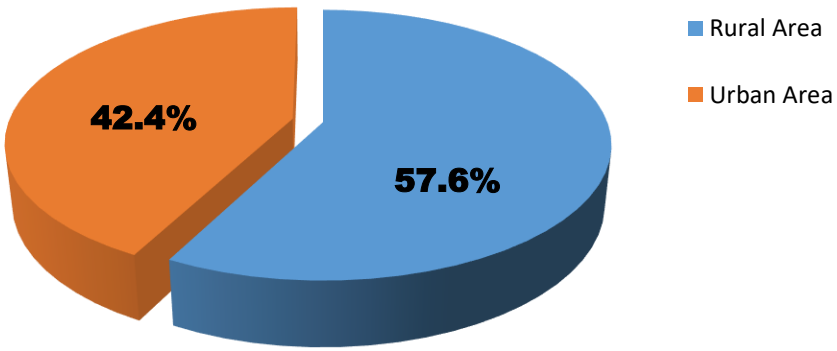
Location Distribution of Pre-primary School Children

Location	Frequency	%
Rural	76	57.6
Urban	56	42.4
Total	132	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of pre-primary children based on the location of their school as follows: pre-primary children in the sampled rural area of the study were 76 (57.6%), while those in the urban area accounted for 56 (42.4%). The distribution reflects clearly that the sample represents a seemingly even quota of the location variable considered in this study. This distribution is depicted in the pie chart of Figure 2 below.

Figure 2.

Location Distribution of Pre-primary School Children



Answering Research Question (RQ)

Each of the research questions and hypotheses was answered first by presenting an interpretation explaining the statistical mean of each sub-scale item across the different domains of development observed in children. This was followed by a table that provides information on the mean of observations recorded by research assistants and reconciled by the authors in the analysis process.

RQ: What is the state of holistic development of pre-primary school children observed in rural and urban settings of Ibadan?

Table 2 below presents the result from observing the preschool children's physical development, and it shows that pre-primary school children in Ibadan rural and urban communities were on average in the development of their physical domain with a weighted average of 3.40. The response further shows the traits of physical development where the children had an average development thus, Child's ability to catch an object (mean = 3.78; 3.10), Child's ability to engage in steady movement as well as their ability to hop, skip or twirl around without falling (mean =3.68; 3.07), Child's ability to participate in different play activities (mean=3.56; 2.58), Child's ability to throw and kick an object successfully (mean = 3.47; 2.17), Child's ability to coordinate both hands to manipulate an object (mean = 3.39; 2.42), Child's ability to pound with, shake, twist or swing an arm or leg (mean = 3.27; 2.69), Child's ability to run, gallop, march or jump easily (mean = 3.21; 2.53), Child's ability to use a marker, crayon, pencil, chalk, paint conveniently (mean = 3.01; 2.92) and Child's ability to draw or paints neatly (mean = 3.00; 3.19). The physical development traits observed in the rural children show that the children were averagely developed in all indicators.

Table 2.

Mean Distribution Showing the State of Physical Development of Pre-Primary School Children in Rural and Urban Areas of Ibadan

		Rural		**Urban**	
S/N	**ITEMS**	**MEAN**	**St.D**	**MEAN**	**Std.D**
1	Child's ability to catch an object	**3.78**	.71	**3.10**	1.42
2	Child's ability to coordinate both hands to manipulate an object	**3.39**	1.13	**2.42**	1.47
3	Child's ability to hop, Skip or twirls around without falling	**2.88**	1.38	**2.35**	1.44
4	Child's ability to run, gallop, march or jump easily	**3.21**	1.18	**2.53**	1.40
5	Child's ability to pound with, shake, twist or swing an arm or leg	**3.27**	1.20	**2.69**	1.33
6	Child's ability to throw and kick an object successfully	**3.47**	.99	**2.17**	1.22
7	Child's ability to engage in steady movement	**3.68**	.81	**3.07**	1.10
8	Child's ability to use a marker, crayon, pencil, chalk, paint conveniently	**3.01**	1.13	**2.92**	1.20
9	Child's ability to participate in different play activities	**3.56**	.92	**2.58**	1.00
10	Child's ability to draw or paints neatly	**3.00**	1.28	**3.19**	1.32
	Weighted Average –Rural (3.40) Urban (W.A= 2.70)				

Furthermore, Table 3 below presents the result from observing the preschool children's intellectual development, and it shows that pre-primary school children in Ibadan rural communities were averagely developed in their intellectual domain with a weighted average of 2.60 and 3.57, respectively. The response further shows the traits of intellectual development where the children had an average development; thus, Child's ability to name natural objects (mean = 3.01; 3.71), ability to create objects freely (mean =2.97; 3.96), child's ability to move or places an object as requested (mean=2.94; 3.19), Child's ability to characterize objects as living and non-living (mean = 2.85; 2.44). Also, those traits in which children developed below average include the child's ability to contribute to an ongoing conversation (mean = 2.47; 3.67), ability to tell or make up a story from pictures (mean = 2.44; 3.85), ability to arrange few or more collections in a repeated series (mean = 2.35; 3.33), ability to use a conventional measuring tool and states result (mean = 2.25; 3.85) while it was discovered from the result that children in the rural community did not develop in their ability to use a sentence of five words and beyond (mean = 1.69; 3.96).

