

Enhancing Effective Learning among Children in Nursery and Primary Schools: Exploring Methodological Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Education is crucial for national development, positively impacting socio-cultural, political, economic, and human aspects of nation-building. This research explores strategies to enhance effective learning among children in nursery and primary schools within Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey method, involving 100 respondents from 10 selected schools. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, validated by experts with a reliability index of 0.72. The findings revealed that effective teaching methods included the play way method, educative rhymes, teacher demonstrations, and storytelling, while music was less effective. Major obstacles identified were the high cost of modern equipment, inadequate teacher training, young age of pupils, inadequate school facilities, lack of experience in handling children, poor teacher remuneration, and lack of interest from teachers. However, the lack of in-service teacher training was not a significant obstacle. It is recommended that schools be equipped with adequate facilities and employ qualified teachers. Additionally, diverse teaching methods should be used to effectively enhance learning in nursery and primary schools. Involving parents in contributing resources to school care centers is also suggested to support the development of these educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument for enhancing national development, playing positive roles in the socio-cultural, political, economic, and human aspects of nation-building. To participate effectively in the highly competitive economy of the 21st century, education is indispensable as it fosters scientific and technological advancements, which are modern-day indices for national development. Derived from the Greek word “educare,” meaning “lead out,” education can be defined as the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties are trained, and skills are developed (Patra, 2017).

The foundation of a child's education is pre-school education, forming an integral part of early education, which may be formal or informal and is provided to children aged 3 to 5 years

before they enter primary school (National Policy on Education, 2013). This educational level caters to the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, and social development of the preschool child. Given its foundational importance, early education significantly influences pupils' performance at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Scales et al., 2020).

Mehan (2020) posits that primary school is the cornerstone of a child's formal educational development. The quality of teaching at this stage influences the child's learning rate and determines the quality and direction of future academic achievements and career prospects. This underscores the necessity of making teaching and learning engaging, stimulating, and meaningful, which can be achieved through the proper utilization and assessment of instructional materials.

Primary education and elementary/nursery education are typically the first stages of formal education, following preschool and preceding secondary education (Olusakin, 2021). Primary education generally takes place in primary or elementary schools, sometimes followed by middle school, an educational stage existing in some countries between primary school and high school.

Moyer and Hedden (2020) stated that the United Nations Millennium Development Goal 2 aimed to achieve universal primary education by 2015, ensuring all children, regardless of race or gender, could complete primary schooling (Madonna King, 2012). However, the goal was challenging, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where a significant number of children remained out of school. In 2010, about 69 million school-age children were not in school, with nearly half in sub-Saharan Africa and more than a quarter in Southern Asia (Marilyn Harrington, 2008). Achieving this goal required all children of primary school entry age to be attending classes by 2009 and ensuring sufficient teachers and classrooms to meet the demand (Fredriksen, 2023).

Pre-primary education is provided to children before the age of six, preparing them for primary school. Defined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), it includes crèches, nurseries, and kindergartens, often provided by private entrepreneurs. Early childhood education has its roots in the efforts of prominent European education experts like John Amos Comenius, J.J. Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel, who championed children's right to early education. Modern educators and scholars, including Umeh (2022) and Fafunwa (2012), continue to advocate for quality early childhood education to help students develop their full potential.

The recognition of pre-primary education's importance in Nigeria led to its inclusion in the National Policy on Education (1977), with revisions in 1981, 1998, and subsequent updates under civilian governments in 2004, 2007, and 2012. Romiszowski (2024) views instructional materials as essential tools used by teachers to facilitate learning, making education more attractive and effective. The issue of poor academic performance in Nigeria has raised concerns among the government, parents, teachers, and students, emphasizing the need for effective coordination of the school environment and quality instructional materials (Ayeni & Akinfolari, 2014).

Effective teaching requires making learning meaningful, functional, and purposeful, enabling students to actively participate and receive immediate feedback using specified instructional materials. Meaningful learning involves active student participation, as Choppin et al. (2022) highlight the importance of facilitating student learning through engaging instructional methods. An effective teacher supports and contributes to student learning and achievement, making the best use of available resources (Fafunwa, 2012).

Ajadi (2021) emphasizes the importance of nursery and primary education, advocating for the establishment of more schools and governmental support in Nigeria. Additionally, community

involvement, including individuals, religious bodies, clubs, and women's associations, is crucial in establishing and organizing these educational institutions. Recommendations from UNESCO and the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) should be considered in these efforts.

