

# Formal Kindergarten Experience as a Predictor of Academic Achievement of Primary Five Pupils in English Language

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated the effect of formal kindergarten education on the achievement of primary five pupils. The academic performance of pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience were compared. Their achievement was based on their performance in the English language tests. The sample consisted of one hundred and twenty pupils made up of forty eight pupils with formal kindergarten education and seventy two pupils without formal kindergarten education selected from ten public primary five classes. The sample consisted of boys and girls. The instrument used for data collection was English language achievement tests. The instruments were administered to students in their various schools. The scores obtained from the tests were analysed using the t-test to find the significant difference between the means of the two groups. The results of this study revealed that formal kindergarten education has a long term effect on the performance of primary school pupils since those with formal kindergarten education performed significantly better than those without. Another finding was that the sex of the students has no effect on the academic performance of pupils in primary school. Conclusively, it was confirmed in the study that pupils with formal kindergarten education perform better than those without in Nigerian context at least in primary school, hence this study emphasized the importance of formal kindergarten education

**Keywords:** Formal kindergarten education, Non-formal kindergarten education, Achievement, Early childhood; Pre-School education.

## **Introduction**

The unhidden evidence that early experiences influenced later academic achievement has motivated the development of a number of pre-school institutions. More recently, formal kindergarten programmes have been designed to prevent high drop-out and low levels of intellectual functioning that are found in disadvantaged children as early as two or three years of age. Scholars like Fafunwa, (1967) Hunt, (1957) and Yoloye, (1975) and Ministry of Education discovered extensively the importance and role of pre-school or formal kindergarten education on the achievement of pupils both in the developed and developing countries like Nigeria.

Having realized the importance of pre-school or formal kindergarten education, the government encouraged private efforts in the establishment of this institution. Also, in recent years, the government now sponsors the pre-school levels of public primary schools in the country.

Thus, this paper tries to examine the English language performance of primary five pupils with formal kindergarten education and those without formal kindergarten education in English language in 10 public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.

### **Background to the Study**

Early childhood education is a term commonly used to describe programmes of formal schooling for children under the age of six years. The encyclopedia of education defines the range of early education as from two or three to eight years. The findings of psychologists and researchers on child development have laid great stress in recent years on the deep impressions made upon children by their early experiences and lasting effect of such impressions. This had led us to recognize that education starts very in life and the need to provide early education.

One of the problems facing the Nigerian school system is the early drop-out rate of pupils. Again, it was discovered that pupils failed in primary classes because they were unable to face or respond to the demands of formal school processes. This problem is not peculiar to Nigerian Primary Schools alone, some developing countries also experience this same problem. Pozner in Orebanjo (1994) found that 35% of first grade children in Argentina dropped-out of school. Galdwell (1972) and Yarrow et al in Awoniyi (1979) were able to explain that family factor accounted for this problem while Enge et al in Onibokun (1986) discussed personal factors. It is the intention of this study to focus on school related factors because it is assumed that there is an appreciable difference in processes of training in the kindergarten classes and in primary school.

It was discovered in several studies that the experiences of a child in early years do have tremendous effect on his later life. Thus, Wheeler (1980) have said that:

*“Because the pre-school years are packed with potential for all sorts of growth, provisions made for young children are crucial”.*

Educationist and child psychologists such as Vasta, Haith and Miller were of same view with Smart and Smart because they found that formal kindergarten experience play an important role in determining a child’s future development and most especially in cognitive achievement especially where the environment is physically and psychologically stimulating.

Awoniyi (1982) said “All children need opportunity for nursery education. What does on during the year before and between birth and entrance of the formal school can seriously affect the value of a child’s experience in school and throughout life”. Hunt (1961) also believed that

cognitive development can be modified by an early experience. All these indicate that a child that is deprived of this experience has missed a lot and this will have effect on him later in life.

The Nigerian Government recognizes the formal kindergarten experience as a result of the findings by the Educationists and he included it in the National Policy on Education. Nowadays, there are proliferations of pre-school institutions both in the urban and rural areas.

The proprietors/proprietresses charge very exorbitant prices as school fees, still parents patronize them because of better facilities available in these institutions which they believe would help their children in future especially in primary school level.

In clear terms, the study intends to find out whether there would be a difference between the performance of pupils with formal kindergarten education and those without formal kindergarten education.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study.

1. There is no significant difference between the English language performance of pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience.
2. There is no significant difference in male primary five pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience.
3. There is no significant difference between the academic performance of female primary five pupils with and those without formal kindergarten experience.

