

HOLISTIC SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the level holistic skills development among preschool children in South-Western Nigeria. Five research questions with their corresponding research questions guided the study. Correlational type of descriptive research design was adopted in this study. 1,988,629 preschool children in south-west, Nigeria constitute the population of this study. A sample of 384 preschool children was selected using multistage sampling procedure. Preschool Children's Holistic Skill Development Rating Scale (PCHDRS) was the instrument used for data collection. It was subjected to face and content validity and test-retest method of reliability was adopted with a reliability coefficient of 0.855. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Findings indicated high levels of cognitive skills development (mean = 2.79), social skills development (mean = 2.92), emotional skills development (mean = 2.87) and language skills development (mean = 2.72). The study concluded that preschool children in South Western Nigeria generally demonstrate high holistic skill development across the four domains assessed in this study. The study recommended that teachers should continue to prioritise activities that can sustain the high holistic skills development found among preschool children in South-Western Nigeria.

Keywords: Holistic Skills, Development, Preschool Children

Introduction

The development of holistic skills in preschool children is a critical aspect of early childhood education. Despite its importance, there is a growing concern over whether they are

receiving the comprehensive development needed in areas such as cognitive, social, emotional and language skills (Rodiah et al., 2024). This is true of privately owned schools (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). Many informal and unregulated ECE centers exist, which may not adhere to recognised standards of child development and learning (Adewusia et al., 2024). In particular, the focus on academic skills, sometimes at the expense of other areas of development, raises questions about the overall approach to preschool education. Balancing academic demands and nurturing other crucial developmental skills remains a significant challenge for both educators and parents in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that preschool children reach their full potential.

Holistic skills development refers to all-encompassing phase through which a child grows. It lays emphasis on the multi-faceted nature of a child's growth (Gordon, 2022). Cognitive, social, emotional and language are key aspects of holistic skills development and all these were considered in this study. Cognitive skills development gives children the opportunity to acquire knowledge and apply as they grow. This aspect of holistic development is concerned with mental processes such as thinking, learning, problem-solving, memory, and decision-making (Berk, 2022). It involves the gradual development of a child's ability to process information, comprehend complex ideas, and make sense of the world around them (Klahr & Wallace, 2022). The development of these skills starts from infancy and ideally, it improves as a child grows. Craik (2022) averred that cognitive skills development can be short-term and long-term.

Social skills development is another key aspect of holistic skills development and this focuses on how a child learns to interact with others and navigate various social environments. It deals with the ability of children to understand and interpret social cues which allow them to respond appropriately in social situations. Over time, children develop a sense of identity within their social groups, understanding concepts such as friendship, empathy and other related attributes (Veresov, 2020). Social skills development get better when children are in more complex social settings such school because they encounter people from diverse social background.

Social and emotional skills development are closely related but they are different construct. Denham and Brown (2019) opined that ability of a child to effectively recognise, express, and manage emotions are key peculiarities of emotional skills development. It involves the ability to understand one's feelings, regulate it and respond to them the right way (Little & Swangler, 2017). Children find it difficult to regulate their emotions in early childhood but over time they learn to manage more complex emotional experiences. This domain does not exist in isolation when it comes to holistic skills development of preschool children (Hutchison, et al. 2016).

Language domain is also crucial to holistic skills development because it is needed for communication and learning (Gleason & Ratner, 2022). This is a foundational skill that serves as a primary medium for conveying thoughts and emotions. It involves multiple interrelated components, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics and so on. The natural sequence of language skills development starts during infancy when babies start making sounds like babbling. Gradually, they begin to say simple words and sentences as they grow older but as they turn to an adult, their use of language becomes more complex.

Cognitive, social, emotional and language domains collectively contribute to what may be understood as holistic skills development of school children. Since inception, this has been part of the agenda in global educational policy (Miller & Kauffman, 2021). In reality, the situation is quite different in Nigeria as the emphasis placed on different aspects of children's development within the educational system varies across schools (Eze, 2021). Subjects like mathematics and English language are made compulsory and receive more instructional time on the time table.

