

# **Investigating the dynamics of learning among pre-primary learners at formal and informal settings in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

In Nigeria, pre-primary education is designed for children between the ages of three and five. It has been observed that during this stage, majority of the children rarely speak clearly and intelligently, hence their ability to learn in school is problematic. In light of the problem highlighted, the purpose of the study is to explore the dynamics that influence learning among pre-primary school learners at the formal and informal settings. I adopted qualitative research methodology. In line with the qualitative methodology, interpretive paradigm was employed. Six teachers within the study area were purposively selected. For triangulation sake, six females whose children are between the ages of three and five were also selected for the study. Based on the nature of the data which was in narrative form, thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Key findings revealed that children's readiness and willingness to learn significantly influence learning among learners at the pre-primary school level.

**Keywords:** Dynamics, learning, pre-primary learners, pre-primary learners, formal and informal settings

## **Introduction**

The earliest words made by a child consist of babbling and other types of non-verbal sounds, some of which are used to attract attention, to engage in imitative play, and to take part in games during the first year of life (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). The vocabulary grows gradually at first- and at 12 months of age an average child has a vocabulary of between two and three words, at 24 months it has approximately 154, and at 36 months it grows to about 2,500 words (Smith & Phillips, 2017). At the same time children learn how to

combine words into grammatical sentences, and build up a structure of meanings in which the words are related. However, the meanings of words are at first very vague and inaccurate. At this point, the children develop greater elaboration and depth of meaning with time as a result of listening and asking questions (McIvor, 2009). According to Wolff (2000), language develops slowly and gradually for children in schools, perhaps because these children are rewarded less for using it and more rapidly at home, probably because of their greater association with adults (Byrne, MacDonald & Buckley, 2002). Wolff (2000) argues that learning is faster for children of more educated parents. In children, much early sound takes the form of monologues that accompany action which helps to control behaviour (Im-Bolter, Johnson & Pascual-Leone, 2006). According to Riojas-Cortez (2001), this is most common at the ages between two and four. A great deal of speech when others are present is 'egocentric' because the child does not put his/herself in the position of the listener or worry too much about whether the message is being received. However, at some point middle childhood speech becomes more 'sociocentric' the child addresses his/her hearer, considers his/her point of view and also tries to influence him/her, or actually exchange ideas with him/her (Niparko, Tobey, Thal, Eisenberg, Wang, Quittner & CDaCI Investigative Team, 2010).

Having possessed relevant communication skill in language, it is worthy to note that majority of the pre-primary school learners rarely learn in the class. The inability of the learners to learn might be function of so many variables. In light of the above, this study will examine the dynamics that surround the way pre-primary school learners learn at the formal and informal education settings. In other words, the question guiding the study is; what are the dynamics that surround the way pre-primary school learners learn at the formal and informal education setting.

## Literature Review

### *The dynamics or approaches of learning in pre-primary school*

Learning and teaching is a complicated science. Jordan, Carlile and Stack (2008) argue that learning is a complicated science with different approaches. Learning is therefore the process of acquiring new information and expanding existing schemata for development purposes. These scholars continue that there are several general principles that make learning effective. Bowman (1993, p.120) articulates that “learning is primarily a social activity and participation in the social life of the school is central for learning to occur.” She continues that teachers principally determine or orchestrate what is learnt and how it is learnt. The dynamics or approaches of learning among children are therefore largely dependent on the teachers, what these teachers teach, and how they facilitate what they are teaching. Jordan et al. (2008, p.38) maintain that “there are several approaches to learning in pre-primary school and these are dependent on the resources available and the quality of teachers facilitating the learning.” Since dynamics refer to the forces which stimulate growth or change within a particular entity (Abrahamson & Sánchez-García, 2016). The dynamics of learning is how the process stimulates or enhances learning. These processes are therefore in line with the approaches of learning since they both communicate how learning takes place and how such learning is enhanced.