Two groups of children in primary five selected from 10 primary schools in Ijebu-Ode (public) were used. Those who had formal kindergarten education (FKE) and those without formal kindergarten education (NFKE). Unfortunately, only Grade I public primary schools in Nigeria have the pre-school education facility. The researcher therefore used 5 public primary schools with pre-school education and five without pre-school education. The sample of the study was one hundred and twenty randomly selected from these schools recognizing the sex and age of the pupils: sixty pre-school scholars and sixty non-pre-school scholars. The breakdown of the numbers is presented below:

### **Distribution of overall sample in Primary five**

Categories	Primary V	Total
Pre-school pupils	48	48 (120)
No pre-school pupils	72	72 (120)
Boys with FKE	24	24 (120)
Girls with FKE	24	24 (120)
Boys without FKE	36	36 (120)
Girls without FKE	36	36 (120)

## Instrument

The study involves conducting tests for pupils in primary five on English language before their achievement could be measured. English language was chosen because it is one of the most important core subjects of primary school curriculum being examined in the common entrance examination before admitted into secondary schools. The researcher constructed English test based on the scheme of works on English language of the concerned schools. The test was subjected to inter rater reliability to determine the content validity of the test. The papers were marked by the researcher herself.

## Results

The results of the tests are presented in the tables below. The hypotheses were tested using t-test statistical method at 0.05 level of the significance.

### Hypothesis I

There is no significant difference between the English language performance of pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience.

**Table II:** t-test of difference between the English language performance of primary five pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience

Groups	N	X	SD	t	P
English language performance of pupils with FKE	48	37.28	3.57	21.69	0.05
English language performance of pupils without FKE	72	26.36	4.46		

Significant P.05

The result on Table II shows that there is a significant difference between the English language performance of primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those without such experience. This hypothesis is also rejected t-value of 21.69 is greater than critical t-value of 1.96.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the academic performance of male primary five pupils with and with formal kindergarten experience.

**Table III:** t-test of difference between the academic performance of male pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience.

Groups	N	X	SD	t	P
Male with FKE	24	21.15	2.15	5.00	0.05
Male without FKE	36	17.44	2.70		

Significant P.05

Table II shows that t-value of 5.00 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. This shows that there is a significant difference between the academic performance of male primary five pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Male primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience perform significantly difference from those without such experience.

### Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the academic performance of female primary five pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience,

**Table IV:** t-test of difference between the academic performance of of female pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience.

Groups	N	X	SD	t	P
Female with FKE	24	10.16	5.86	2.07	0.05
Female without FKE	36	8.11	5.22		

Significant P.05

In the same way, the third null hypothesis is rejected t-value 2.07 is greater than critical t-value of 1.96. This shows that female primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience will perform significantly different from female primary five pupils without such experience.

### Summary of Findings

From the above analyses, the results can be summarized thus:

- i. There is a significant difference between the English language performance of pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those with such experience.
- ii. There is a significant difference between the academic performance of male primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those without such experience.

- iii. There is a significant difference between academic performance of female primary five pupils with formal kindergarten experience and those without it.

## **Discussion**

The findings are discussed under the following sub-headings:

- i. Formal kindergarten experience and English language achievement.
- ii. Sex and primary school achievement.

### **Formal kindergarten experience and English language achievement**

Hypotheses one states that there is no significant difference between the English performance of pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience. This hypothesis is rejected because it was found in this study that pupils with formal kindergarten experience despite the years interval performed significantly better than those without formal kindergarten experience.

To Onibokun, (1986) and Wheeler (198)) pre-school education has a short-term effect on pupils achievement in primary school. It then means that this study runs contrary to their own study because the difference is still clear in primary five.

### **Sex and Primary School Achievement**

Hypotheses two and three states that there is no significant difference between the academic performance of male and female primary five pupils with and without formal kindergarten experience. These two hypotheses examined the effect of sex on the academic performance of boys and girls with and without FKE. Male and female with FKE performed better than male and female without FKE. This study is synonymous with the findings of Onibokun (1981) in which in his findings, he discovered that there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in the achievement tests in primary school. A possible explanation for this result could be that the sex of the learner has nothing to do with the learner's performance on a given course.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study shows that formal kindergarten experience contributes to academic achievement of Nigerian primary school pupils irrespective of the sex or level or subject. It has a long term effect on the achievement of pupils in primary schools. Hence, the formal kindergarten experience helps to minimize the problem of drop-out and school failure.

Based on the above conclusion the following recommendations are made:

- i. Infant classes that are attached to the Grade I public primary schools should be well equipped and well founded.
- ii. Government should extend the establishment of those infant classes to Grade II and Grade III public primary schools.

- iii. Government should make sure that fees charged in private owned schools are appropriate and uniform throughout the nation in order to give opportunity of pre-school. Experience to all the children.
- iv. Competent teachers should be employed to teach in these infant classes. The Ministry of Education should see to the recruitment of teachers.

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