Even though many schools provide opportunities for physical and social skills development through inter-house sports and physical education classes, the frequency and quality of these activities differ depending on factors such as available resources and teacher expertise. All these raise important questions about whether holistic skills development of children are being approached in a balanced and comprehensive manner, and thus warrants further investigation. It is therefore against this background that the researcher deems it fit to investigate the level of holistic skills development of preschool children in South Western Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of emphasis are being laid on holistic skills development in early childhood education on paper but in reality, little attention is given to it among preschool children in Nigerian schools (Eze, 2021). There are many informal and unregulated ECE centers that are not following the laid down standards. The focus is on academic performance and subjects like Mathematics and English language are made compulsory and receive more instructional time on the time table. All these raise important questions about whether holistic skills development of children are being approached in a balanced and comprehensive manner, and thus warrants urgent attention (Miller & Kauffman, 2021).

Existing literature shows that there remain notable gaps in understanding of the holistic skills development of preschool children. First of all, while previous studies have often focused on individual aspects of children's development, these studies have most times fail to consider these aspects holistically. This therefore means that there is an incomplete understanding of the holistic spectrum of a child's development. Addressing this specific gap is essential because holistic skills development is crucial for preschool children to thrive in all aspect of their life. Hence, the present study addressed these identified gaps and contribute to the body of knowledge in the literature.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives, which are to:

1. Ascertain the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria.
2. Determine the level of social skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria.
3. Examine the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in. South Western, Nigeria.
4. Examine the level of language skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South western Nigeria?
2. What is the level of social skills development among preschool children in south western Nigeria?
3. What is the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in south western Nigeria?
4. What is the level of language skills development among preschool children south western Nigeria?

Methodology

Correlational type of descriptive research design was adopted in this study. 1,988,629 preschool children in Lagos, Oyo and Ogun states constitute the population of this study (National Population Commission, 2022). A sample of 384 preschool children were selected using multistage sampling procedure. Using purposive sampling technique to choose Lagos, Oyo and Ogun states from South-Western Nigeria was the first stage and this was based on the fact that they had the highest number of preschool children in the region (National Population Commission, 2022). Selecting local governments in each of the chosen states using a proportionate sampling was the second stage. Next was to select preschools in each local government area. Eight preschools were selected in each local government using simple random sampling technique. The final stage involved using simple random sampling technique to select six children from each of the chosen preschools. Preschool Children’s Holistic skill development Rating Scale (PCHDRS) was the instrument used for data collection. It was subjected to face and content validity and test-retest method of reliability was adopted with a reliability coefficient of 0.855. The data collected for this study was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South-Western, Nigeria?

Table 1: Table showing the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria

S/N	Cognitive Skills Development	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	The child demonstrates strong attention and focus, during class activities	2.97	.464	High
2.	The child easily follow multi-step instructions given by the teacher	3.20	.586	High
3.	The child shows the ability to remember and recall previously learned information during classroom discussions	3.21	.482	High
4.	The child identifies and name common objects and pictures	2.68	.487	High

5.	The child is able to solve simple puzzles and problems independently	3.11	.451	High
6.	The child recognises and name basic shapes, colors, and patterns	3.25	.483	Very High
7.	The child identifies and differentiates between letters or numbers	3.01	.476	High
8.	The child understands and follow simple rules and directions in games	2.77	.419	High
9.	The child demonstrates the ability to complete simple tasks or assignments with minimal guidance	2.21	1.107	Low
10.	The child counts objects accurately and recognizes numbers	2.32	.634	Low
11.	The child understands the concepts of time, such as morning, afternoon, or evening	2.42	.535	Low
12.	The child shows the ability to make decisions and choices independently	2.84	.601	High
13.	The child completes a task in a reasonable amount of time without getting easily distracted	2.80	.680	High
14.	The child expresses ideas clearly and in a way that others can understand	2.29	1.071	Low
15.	The child shows an interest in learning new things presented by the teacher	2.86	.567	High
	Weighted average	2.79		High

Decision: Very Low: 1.00-1.74, Low: 1.75-2.49 High: 2.50-3.24, Very High: 3.25-4.00 DeVellis (2021)

Table 1 shows the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria. The weighted average is 2.79 which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria was high.