Polychroni, Koukoura and Anagnostou (2006), Hyson (2008) and Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreño and Haas (2010) argue that children are different and have different abilities and these abilities inform the way they learn and react to whatever they come across. Jordan et al. (2008) and Li-Grining et al. (2010) further argue that research has shown that five percent of children learn effectively through lecture or silencing by the teacher directly. Another ten percent of children learn better by reading from books and other materials. Even though they sit in classes, listen to the teacher and engage in several activities, they learn better by reading.

Furthermore, fifteen percent of children are visual learners or learn through visual arts (Li-Grining et al., 2010). This means that they are more photographic in their memory and pictures make more sense to them.

Another thirty percent of children learn better through demonstrations. When the teacher demonstrates in the classroom their understanding is heightened. Adding to this, another fifty percent learn better through small group engagements or work (Li-Grining et al., 2010, p.125). Once they become participants in group endeavours, whatever they might be doing, the knowledge acquired or constructed from such processes is enhanced. A “great percentage of children or pupils, about seventy-five percent to be exact, learn better through experimental work” (Li-Grining et al., 2010, p.125). Experimenting becomes an amazing tool or approach to construct knowledge and because it is constructed out of excitement and experience, the children own their knowledge and keep it. But a greater percentage of children, ninety percent to be precise, learn more through peer tutoring (Li-Grining et al, 2010). By engaging in education activities with their peers, these children learn more rather than through engagements with the teacher.

The idea of peer tutoring, developed through Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’, informs the dynamics of many approaches to teaching and learning in pre-primary school today. Hannan (1996, p.20), an expert in child learning, builds on Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’ and recommends a “third/third/third” approach to child learning, cultured or founded on the zone of proximal development, with children “spending a third of proximal learning time in friendship pairings/groupings, a third in single gender non-friendship pairings, and a third in mixed gender pairings, so that within one half term everyone works with everyone else.” This works better with activity-based learning as well as other learning approaches which encourage participative approaches to learning or learning which stimulates development both at the individual level and at the classroom level.

From the above, it is clear that there are many individual learning styles in children depending on their context, with some learners being dominant or having abilities in more than one particular style. These dynamics of learning, be it visual or spatial, auditory or kinaesthetic, all have different things to offer or help the child to develop effectively in different areas. Kinaesthetic learners or children who are kinaesthetically oriented learn best when they are physically engaged either by touching, feeling, or doing. Visual learners or those who learn more by seeing information or creating mental pictures of what is being said, learn more in spaces with enhanced resources, while auditory learners prefer to hear information because their auditory senses are more heightened. These learning dynamics would influence the way teaching and learning unfolds in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Framing**

In this study, socio-cultural learning theory was adopted. This theory maintains that learning is an active process in which the context plays an important role (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Goos (2009), learning is not just an individual matter but develops within a social context. Socio-cultural learning theory places the social context at the centre of learning, and that without it the development of the mind is impossible (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2015). This is because learning is mediated. Lantolf (2000) argues that Vygotsky finds an important role for what he calls ‘tools’ in a human’s understanding of the world and of themselves. According to Lantolf (2000), Vygotsky advocates that humans do not act directly on the physical world without the intermediary of tools. Whether symbolic or signs, tools in Vygotsky’s view are ‘artefacts’ created by humans under specific cultural (culture specific) and historical conditions, and as such they carry with them the characteristics of the culture in question (Turuk, 2008). These are applied as aids in solving problems that cannot be resolved in the same way in their absence (Leach & Scott, 2003). In turn, these artefacts also exert an influence on the people who

