

Organisation of Classroom Space for Pre-Primary School in Delta State

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Abstract: *Classroom space is one of the places in a school environment. It is a learning environment. Effective teaching and learning is contingent upon the availability of supportive physical classroom space environment. This study focuses on organising classroom space for pre-primary school children. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Four research questions were posed to guide the study. 155 pre-primary school teachers/parents were randomly sample from Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State for the study. A 34 item questionnaire titled Organising classroom Space for pre-primary School Children (OCSSCO) was constructed by the researcher, validated and used in eliciting responses from the respondents. The data was analysed using mean and standard deviations. The study revealed that classroom spaces and school compound were very inadequate in pre-primary schools in Uvwie Local Government area. Thus, Provision of more classroom spaces, large school compound, and physical facilities were highly recommended.*

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Pre-Primary Education, Intellectual, Emotional

Introduction

Pre-primary Education, also known as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), is an important exposure for every child. It is widely regarded as a stepping stone to the primary level of education. Paris (2002) conceptualized has the initial stage of organised instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment, that is, to provide a bridge between home and a school-based atmosphere. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education WRN, 2004) conceptualises it as education given to children in an educational institution prior to their entering primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. Morrison (2007) and Esa (2011) describe it as care and education given to children from birth to eight years. Early childhood care and education is designed to nurture children in all round development: intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and nutrition, it is the building block of a child's primary education. It provides opportunity for laying a good foundation for all-round development of a child. It enables a child develop his/her talents and creativity, thereby developing his/her personality in a natural way. Pre-primary education helps a child lo grow into a healthy, socially well-adjusted individual, Schweinhart (1992) states that preprimary education is one of the environmental influences that generally interact with the developing abilities and dispositions of young children to form all aspects of their potentialities: social, emotional, affective, moral, physical, intellectual, creative and aesthetic, among others. Based on the crucial significance of ECCE, FRN (2004) prescribed the principal objectives of this level of education to include: effect a smooth transition from home to school; prepare the child for primary level of education; provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc); inculcate social norms, learn good habits, among other.

Pre-primary education operates in diverse settings such as in old and new premises, family homes, converted (ware-house) buildings or spaces and the like. Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2007) states that a place that is acceptable to the community such as homes, community buildings such as civic centres, churches, mosques and existing schools or a purpose built structure, among others could be use for operating pre-primary education. It is essential to note that the way the environment is set out and maintained can present both challenges and opportunities to children. Wardle (2013) states that an early childhood environment is many things. According to the author, it is a safe place where children are protected from the elements and are easily supervised. It provides the environment where important activities of the clay take place such as playing, eating, sleeping, washing hands and going to the bathroom. Children learn from everything that happens to them, the classroom inclusive. Similarly, Dean (2003) affirms that a pleasant classroom environment is likely to contribute to the formulation of good attitudes. Also, Isbell (2011) notes that the environment in which young children live tells them how to act and respond. The author avers that a large open space in the centre of the classroom clearly invites young children to run across the area. The author further states that if few materials are available for use, children will create interesting happenings, including conflict. This implies that a pleasant or conducive classroom environment is essential for pre-primary school children.

Sequel to the above, the purpose of pre-primary education can only be achieved by ensuring that the classroom space be organised appropriately. Classroom space is an environment within a confined classroom area designed for the primary purpose of teaching

and learning via the interaction between teachers and learners (pupils). It is a physical space for learning. Wilson (1996) affirms that learning environment is a place where learning is fostered and supported. The use of physical space is important in a total learning environment and it varies depending on context. Stokols and Altman, cited in Snow (2002), describe three reasons to be concerned with the physical environment of the classroom. These include time and energy conservation, programme “authority” and school sameness. The qualities and use of instructional can reflect the value placed on particular learning activity. The authors further describe the contribution of certain milieu qualities to the learning activity: the placement of chairs in inward-facing circles, instead of in row and column positions, shows that discussion is to involve attention to one another’s persons as well as to their verbal statements. Provision of a reading niche instead of books at student’s desks shows that reading is a valued activity and that it must be attractive or pleasurable. Optimum provisions of place and things can suggest programme behavior and programme benefits. Grchrkc, cited in Snow (2002), states that organization of space send signal to children about how teachers view learning. The day-to-day sameness of milieu condition in the classrooms is well known. The possibility exists that change, for its own sake can be a stimulating experience. For example, new seating arrangements, introduction of individualised learning stations, and changed learning centres can freshen experience and energize behaviour. The capacity of novelty to alert and to arouse curiosity in children is well-established (Stokols and Altman cited in Snow, 2002).