Research Question Two: What is the level of social skills development among preschool children in South-Western, Nigeria?

Table 2: Table showing the level of social skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria

S/N	Social Skills Development	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	The child plays well with other children in group activities	3.22	.530	High
2.	The child shares toys and materials willingly, with others	3.14	.667	High
3.	The child takes turns with others during play and learning activities	2.73	.565	High
4.	The child initiates conversations with peers and adults	3.07	.543	High

5.	The child listens attentively to others when they speak, showing respect and interest	2.69	.709	High
6.	The child forms close friendships with peers and enjoys spending time with them	3.20	.677	High
7.	The child manages conflict with peers in a calm and respectful manner	2.73	.616	High
8.	The child is able to apologize and make amends when he/she has upset another child	3.06	.686	High
9.	The child makes new friends easily and feels comfortable in social settings	2.58	.552	High
10.	The child engages in reciprocal conversations, taking turns while speaking and listening	2.65	.555	High
11.	The child independently greets others and, use polite expressions like "please" and "thank you"	3.01	.492	High
12.	The child adapts well to changes in group activities or new social settings	3.35	.596	Very High
13.	The child is able to follow the teacher's instructions in social interactions, like greetings or playing games with others	2.91	.811	High
14.	The child frequently invites other children to join in play activities	2.77	.777	High
15.	The child helps other children when they are in need, without being asked	2.74	.787	High
	Weighted average	2.92		High

Decision: Very Low: 1.00-1.74, Low:1.75-2.49 High: 2.50-3.24, Very High: 3.25-4.00 DeVellis (2021)

Table 2 shows the level of social skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria. The weighted average is 2.92 which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that level of social skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria was high.

Research Question Three: What is the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in South-Western, Nigeria?

Table 3: Table showing the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria

S/N	Emotional Skills Development	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	The child shows a high level of self-control when he/she is upset or angry	2.70	.542	High
2.	The child shows concern for others when they are upset	2.77	.696	High
3.	The child demonstrates excitement and joy when engaging in fun activities	3.00	.526	High

4.	The child identifies his/her emotions and express them in a way that others can understand	3.20	.404	High
5.	The child shows kindness by sharing with friends.	2.67	.549	High
6.	The child adapts to new situations without feeling overly anxious	2.60	.501	High
7.	The child expresses sadness when necessary and seeks comfort appropriately	3.33	.473	Very High
8.	The child shows gratitude when receiving help or kindness from others	2.54	.538	High
9.	The child has the ability to be patient, waiting for his/her turn without becoming upset	2.71	.657	High
10.	The child is able to apologize when he/she hurts someone's feelings	3.46	.595	Very high
11.	The child manages feelings of jealousy when interacting with peers	3.26	.668	Very high
12.	The child feels comfortable showing vulnerability, such as crying or asking for help when needed	2.70	.777	High
13.	The child independently manages emotions such as anger during group activities	2.72	.858	High
14.	The child reacts to compliments with genuine happiness	2.76	.744	High
15.	The child demonstrates awareness of his/her emotional state by discussing how they feel in a calm manner	2.68	.466	High
	Weighted average	2.87		High

Decision: Very Low: 1.00-1.74, Low:1.75-2.49 High: 2.50-3.24, Very High: 3.25-4.00 DeVellis (2021)

Table 3 shows the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria. The weighted average is 2.87 which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that level of emotional skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria was high.

Research Question Four: What is the level of language skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria?