use them in that they give rise to hitherto unknown activities and hitherto unknown ways of understanding phenomena in the world. Therefore, artefacts are subject to modification as they are transferred from one generation to another. However, each generation tries to rework them in order to meet the needs and aspirations of its people and communities (Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) argues that the role of a psychologist in this context is to understand how human social and mental activity is organised through culturally constructed artefacts. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) maintains that the socio-cultural environment presents the child with a variety of tasks and demands, and engages the child in his world through the tools. In the early stages of development, Vygotsky contend that the child is completely dependent on other people, usually the parents or other family members, who initiate the child's actions by telling him/her what to do, how to do it, as well as what not to do (Turuk, 2008). Parents or other members of the family, as representatives of the culture and the channel through which the culture navigates into the child, actualise these instructions primarily through language. On ways in which children do appropriate the cultural and social heritages, Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner (2015) recount that the child acquires the knowledge through personal contacts and interactions with people as the first step (inter-psychological plane), and thereafter assimilates and internalises this knowledge adding his personal value to it (intra-psychological plane). However, the transition from social to personal property in Vygotsky's view is not a 'mere copying work'. Rather, it is a transformation of what had been learnt through interaction into personal values (Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) submits that this is what also happens in schools. Learners do not merely copy teachers' capabilities; instead, they transform what teachers give them during the processes of appropriation.

According to Turuk (2008), socio-cultural learning theory holds a holistic perspective regarding the act of learning. Kozulin (2003) contains that the socio-cultural learning theory is against the idea of the discrete teaching of skills. Instead, Kozulin (2003) maintains

that meaning should constitute the central aspects of any unit of learning. Any unit of learning should be offered in all its complexity rather than skills and knowledge offered in isolation (Turuk, 2008). Socio-cultural learning theory focuses on the importance of what the learner brings to any learning setting as an active meaning-maker and problem-solver. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the dynamic nature of the interplay between teachers, learners, and tasks and provides a view of learning as arising from interactions with others (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). Ellis (2000) asserts that socio-cultural theory assumes that learning occurs not through interaction, rather, in interaction. The learner first succeeds in performing a new task with the help of another person such as teacher or parents and then internalises the task so that he/she can perform it on his/her own. In this way, the social interaction that takes place is advocated to mediate learning (Turuk, 2008). According to Ellis (2000), the socio-cultural learning theory goes further to say interactions that positively mediate learning are those in which the learners scaffold the new tasks (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). From the foregoing, the theory is adopted to understand ways in which pre-primary school learners learn in the formal education setting.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative approach as the general research methodology. The reason for the choice of the qualitative approach was informed by the nature of the study under investigation. In other words, this approach was thought to be most suitable because it allowed the researcher to develop in-depth accounts of the dynamics of learning among pre-primary school learners in formal and informal education processes. In line with qualitative approach adopted, this study was guided by the interpretive approach which is concerned with meaning making and strives to comprehend the subjective world of human experience (Bailey, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). According to Bailey (2007, p.45), “interpretive

paradigm is based on the premise that human beings create meaning in their worlds and the meaning is socially constructed as a result of interaction with others.” As mentioned earlier, I adopted a qualitative approach which is mainly concerned with understanding the lived experiences of the participants’ worlds and meaning they make of that experience from their perspective as they experience the problem in a real-life situation (Merriam, 2007). In furtherance to the adoption of an interpretive approach and in order to address the key research questions stated above, I adopted a case study design. The aim was to understand holistically the dynamics of learning among pre-primary school learners in formal and informal education processes.

In this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the forces that impact learning among pre-primary school learners in formal and informal education processes. This sampling method was relevant for the study as I wanted teachers and parents with comprehensive knowledge and experience in teaching and parenting to explain the forces that impact on children’s learning. The sample size consisted of six teachers who teach pre-primary level and six parents whose children are between the ages of zero and six years. Semi-structured individual interviews which consist of open-ended questions were developed and used in the gathering of the information. During the interview sessions, I made use of a tape recorder for the recording of the conversations. In addition, I also made use of field notes to take down some important points raised by my participants. After all, Mulhall (2003, p.12) argues that “field notes play a crucial role in connecting researchers and their subjects in the writing of an ethnographic study.” All research ethics were adhered to. For instance, names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms and all participants were given full information about the study before they could give consent. Scholars such as Bernard, Wutich and Ryan (2016) argue that data analysis begins when a researcher is in the field. This is because in the research



field, the researcher has to select important things (data) which are relevant to the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In line with the above narrative, the data was analysed from the field, transcribed and subjected to coding. The themes that emerged from the open coding were analysed using thematic analysis.