The development of early childhood centers faces challenges such as a lack of qualified teachers. For instance, in Zimbabwe, despite planning and funding for preschools post-1995, the implementation was impeded by the shortage of qualified teachers (Rose et al., 2013). Similarly, in Malaysia, preschools struggled with underqualified teachers lacking essential skills (Rohaty). Effective nursery and primary school teachers must possess qualities such as passion, patience, creativity, flexibility, and dedication (Birhan et al., 2021; John Hagins, 2009; Ata-Akturk & Sevimli-Celik, 2023; Chen, 2023; Turk & Korkmaz, 2022).

Research indicates that effective teachers are the most crucial factor in student achievement, more so than curricula, class size, funding, or community involvement. Thus, selecting effective teachers is essential for schools aiming to improve performance. Research provides empirical data that can guide policymakers in creating effective educational policies. It helps identify what works and what doesn't, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and that interventions are targeted where they are most needed. By understanding the factors that influence student success, educators can design curricula that are more engaging, relevant, and effective. This ensures that the educational content delivered at various levels, especially in early childhood and primary education, aligns with the developmental needs of children.

METHOD

A descriptive survey methodology was deemed appropriate for this study. Descriptive research designs were adopted for this study since the researcher intends to investigate the perceptions of teachers on effective learning among children in nursery and primary schools: exploring methodological approaches, and a descriptive survey emphasizes the data collections about one's opinion, view, perception, and attitudes, which contribute to the current status of a situation under investigation (Siedlecki, 2020).

The target population comprised all nursery and primary school teachers, including both males and females, in the Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. A sample of sixty (100) nursery and primary school teachers was drawn from this population, encompassing both genders of teachers. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Purposive Sampling techniques were used to select ten (10) schools, ensuring a mix of private and public nursery and primary schools. From each of these schools, ten (10) teachers were selected using Simple Random Sampling, resulting in a total of one hundred (100) respondents.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire. Participants were asked to respond freely to the questionnaire items on an individual basis. The questionnaire was validated by lecturers from the Department of Art Education at the University of Ilorin. To ensure reliability, a test-retest method was applied, yielding a reliability index of 0.72. The instrument used for this study was the "Enhancing Effective Learning Among Children in Nursery and Primary Schools Questionnaire" (EELCNPSQ). The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, and rank to provide a clear understanding of the responses and to identify trends and patterns within the data. Descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, and rank were used to analyze the two research questions raised in the study.

RESULTS

Research Question One: what are the teaching methods for effective learning in primary schools in Ilorin South, Kwara State?

To answer research question one, participants’ responses were analyzed using frequency and percentages with a percentage agreement of 50% and above adjudged affirmative on of teaching methods available for effective learning in primary schools as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Teaching Methods for Effective Learning in Primary Schools

Roles	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)	Rank
Play way	88(96.7)	3(3.3)	1 st
Educative rhymes	86(94.5)	5(5.5)	2 nd
Teacher demonstration	66(72.6)	25(27.4)	4 th
Storytelling	73(80.2)	18(19.8)	3 rd
Music	36(39.6)	55(60.4)	5 th

As shown in Table 1, with a percentage agreement of 50% and above, play way, educative rhymes, teacher demonstration, and storytelling were effective methods for learning in primary schools while music was not regarded as an effective teaching method. While the educative playway method ranked first, educative rhymes ranked second, storytelling ranked third and teacher’s demonstration ranked fourth.

Research Question Two: what are the obstacles encountered in applying effective teaching methods for learning in Nursery and Primary schools in Ilorin South LGA?

To answer research question one, participants’ responses were analyzed using frequency and percentages with a percentage agreement of 50% and above adjudged an obstacle to applying effective teaching methods for learning in Nursery and Primary schools as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Obstacles in applying effective teaching methods for learning in Primary Schools

Roles	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)	Rank
High cost of modern equipment	74(81.3)	17(18.7)	4 th
Inadequate teacher training	75(82.4)	16(17.6)	3 rd
Age of pupil (too young)	50(54.9)	41(45.1)	6 th
Inadequate school facilities	70(76.9)	21(23.1)	5 th
Lack of children handling experience	79(86.8)	12(13.2)	2 nd
Lack of in-service teacher training	27(29.6)	64(70.4)	7 th
Poor teacher remuneration	82(90.1)	9(9.9)	1 st
Lack of teacher’s interest in children	83(91.2)	8(8.8)	8 th

As shown in Table 2, obstacles to applying effective teaching methods for learning in primary schools, with a percentage agreement of 50% and above, included the high cost of modern equipment, inadequate teacher training, age of pupils (too young), inadequate school facilities, lack of children handling experience, poor teacher remuneration, and lack of teacher's interest in children. However, the lack of in-service teacher training was not considered an obstacle by the majority of respondents.