Currently, young children are spending a large number of hours in ‘new’ environment - child care centres. Isbell (2011) observes that some children who begin to attend child care in infancy may spend as much as 12,000 hours in this setting. The massive number of hours in one environment demands that the space be carefully designed to create the “best” place possible for young children. Pre-primary school children are active learners. If the procedures for using the classroom spaces are not clearly stated and easily understood, the children will wander in and out of the classrooms with little participation in the activities on board. The author further affirms that an effectively designed classroom has the potential for positively influencing all areas of children’s development: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. In the same line of thought, Mayesty (2009) states that a positive physical space classroom, environment is one of the keys to the success of the creative activities that take place within it. The author avers that it has an effect on the safety and success of creative activities for which it is used. This appears to be true of pre-primary school classrooms.

Organising classroom space for pre-primary school children is essential for effective service delivery. Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren (2011) state that organisation of physical space (classroom’) is an effective predictor of quality pre-primary school because it affects what children can do, determines the ease with which they carry out their plans and affect the ways in which they use materials.

Montessori, in Wardle (2013), affirms that pre-primary school children require classroom with low shelves, four basic learning areas, and places for children to work and learn independently. The author is an advocate of prepared environment. Children need private space where they can work alone as individuals fully in charge of their own thoughts and feelings. A study corner with child-size, local a leather pews or mat with piles of pillows can serve this need. A small-group space is necessary too for two to six children. This scenario appears to encourage quiet interaction with one another. It helps children develop cooperative and helping behaviours when they are in close personal space of about two feet, especially when the assignment presented to the group is not competitive. When spaces are designed for small groups rather than only for individuals or large groups, behaviours such as wandering, running, fighting over materials, and repeating the same activity many limes can be minimised (kostelink, Whiren, Soderman & Gregory, 2009).

Classroom space for a large group can be constructed where many children listen to stories, sing, engage in games or other movement activities and share whole-group instruction. In a classroom with spaces appropriately designed, children get pleasure from what is around them. The working environment - the classroom is functional if properly organised. Dean (2003) affirms that functional classroom contributes to the formation of good working habits. The author avers that practical area needs to have tools and materials laid out, each in its marked place with clear rules about how things are to be used and returned.

Organising classroom spaces makes it easier to be maintained. There are good arrangements for retrieving things and returning them. There is a definite place for everything and things and places are appropriately labelled for easy and smooth movement in the classroom. Such a classroom stimulates children because some materials designed to capture children’s thinking and make them ask questions and sometimes get them working displayed for them. The way the classroom is organised and materials or resources made available affect the way children learn. Hence, it is essential to plan for effective use of the classroom space. Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whirem (2011) state that early childhood professionals are responsible for planning the effective use of classroom space. Also, according to national accreditation standards and many state licensing standards, indoor floor spaces should be at 35 square feet per child not counting closets, hallways and immovable storage units. On the outdoor space should be two to three times this number 75 to 105 square feet per child (NAEYC Early childhood programme standards and accreditation 2005).

A pre-primary school classroom environment support development of children. It influences or determines the way children relate with one another. Essa (2011) posits that positive interaction is promoted when children are not crowded in classrooms. The author avers that classroom arrangement foster cognitive development. Children's sense of independence is enhanced when classroom spaces are properly arranged so that they can move about freely. Shepherd & Eaton, cited in Essa (2011), maintain that children are more productively involved in activities when the purposes of classroom space are clearly defined and when materials are developmentally appropriate. Children are also more likely to follow classroom rules when the environment reinforces these. Similarly, the author posits that environment also enhances children's self-esteem when it is designed with their needs and development in mind, when it provides space for personal belongings and when it promotes competence by allowing children to function independently.