## **Findings and discussion**

It is pertinent to say beforehand that the presentation of the findings and discussion is done simultaneous. This is done to ensure that the audience has a better understanding of the study being investigated.

### **Children's readiness to learn**

Parents interviewed reported that children learn when they are physically and mentally ready. For instance, Ms Akon was of the view that most children learn minutes after they are born. She said that when the child is born, the first thing he or she does or learns is how to suck the mother's breast (colostrum). On the first day of the child's birth, the mother will put her breast in the child's mouth. She will even force the breast on the child which initially the child may reject. The child's rejection of the breast is as a result of the child's inability to learn how to suck the breast of the mother. A few hours after the child have been forcefully breastfed by the mother, and recognising breastmilk as the source of his/her food, the child will 'willingly' (ready) look for his/her mother to breastfeed him/her. In furtherance to the above, Ms Akon reported that most times children cry in order to attract the mother's attention to breastfeed him/her. Similarly, Ms Alice said that children displayed interest/attention to learn when a bright and colourful object is brought before them. Children's level of concentration was found to be related to their attention/interest which in turn promoted learning. Ms Alice declared:

If an object which is bright and beautiful is presented to the child, this will attract his/her attention. When attention of *the*

child is brought under a particular focus, this is when children readiness to learn occurs. This is because the child's attention and interest is directed towards the bright object (Interview, 2016).

From the narrative, it is obvious that children like bright and beautiful colours. It is worthy to mention that bright and colourful colours always appeal to children. Children's interests are always brought under specific focus through the presentation of bright and colourful images and objects.

On the issue of a child's level of concentration, Ms Alice said that this plays a crucial role in the children's ability to learn. She observed that children's physical and emotional consciousness have to be brought into focus for a specific period for learning to take place. Ms Idem also mentioned children's readiness to learn in the context of children's physical and emotional stability. She said that before a child learns, he/she should be physically stable. Physical stability is the ability to use his/her hands, legs, eyes, mouth, ears, nose and other vital organs in the body. By implication, it can be reasoned that children with physical disability find it difficult to learn tasks like kicking a ball in the case of a crippled child or drawing pictures in the case of a blind child. It is worthy to mention that for the children to learn, some of the physical features, if not all in the child's body, should be functional and be ready to perform the assigned task. From the physical perspective, for children living with disability their readiness to learn is not always rote because of their inability to perform the task given by the teacher. The majority of the teachers at the pre-primary school level are not trained to handle children living with disability. Therefore, the ability of teachers to prepare these children for learning is doubtful.

Another factor that influence learning among children was emotional stability. Ms Ekpoawan thought that children with emotional instability find it extremely difficult to learn. For instance, if a child is stressed or disturbed emotionally, his/her willingness to

learn diminishes. Similarly, with children who suffer from one kind of abuse or other, their level of readiness to learn either at home or in the classroom waned. From the foregoing, it may be argued that the level of concentration of a child whose family is in crisis is zero, therefore, the child's willingness and readiness to learn is at zero point.

From the perspective of the formal setting, Ms Ekom remarked that children's readiness to learn is very important in the classroom setting. She went on to say that no child learns without getting his/herself ready for the task which is put before him/her. Ms Ekom declared:

As children especially at the preschool arrive in the classroom from their home, most of them are not ready for any serious academic exercise. The majority of them move aimlessly around the class. At this stage, the teacher has to prepare the mind of the children for the day's lesson. This is done through so many ways such as reminding the children what was taught the previous day, telling them short story, singing, among others (Interview, 2019).