Table 3.

Mean Distribution Showing the State of Intellectual Development of Pre-Primary School Children in Rural and Urban Area of Ibadan

S/N	ITEMS	Rural MEAN	St.D	Urban MEAN	St.D
1	Child's ability to contribute to an on-going conversation	**2.47**	1.18	**3.67**	.69
2	Child's ability to creates objects freely	**2.97**	1.13	**3.96**	.26
3	Child's ability to arrange few or more collections in a repeated series	**2.35**	1.17	**3.33**	1.03
4	Child's ability to use a conventional measuring tool and states result	**2.25**	1.25	**3.85**	.40
5	Child's ability to move or places an object as requested	**2.94**	1.06	**3.19**	1.13
6	Child's ability to use a sentence of five words and beyond	**1.69**	.96	**3.96**	.26
7	Child's ability to number the parts or features of an object	**2.98**	1.18	**3.78**	.80
8	Child's ability to tell or makes up a story from pictures	**2.44**	1.46	**3.85**	.55
9	Child's ability to names natural objects	**3.01**	1.22	**3.71**	.56
10	Child's ability to characterise objects as living and non-living	**2.85**	1.35	**2.44**	.89
	Weighted Average- Rural (2.60), Urban (3.57)				

Lastly, Table 4 revealed the state of socio-emotional development of pre-primary children in Ibadan rural and urban communities with weighted averages of 2.44 and 2.27, respectively. The result showed that the children developed but were below average in the following traits: Child's ability to express feelings calmly (mean =2.94; 2.64), Child's ability to initiate interaction with peers (mean = 2.69; 3.03), Child's ability to represent an emotion with pretense play (2.64; 2.05)Child's ability to involve in activities with other children (mean = 2.60; 3.01), Child's ability to participate in a conversation initiated by peers (mean = 2.56; 2.26), Child's ability to sit in isolation in class (mean = 2.36; 1.66), Child's ability to initiates interaction with teacher (mean = 2.35; 1.87), while Child's ability to play alone (mean = 2.28), Child's ability to yell on another child during conflict (mean = 2.15; 2.21), Child's ability to cries at unattended requests (1.82; 1.66) are negative statements

Table 4.

Mean Distribution Showing the State of Socio-Emotional Development of Pre-Primary School Children in Ibadan Rural and Urban Areas

S/N	ITEMS	Rural Mean	Std.D	Urban Mean	Std.D
1	Child's ability to express feelings calmly	**2.94**	1.10	**2.64**	.88
2	Child's ability to involve in activities with other children	**2.60**	1.28	**3.01**	1.18
3	Child's ability initiate interaction with peers	**2.69**	1.41	**3.03**	1.14
4	Child's ability to play alone	**2.28**	1.15	**2.39**	1.24
5	Child's ability to yell on another child during conflict	**2.15**	1.09	**2.21**	1.07
6	Child's ability to represent an emotion with pretence play	**2.64**	1.27	**2.05**	1.06
7	Child's ability to initiates interaction with teacher	**2.35**	1.37	**1.87**	1.07
8	Child's ability to participate in conversation initiated by peers	**2.56**	1.34	**2.26**	1.25
9	Child's ability to sit in isolation in class	**2.36**	1.34	**1.66**	.95
10	Child's ability to cries at unattended requests	**1.82**	.98	**1.66**	.83
	W.A. – Rural (2.44), Urban (2.27)				

Testing the Null Hypothesis

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children in their:

a. physical development
b. socio-emotional development, and
c. Intellectual development.

The table below presents finding from the test of hypothesis to determine the (if there is) the significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children's holistic development across the three domains observed in this study.

Table 5.

Summary of t-test Analysis Showing the Significant Difference between Rural and Urban Pre-Primary School Children in their Physical Development

Variable		N	Mean	Std.D	T	df	Sig.	Remark
a. Physical Development								
Rural schools	Pre-primary	76	33.2895	6.5070	-2.612	130	0.001	Significant
Urban schools	Pre-primary	56	27.0213	3.5849				
b. Intellectual Development								
Rural schools	Pre-primary	76	26.0000	6.3895				
					-0.806	130	0.067	Not
Urban schools	Pre-primary	56	25.0893	9.1299				Significant
c. Socio-emotional Development								
Rural schools	Pre-primary	76	24.3905	5.3227				
Urban schools	Pre-primary	56	22.8714	7.1299	-0.913	130	0.363	Not Significant

Table 5(a) shows that there is a significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children's physical development ($t = -2.612$; $df = 130$, $p<0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis 1a is rejected.

Table 5(b) shows that there is no significant difference between rural and urban pre-primary school children's intellectual development ($t = -.806$; $df = 130$, $p>0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis 1b is accepted.