Organizing classroom space appears to face the challenges of inadequate space in the school compound, inadequate number of school buildings, insufficient funds by proprietors to provide enough school buildings and classroom space, insufficient government grants in funding pre-primary schools in existing primary schools, ignorance on the value on providing enough school buildings and classroom space for pre-primary school children, among others. These are constraints to organising classroom space for effective teaching and learning in pre-primary schools. In the same vein, Snow (2002) affirms that the amount or arrangement of space was inadequate for the teachers' needs, particularly in the area of child mobility and storage. The author further states that newer facilities and smaller class sizes contributed to teachers' senses of well-being and effectiveness while poor maintenance and overcrowding were associated with feelings of frustration.

Also, the children in older poorly maintained buildings seemed to be more destructive and less appreciative of their facility than children in newer schools. In the same vein, the researcher noted that in the primary schools visited, the ECCE classrooms were grossly inadequate. Children were packed like sardine in chairs and classrooms. People feel that the moment chairs and any type of accommodation provided; the pre-primary school can takeoff, whether the chairs and classroom 'warehouse' are adequate and appropriate to the age and level of children. This is nobody's business. It does not matter. But it matters. This is in line with Obiweluzo's (2009) submission that some primary schools do not have enough buildings for accommodation. The author avers that some of the classes stay under trees, some others in church halls. Also, some of the schools have just one building that houses the entire pupils and teachers in their classes as well as head teachers' offices. In the same line of thought, Phyfe-Perkins, cited in Essa (2011), concludes that crowding of children which provides less than 25 square feet per child for an extended period of time should be avoided. The author states that it may increase aggressive behaviour and inhibit social interaction and involvement. This condition endangers learning. One wonders how children study in such unsupportive environment. What will be the fate of those children if there is no intervention? It is against this background that the researcher is compelled to look at the organisation of classroom space for pre-primary school children.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to look at the organisation of classroom space for pre-primary school children. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the adequacy of the physical classroom space for pre-primary school children.
2. Identify guidelines for organising classroom space for pre-primary school children.
3. Identify the constraints to providing adequate classroom space for pre-primary school children
4. Identify the strategies for enhancing promotion of classroom space for pre-primary school children.

The following research questions are generated to guide the study.

1. To what extent is the physical classroom space adequate for pre-primary school children?
2. What are the guidelines for organizing classroom space for pre-primary school children?
3. What are the constraints to providing adequate classroom space for pre-primary school children?
4. What are the strategies for enhancing promotion of classroom space for pre-primary school children?

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It is a survey that looks at the organisation of classroom space as a medium for promoting best practices in pre-primary education. The study was carried out in Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State. The sample for this study was made up of one hundred and fifty three (153) pre-primary school teachers/parents. A thirty-four (34) item researcher structured questionnaire titled "Organising Classroom Space for Pre-primary school children (OCSSC) was used to generate information from teachers/parents. The item statements were arranged in four clusters in line with the research questions. The first cluster sought information on the adequacy of classroom space for pre-primary school children while the second cluster elicited information on some guidelines to consider when organising appropriate classroom space for pre-primary school children. The third cluster sought information on the constraints in classroom space for pre-primary school children while the fourth cluster sought information on the strategies for enhancing the provision of classroom space for pre-primary school children. The instrument had a four point response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with corresponding numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1. The instrument was face validated by three experts, and suggestions made by them were carefully effected in the final draft of the questionnaire. The instrument was trial tested and results analysed using Cronbach alpha and internal coefficient consistency obtained were 0.85, 0.69, 0.75 and 0.60 respectively. The grand mean is 0.76. the data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations. The decision was based on a mean score of 2.50 and above for acceptance.

Result

The results of the study are presented in line with the research questions as shown in tables 1-4.

Research question one

To what extent is the physical classroom space environment adequate for pre-primary school children?

Table 1

Mean rating and standard deviation of teachers/parents' responses on the adequacy of physical classroom space for pre-primary school children.