Ms Idong said that the issue of children's readiness to learn in the classroom setting is central in the mind of every professional teacher. At the pre-primary school level, the ability of the children to concentrate in the class is very limited. She said teachers always observed that at pre-primary school level, the children's concentration in the class during lesson is between 15 and 20 minutes. With this in mind, a professional teacher should be able to constantly talk to the children to keep their attention. This is because teaching pre-primary school children without ensuring that their level of readiness is ascertained is an exercise in futility.

From the findings, it has been discovered that children's readiness to learn encompasses physical and emotional balancing. In the area of emotional stability, the findings discovered that the children's state of mind should be free from all crises. A child

from an unstable home (whose parents are constantly fighting) or a broken home usually has emotional issues. It is worthy to say that families that are disengaged often manifested in unsupportive and emotionally withdrawn children. In other words, unstable home impacts negatively on the emotions of the child, hence his/her readiness to learn in the class is very rare. The finding is in line with High's (2008) position who reported that children's readiness for learning connote the social and emotional development, including turn-taking, cooperation, empathy, and the ability to express one's own emotions.

### **Children's willingness to learn**

From the data analysis, it was discovered that one of the dynamics surrounding the way pre-primary school children learn is the willingness of the children to learn. Ms Akon said children are complex beings, therefore, they only learn what they want to learn at a particular time. Anything that a child sees as unimportant or which is something he/she is uninterested in, the child will refuse to learn. Ms Akon went on to say that she finds it difficult to convince her children to learn what they do not want to learn. A good example was cited when she told all her children to wash their hands properly each time they wanted to eat. She observed that while other children willingly washed hands each time they wanted to eat, her youngest child, Victor, bluntly refused to wash his hands. Effort to convince him to wash his hands when he wanted to eat was fruitless.

Corroborating Ms Akon's view, Ms Ekpoawan stated:

Children willingness to learn depends on their mind set. Before a child learns, he/she should have interest on the subject. His/her inner mind should confer the importance and potential gain of the subject to the child (Interview, 2019).

In a similar vein, Ms Ime used an African proverb to explain children's willingness to learn in an informal setting. She said:

Children's willingness to learn is akin to leading a cow to the river, but one cannot force the cow to drink from the river (Interview, 2019).

From the above narrative, it is obvious that some children have an independent mind which cannot be easily changed once it is made up. It is common to see four children from the same family behaving differently. The exhibition of diverse behaviour by these children is a function of inherent individual differences. From all indications, this assertion is in sharp contrast to the position held by Vygotsky (1978) who says that socio-cultural perspectives focus on learning from a cultural point of view and emphasise the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge in an individual.

### **Maturity of children**

The issue of children's maturity also emerged from the data analysis. For instance, Ms Ime recounted that for a child to learn effectively and efficiently, he/she should be matured both physically and mentally. Ms Ime also said that a child's physical development determines his/her level of reasoning. A child of either one or two years old cannot reason and learn like a child of about four or five years old. Ms Ime declared:

When my child was about one or two years old, the level of his learning was not as concrete as when he is seven years of age. At one or two years old, he was only able to learn simple things such as identification of his father and siblings. However, when he is about seven years of age, he is not only able to identify his father and other siblings, but he learns about his immediate environment (Interview, 2019).

Ms Ime's view was supported by Ms Ayade who reported that children of two to three years old begin by learning simple things

like alphabets, names of animals, and names of objects, unlike children who are between the ages of seven and ten who are able to learn complex things such as construction of sentences, navigating his/her environment, and understanding complex issues. Ms Ekom went on to say that a child's level of reasoning is a function of his/her chronological age. Pre-primary school children are not capable of seriation, that is, they are not capable of arranging different objects according to the size, and they cannot reason that two is greater than one. The ability to develop this abstract reasoning occurs when children are of age or matured both physically and mentally.