Table 5(c) shows that there is no significant difference in the social and emotional development of rural and urban pre-primary school children ($t = -.0.913$; $df = 130$, $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1c is not rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although both settings had relatively average mean in terms of physical domain development, the inferential statistics gave a clearer indication that there was a significant difference in the physical domain development of pre-primary children in Ibadan rural communities when compared to that of their counterparts in urban communities. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact that children in rural communities are often exposed to fun-rigor activities,

and some social skills are often injected into them early in life. This may not be so with children in urban communities as we still see and hear of practices of the child being brought up under modern-day conditioning, such as disallowing the child from engaging in moderately challenging activities and play, taking up every activity the child for the child among others, all of which Salami (2017) referred to as child over pampering while presenting the fun-rigor theory of child development.

Moving on to the intellectual development of the children, pre-primary children in Ibadan rural communities were averagely developed in their intellectual development domain compared to their counterparts in the urban community, who were found to be developing above average in their intellectual domain of development. This finding should not be chucked because it could be a result of the fact that some parents, most especially in the urban communities, still have the notion that the only time their children are seen as doing good is when the teachers or caregivers still issue them results of their children performance indicating subjects where such child had high scores. This finding aligns with Ogunleye (2002) and Ndukwu (2002)'s study which established that urban students academically outperformed their counterparts in rural and semi-urban areas. Moreover, Arnold et al. (2005) study revealed that learners in rural areas have low academic achievement, educational aspirations, and motivations when compared to their urban counterparts. Macmillan's (2012) study corroborated previous findings by revealing that learners in rural areas do not prioritize academics and, as such, affect their academic achievements. However, Ashley et al. (2022) identified that learners in rural schools performed higher on the percentile ranking scale in the areas of cognitive achievements, such as reading and mathematics, than learners in Urban schools. This corroborates the findings of the 2019 NAEP reading assessment, as learners in rural schools outperformed their urban school counterparts with a mean difference of 180 to 173. This is also applicable to mathematics output, as rural schools had a mean score of 213 while learners in urban schools had 204.

It is expedient to note that the average intellectual development of children in rural communities may be attributed to the issues of insufficient resources and/or matters of teachers not showing full concern for their profession identified in this study. This aligns with the findings of Isola et al. (2022) that a larger percentage of human resources, non-projected materials, and audio-visual materials are not available as the available printed materials are spoilt. This corroborated the position of Mwaipopo et al. (2021) that overconcentration of ECCE centers in urban centers, inadequate funding, limited educational resources, infrastructural deficit, high staff turnover, nutritional challenges, language barriers, among others, are prevailing problems affecting early childhood education in Africa. The consequences of these problems are manifestations of poor development of some or all domains of children in their early years. This presents future challenges for other stages of human development.

The adjourned threat hidden in this study's finding is the fact that should we continue to have children who are not at least averagely developed at the preschool level irrespective of

their location, there may be no alternative later in other developmental phases of life than to keep embarking on rehabilitative measures for such children forcefully. This is in line with the assertions of earlier studies (Wadende et al., 2016; Salami, 2017; Greensprings School, 2023) that exposing children early enough to activities that promote physical development, economic and social skills early in life if delayed to later age, may make the process become by force. The skills will not be acquired as expected.

This study examined the state of holistic development of pre-primary school children in Ibadan, Nigeria, with emphasis on locational differences. Because of the debates and efforts of early childhood education practitioners and experts regarding child holistic development and individual personality, this study was regarded as essential in a domesticated approach. It must not be addressed casually as it considers the child to be the future of all present undertakings. It was affirmed in this study that the holistic development of pre-primary children generally varies with respect to the different developmental domains and school locations of the children. For instance, the development of the physical domain of pre-primary children in rural communities was, on average, more developing than that of urban pre-primary children, the reverse was the case with regards to the intellectual domain development of the children while children from the two locations had a not-so-good developmental scaling in their socio-emotional development. This study concludes with the worry that most urban pre-primary schools may end up raising individuals who are bookworms in society but lack what it takes to be a living member of such a society. This study also presents a need for action to be taken by curriculum planners such that it takes into consideration the effective implementation of the one-year pre-primary curriculum such that it can prepare children in a holistic manner. This will bring about a paradigm shift in caregivers and parents looking after their children developing their intellectual domain alone but also emphasizing other domains such as physical and socio-emotional development. This also extends to instilling in the child the art and act of relating with other children by preparing a classroom condition that is play-dominated and interactive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we put forward the following recommendations:

- Children across centers should be given equal opportunities to explore the environment for improved holistic development. Learning environment should be spacious enough for fine and gross motor, intellectual and other social activities.
- Teaching and learning should be contextualized for learners in rural areas for improved language development in the area sentence construction. This can include the use of readily available social tools such as language of immediate environment and artefacts to enhance language development.
- The contemporary socio-economic problems are affecting parent-child relationships and this is consequent on dismal socio-emotional development of children in rural and urban centres. Hence, parents should see the need for proper upbringing as a necessity and not an option.

- Learning environment should be structured to accommodate small group and large group social activities with the involvement of teachers. This will also foster good teacher-pupil relationships.
- School owners, heads of schools, teachers and other relevant stakeholders should be sensitized and encouraged to prioritize holistic development of children rather than contemporary practice of emphasizing intellectual development of children at the expense of other domains of development.

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