S/N	Item Statement	X	D	Decision
1.	Sufficient space in every classroom	3.15	0.83	A
2.	Classrooms well partitioned	3.11	0.88	A
3	Floor are smooth and comfortable for children to sit on	2.74	1.09	A
4	Classrooms have light and are properly ventilated	2.90	1.09	A
5	There is easy - to - reach storage space for equipment that is in daily use	2.80	1.01	A
6	Classrooms are attractive and aesthetically pleasing	2.91	1.05	A
7	"Soft" places in the environment where children can snuggle and find comfort	2.77	1.01	A
8	Paths to each area are clear and unobstructed.	2.74	1.02	A
9	Classrooms have places -for children to be alone if they so wish	2.26	1.10	D
10	There is a convenient place for children to keep personal belongings.	2.81	1.06	A
11	Adult areas are separated from children areas.	3.01	1.06	A
12	The environment is filled with words, books, and symbols.	3.09	1.01	A
13	Furnishing are child-size, clean, and comfortable.	2.91	0.95	A
14	Children move from one part of the room to another without interfering	2.39	1.07	D

Key *A = Agree, D = Disagree

The result on table I indicates that teachers/parents sampled agreed with twelve out of the fourteen items that there is inadequate physical classroom space for pre-primary school children. Since 7 math they have mean ratings of 2.50 and above, it means that the score is significant for the argument that and physical classroom space is inadequate for pre-primary school children. The

teachers/parents did not agree with items 9 and 14 as indicated in their mean scores which are deviations range from 0.83 to 1.10. This indicates that the respondents were not far from one another in their opinions.

Research Question Two

What are the guidelines for organizing classroom space environment for Pre-primary school children?

Table 2

Mean rating and standard deviation of teachers/parents' responses on the guidelines for organizing classroom space for pre-primary school children.

S/N	Item Statement	X	D	Decision
15	The room arrangement should reflect child-centered classroom	3.43	0.77	D
16	Children's ages and developmental levels should be considered	3.49	0.71	D
17	The classroom should be attractive and aesthetically pleasing.	3.40	0.78	D
18	Materials should be stored at a level where children can easily reach, and return them.	3.44	0.80	D
19	Toilet facilities should be accessible to children.	3.37	0.77	D
20	There should be individual places for the children's belongings.	2.96	1.05	D
21	There should be places for children to be alone if they so wish; that is quiet, private spaces.	2.43	1.04	D
22.	Paths to each area of the classroom should be clear and unobstructed.	3.49	0.67	A
	Sonic areas require more space than others.	2.94	0.92	A
24	The classroom environment should be safe in all ramifications.	3.58	0.67	A

Key *A = Agree, D = Disagree

The data on table 2 above showed that nine out of ten items were perceived as guidelines for organising classroom space for pre-primary school children. Since they have mean scores which were above 2.50 points. However, the respondents did not agree with item 21 as one of the guidelines as indicated in its mean score which was below 2.50. The standard deviation of the scores generated in all items is small, indicating that the variations of the scores from the mean are not so much.

Research Question Three

What are the constraints to providing adequate classroom space environment for Pro-primary school children?

Table 3

Mean rating scores and standard deviation of teachers and parents' responses on the constraints in providing adequate classroom space for pre-primary school children.

S/N	Item Statement	X	D	Decision
25	Inadequate number of school buildings	3.01	1.00	A
26	Inadequate space in the school compound	3.03	0.95	A
27	Inadequate funds by proprietors to provide enough school buildings	3.14	0.92	A
28	Insufficient government grants in funding pre-primary school in existing primary schools.	3.01	0.91	A

29	Ignorance on the part of those concerned on the value of providing enough school buildings and classroom space for pre-primary school children.	2.94	0.99	A
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Key *A = Agree

The data on table 3 above showed that the 5 items were perceived as constraints to providing adequate classroom space for pre-primary school children since they have mean scores which were above 2.50. The standard deviation of the scores generated in all the items are small indicating that the variations of the scores from the mean are not so much.

Research Question Four

What are the strategies for enhancing provision of classroom space environment for Pre-primary school children?