The above assertion was also supported by Ms Akon who confirmed that the way a two year old child conceptualises issues is quite different from the way a ten or twelve year old child does. Children within the age bracket of two and three cannot learn or think on their own. They are usually instructed on what to do by adult members of the family or community. Because of their immaturity, children are always not only guided, but they imitate their parents in all things they learn. Conversely, because of their maturity level, children of ten years of age and above are able to think and learn independently. Although they usually need little or no support from elder member of the family due to their constant questionings, at this stage their level of intelligence is high. Obviously, most of the decisions taken by the children at this level are purely not dependent on their parents or any member of their community.

In the context of a formal setting, Ms Iquo stated that children from the ages of ten to fifteen years old are anxious to learn. They are not only willing and ready to explore some complex issues, but they often ask some questions for clarification. I probed further why children within the age bracket of ten and fifteen years old often ask questions more than children from between two and four years of age. This is what Ms Iquo said:

I want to let you know that the reason why children of ten and fifteen years old usually ask questions more than children of two and four years of age is because, they are mature and their Intelligent Quotient (IQ) is high (Interview, 2019).

Similarly, Ms Kokoeka declared:

Children between the ages of two and four learn simple things because they cannot speak the language clearly. They can only speak few words which at times cannot be understood *by an adult (Interview, 2019)*.

From the quotations, it is obvious that the quality of questions being asked by children between ages of ten and fifteen years old is determined by their level of IQ. From all indications, children whose ages are between two and four years old have a low IQ and also their level of understanding is low. Therefore, a child who is matured learns more than the one who is not. In addition, maturity of a child is also influenced by the way the child speaks. Young children rarely speak well. The inability of the children to speak audibly is as a result of the incomplete development of their vocabularies due to immaturity. Here, the children have limited vocabulary, as a result they can only learn through rote learning or recitation. In a similar vein, although pre-primary school children do count, this does not imply that they have a number concept. They can only memorise and recite the numbers as they are instructed and guided by their teacher. From the findings, it was discovered that children's level of maturity played a critical role in the way they learn. The children's physical, physiological and mental development leads to maturity and these in turn metamorphosise into the children's ability to learn effectively. It was also asserted that the maturity level of the children significantly impacts the way they speak and think. Children between the ages of two and four years old usually use chant and recite methods to learn.

The chanting and reciting methods are used because they are not mature enough to learn through other methods such as description, explanation, discussion, among others. Moreover, their level of vocabulary is limited. However, when the children are more developed physically, physiologically, and mentally, the issue of learning through chanting and reciting is reduced and their usage of language for all forms of communication increases and improves. At

this point, the children are able to learn complex or abstract issues. In literature, children's maturity level was not mentioned as one of the dynamics that impact learning at the pre-primary school level.

### **Parents'/teachers' attitude towards children**

From the data analysis, it was indicated that young children need the support of parents and teachers to learn effectively both at home and in school. Ms Victoria specifically reported that most children between the ages of one and four years old are dependent on their parents to learn in regards to parent's attitude. Children look up to their mothers, fathers or any member of the family for instruction and guidance. They usually listen and abide by whatsoever instructions their parents give to them. Furthermore, she said that children need words of encouragement from their parents in order to learn effectively.

When I asked Ms Ayade the type of encouragement children need, she replied:

I want to tell you that some children are shy and reserved, they rarely talk in the house with other siblings. Therefore, the positive attitude from the parents or any member of the immediate family will ultimately bring out positive learning habits from them (Interview, 2019).

To get a clearer picture of how children need encouragement from their parents to learn, I interrogated Ms Akon to clarify on this area, she answered:

Most of our children are shy to speak when they are in the mist of other children or strangers. They usually cover their mouth or face when a stranger is in their presence. For these children to have confidence to speak or learn, their parents whom they are very close with have to be around them (Interview, 2019).