Table 4: Table showing the level of language skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria

S/N	Language Skills Development	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	The child shows a high level of self-control when he/she is upset or angry	2.85	.353	High
2.	The child shows concern for others when they are upset	2.59	.531	High
3.	The child demonstrates excitement and joy when engaging in fun activities	2.45	.558	Low

4.	The child identifies his/her emotions and express them in a way that others can understand	2.68	.488	High
5.	The child shows kindness by sharing with friends.	2.27	.600	Low
6.	The child adapts to new situations without feeling overly anxious	2.36	.892	Low
7.	The child expresses sadness when necessary and seeks comfort appropriately	3.12	.617	High
8.	The child shows gratitude when receiving help or kindness from others	2.79	.726	High
9.	The child has the ability to be patient, waiting for his/her turn without becoming upset	3.32	.468	Very High
10.	The child is able to apologize when he/she hurts someone's feelings	3.21	.408	High
11.	The child manages feelings of jealousy when interacting with peers	2.28	1.074	Low
12.	The child feels comfortable showing vulnerability, such as crying or asking for help when needed	2.10	.849	Low
13.	The child independently manages emotions such as anger during group activities	2.65	.786	High
14.	The child reacts to compliments with genuine happiness	3.10	.604	High
15.	The child demonstrates awareness of his/her emotional state by discussing how they feel in a calm manner	3.00	.683	High
	Weighted average	2.72		High

Decision: Very Low: 1.00-1.74, Low:1.75-2.49 High: 2.50-3.24, Very High: 3.25-4.00 DeVellis (2021)

Table 4 shows the level of language skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria. The weighted average is 2.72 which is greater than 2.49 the base line for positive opinion. This therefore shows a numeric indicator that level of language skills development among preschool children in South Western, Nigeria was high.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that the level of cognitive skills development among preschool children in South-West Nigeria was high. This finding is in tandem with Duruh et al. (2023), who used a quasi-experimental design in Abuja with a control and treatment group of 40 preschool pupils and the SSIS-RS cognitive subscale to show that those exposed to the Reggio-Emilia training approach scored significantly higher on problem-solving and reasoning tasks. However, this finding is inconsistent with Quenzer-Alfred (2024) whose longitudinal study of 98 preschoolers during the COVID-19 lockdown using parent-reported video assessments found stagnation or decline in cognitive scores over six months.

The second finding of this study revealed that the level of social skills development among preschool children in South-West Nigeria was high. This finding is in tandem with Obijiofor and Ugwele (2025), who used a descriptive survey design in Southeast Nigeria and found that stronger teacher-child interactions, measured via the Teacher-Child Interaction Scale, were linked to higher social skills scores. On the contrary, this finding differs from the study of Odebowale (2022), conducted in Lagos State, which used a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests in four schools and found that children's social-skills scores remained in the "low" range after six weeks of play-based intervention.

The third finding of this study revealed that the level of emotional skills development among preschool children in South-West Nigeria was high. This finding is in tandem with Sulyman and Alawaye (2024), who carried out a descriptive survey on a sample of 368 pre-primary pupils in Ilorin South and used the Emotional Skill Acquisition Scale to show that these children have high emotional skill scores especially those exposed to structured pre-primary programmes. This finding disagrees with Ujah et al. (2025), who analysed the 2022 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey in a multilevel mixed-effects model and reported that only 37% of children aged 24–59 months across all six zones met the WHO's emotional-development benchmark.

The fourth finding of this study revealed that the level of language skills development among preschool children in South-West Nigeria was high. This finding is in tandem with Enelamah et al. (2024), who analysed 2016–17 MICS data for 11,073 three- to four-year-olds and reported that just over half (51 %) of Nigerian preschoolers were "on track" in the language domain of the Early Childhood Development Index. However, this finding contradicts the circle-time language study by Olumide (2025), which used a correlational design with 300 preschoolers in Imo State and found moderate language gains after weekly circle-time routines.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence gathered in this study, a conclusion can be made that the cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills development of preschool children in South Western Nigeria was high. This is an indication that preschool children in South Western Nigeria generally demonstrated high holistic skill development across the four domains assessed in this study.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should continue to prioritise cognitively stimulating classroom activities and learning materials to reinforce the high cognitive skills demonstrated among preschool children.
2. Educators should facilitate regular cooperative play and group exercises to build on the strong social skills already evident among preschool children in Southwest Nigeria.

3. Schools should integrate age-appropriate activities focused on emotional and language to strengthen the high emotional skills observed among preschool children.

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