Table 4

Mean scores and standard deviation of teachers/parents on the strategies for enhancing the provision of classroom space for pre-primary school children

S/N	Item Statement	X	D	Decision
30	Adequate number of school buildings should be provided to accommodate enough classroom space.	3.64	0.64	A
31	Proprietors should generate adequate fund before establishing a pre— primary school	3.43	0.83	A
32	Adequate space should be provided to accommodate more number of classroom space.	3.52	0.58	A
33	Sufficient government grants should be provided for funding pre-primary school to enable provision of more classroom space.	3.41	0.77	A
34	People concerned with education of children should be the prime importance of providing adequate classroom Space for pre-primary school children.	3.53	0.77	A

Key *A = Agree

The result on Table 4 above indicates the five strategies that were attested to by teachers/parents as effective measures for enhancing provision of classroom space for pre-primary school children. This is evident in the mean scores which were above 2.50. The standard deviations generated from the mean scores on the items are small. This indicates that the score of the respondents are not very far from the mean and from one another’s responses.

Discussion

The results indicate that teachers/parents perceived twelve out of fourteen item statements as inadequate physical space for pre-primary school children. This finding is in consonance with the views of Snow (2002), Obiweluzo (2009) and Phyfe-Perkins cited in Essa (2011) that there is inadequate physical space for pre-primary school children. The authors maintain that the amount or arrangement of space was inadequate for the teachers’ need, particularly in the areas of pupils’ mobility and storage. Poor maintenance and overcrowding were associated with feelings of frustration. On the contrary, the teachers/parents did not perceive two item statements as being inadequate. This may be affected by culture-fair. The respondents appear complacent about the classroom space. They are people who feel that any type of accommodation provided for pre-primary school children is adequate.

Based on item enumerated in research question 2 as guidelines for organizing classroom space environment for pre-primary school children such as the room arrangement should reflect child- centred classroom, the classroom should be attractive and aesthetically

pleasing, there should be individual places for children's belongings, among others. This position corroborate the views of Snow (2002), Dean (2003), Mayesky (2009) and Essa (2011) that guidelines should be observed accordingly in organising classroom space for pre-primary school children. The authors affirm that it enhances instruction and pupils' achievement in their studies. It helps in providing classroom space that will support instruction activities and adequate accommodation for children's mobility. However, the teachers/parents did not perceive that there should be places for children to be alone if they so wish, that is quiet, private spaces. This could be influenced by their individual differences as some feel it does not matter.

An overview of the items enumerated in research question 3 as constraints to providing adequate space for pre-primary school children such as inadequate space in the school compound. Inadequate number of school buildings, among others. This finding is in consonance with the positions of Snow (2002) that the amount or arrangement of space was inadequate for the teachers' needs, particularly in the areas of children mobility and storage. In the same line of thought, Obiweluzo (2009) affirms that some primary schools do not have enough buildings for accommodation. The authors averred that some of (lie classes stayed under a tree, some others in a church hail. This is d problem. Similarly, Phyfe-Perkins, cited in Essa (2011), concludes that crowding of children in classroom space should be avoided.

Results from research question 4 reveal that teachers/parents perceived all the strategies suggested as effective ways of enhancing the organization of classroom space for pre-primary school children. This is in consonance with the views of Dean (2003), Snow (2002). Mayesky (2009), Essa (2011) that adequate classroom space should be provided to accommodate more number of classrooms.

Recommendations

- Adequate number of school buildings should be provided to accommodate enough classroom space.
- Proprietors should generate adequate fund before establishing a pre-primary school.
- Adequate space should be provided to accommodate more number of classroom spaces.
- Sufficient government grants should be provided for funding pre-primary schools to provide more classroom spaces.
- People concerned with education of children should be educated on the prime importance or providing adequate classroom space for pre-primary school children.
- Provide classroom space in pre-primary schools that will support or enhance children's activities and accommodate their mobility.

Conclusion

Pre-primary school children are in the early years of life. It is a time children need special care, nurture, attention, and education to facilitate the development of their full potentials. High quality classroom space environment is essential in educating children. Pleasant classroom contributes to children's formation of good habits. It helps children to develop a sense of responsibility and enhances their self-esteem, instruction and their academic achievement.

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