DISCUSSION

Several scholars have suggested that a variety of teaching methods are effective in the teaching and learning process. The findings of this study showed that the play method, educational rhymes, teacher's demonstrations, and storytelling were very effective for learning in primary schools. These results are consistent with a study by Yumutbaevna (2020), which emphasizes using new pedagogical technologies, poems, game elements of play, and videos in teaching English. Likewise, Malik et al. (2020) found that teachers use storytelling and play-way methods to introduce starting concepts as taught in early childhood education classes within a conducive and stimulating learning environment. Najmonnisa & Haroon (2014) pointed out that cooperative learning positively contributes to academic achievements and interpersonal skills. The study is also in consonance with the submissions of Reinita and Saralee (2022), Koroh et al. (2022), and Patturina (2020), who posited the importance of active teaching methods such as play and storytelling as effective methods among teachers. However, Trullàs et al.'s (2022) caution is that there is no universally best method of teaching, indicating its effectiveness depends on how it satisfies memory criteria.

A number of obstructions may impede effective teaching methods. Among many other factors, the research highlights a range of barriers to the successful implementation of effective teaching methods in primary schools such as the high cost of modern equipment, inadequate training for teachers, young age of pupils, insufficient school facilities, lack of expertise on how to deal with children, poor pay for teachers and disinterest in children by teachers. Surprisingly, the study shows that lack of in-service teacher training was not seen as an obstacle to efficient teaching methods for learning. The common issues that affect effective teaching include bad behavior among students, lack of interest, and mischievousness according to Devrani et al., (2020). Similarly, Bidabadi et al., (2016) enumerate hurdles associated with efficient ways of teaching focusing on teacher's conduct and attitude and classroom regulations. Modebelu and Duvie (2012) underscored the importance of creative teaching techniques in overcoming these challenges by advocating for teacher empowerment through quality workshops. From this point-of-view, those research works collectively emphasize the complicated interplay between student and teacher factors thereby stressing the need for continuous professional development aimed at improving effectiveness in pedagogy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

Based on the findings from this study, play-based learning, educative rhythms, teacher demonstrations, music, and storytelling are the factors identified that can help children learn effectively in nursery and primary schools. This implies that teachers can be encouraged to often employ the use of play-based learning, educative rhythms, teacher demonstrations, music, and storytelling. Sustaining the interests of children can be a very challenging task. It is a known fact that nursery and primary school pupils view playing as a fun activity, an act that deserves their full

attention. Hence, employing the play-based learning method can effectively sustain the interest of children towards active learning. Educative rhythms and music are another form of fun activities that piques the interest of pupils. They show more interest sing along activities. Therefore adopting this method of effective learning can provide teachers or educators with additional instructional material that intensifies the interests of nursery and primary school pupils in learning. Teachers demonstration can also improve pupils learning as it entails practical and hands-on activities that focuses the students attention on a particular subject matter.

Additionally, the study concluded that a number of obstructions may impede effective teaching methods. Among many other factors, the research highlights a range of barriers to the successful implementation of effective teaching methods in primary schools such as the high cost of modern equipment, inadequate training for teachers, young age of pupils, insufficient school facilities, lack of expertise on how to deal with children, poor pay for teachers and disinterest in children by teachers. The high cost of modern equipment and insufficient school facilities can negatively affect the pace of student learning. Over the world, availability of modern equipment and adequate school facilities learning by providing a more conducive environment for learning. Furthermore, lack of expertise on how to deal with children, poor pay for teachers and disinterest in children by teachers can be detrimental to pupils learning at the elementary. This dearth in expertise denies the pupil of access to the best quality of education. Poor pay for teachers hampers teacher's volition to deliver at their best. Hence tackling these barriers can effectively improve the quality of education for nursery and primary pupils.

Also the study shows that lack of in-service teacher training was not seen as an obstacle to efficient teaching methods for learning, which implies that we have adequate in-service training already put in place. This provide a basis on which the foundation of quality education delivery can be put in place. Additionally, teachers' mastery of the English language, in line with the policy guidelines of the Ministry of Education in Nigeria, is crucial for effective communication with learners. Teachers should possess qualities such as passion, patience, creativity, flexibility, and dedication to support children's academic growth. The study also concluded that there is a significant difference in the methods of helping children learn effectively in nursery and primary schools based on teachers' qualifications and the type of school.

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

1. Schools should be provided with and equipped with adequate facilities to enhance learning.
2. Qualified teachers should be employed by both government and private schools to implement effective teaching methods.
3. A variety of teaching methods should be used to effectively encourage teaching and learning in nursery and primary schools.
4. The development of nursery and primary schools should include initiatives where parents can contribute resources to school care centers.

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