Confirming the views of Ms Akon and Ms Ayade, Ms Idem added that parents play a crucial role in their children's ability to learn. This is done through the exhibition of an appropriate attitude towards their children. According to Ms Idem, appropriate attitude includes loving, playing, and exhibiting kindness towards children. She went further to observe that parents should be friendly with their children at all times. Aside from that, she said that parents should give serious attention and also listen attentively to their children in order to address any challenge their children may face. Ms Idem concluded that when the children's challenges are listened to and addressed by the parents, it acts as a moral booster for the children to learn.

In another vein, another participant, Ms Ekpoawan, stated that some parents exhibit abusive behaviour towards their children. For instance, abusive words such as 'idiot', 'useless child', and 'stupid', among others, are often used by parents to their children. This singular act adversely affects their children's cognition which invariably affects the children's ability and willingness to learn. In line with the above narrative, Ms Ime said:

Some parents are so pre-occupied with office duties to the extent that they neglect their family's responsibilities. Due to the parents' exhaustion after the office hours, they often ignore their children. In fact, they always shout on their children if they attempt to come close to them. This attitude or behaviour by the parents compels their children to distance themselves from them hence impact negatively the way children learn (Interview, 2019)

From the above analysis, it can be deduced that children learn effectively when they are in a comfort zone with their parents or loved ones. Furthermore, it was established that some parents or loved ones are not only very harsh with their children, but they are abusive. Children appear to be timid and confused when they are around or with the abusive parents hence they forget what they intend to learn. Some children who live with abusive parents usually prefer

a caregiver they trust and can confide in. However, it may be asserted that children are not born with the physical ability to seek proximity to their parents by means of their own movement. Rather, they have a number of attachment behaviours that have the predictable outcome of increasing the proximity of the children to their caregiver. Here, attachment is the emotional bond that exists between two individuals as a result of intimacy. From the interpretive perspective, it can be argued that children whose parents are friendlier, more supportive, more understanding, more affectionate, more generous, and more playful, are more likely to be attached to their parents than those whose parents are not. In addition, the children's attachment towards the parents would result in their positive learning culture.

From the formal setting perspective, Ms Iquo held that teachers' attitude towards children in the classroom is very significant. It is either that learning is promoted when a positive attitude is shown to the children, or impedes learning when negative attitude is exerted towards children. Additionally, Ms Kokoeka observed that teachers' caring behaviour is very important if they want to create a conducive climate for pre-primary school children to learn. She opined that the children's relationship with their teachers is an important predictor of their commitment to their academic work. According to Ms Edem, the relationship exists because children internalise the values and standards of their teachers when the relationship is characterised by mutual respect and admiration.

In addition to Ms CEdem's view, Ms Ukoh reported:

I want to say that as teachers, we should develop a positive attitude with our children because it is a powerful tool that would impact on their lives. When this occurs, the children will have confidence that their teacher care for them. Therefore, they will enjoy being near to their teacher (Interview, 209).

Supporting Ms Ukoh, Ms Idong affirmed:

Madam, children know those who love and care for them. When a teacher express affection and care for her class

children, they will give attention to whatever their teacher says in the class. My belief is that success occurs when the teacher cares for his/her class children (Interview, 2019).

Notwithstanding the Ms Ukoh's opinion, Ms Ekom said that apart from getting close to those teachers who love them, the children also become friendly with teachers who speak very well of them and equally encourage them both in the class and in the field of play. She observed that over time, the children whose teachers exhibited positive attitude/behaviour towards them learnt faster during lessons and performed excellently well in examinations.

From the narrative above, it was established that teachers who are friendly and have an accommodating attitude/behaviour towards their children in the classroom usually influence the children to get close to them. By getting close to their teachers, the children are able to build trust in their teachers. When the trust between teachers and children is established, the children are free to confide in the teachers to find solutions for any challenge they may face in the class.

From the interpretive perspective, it should be argued that a teacher's respect and ethical application of power in the class are key to the children's understanding of love and care. With respect for his/her class children, a teacher can communicate care and love for the children when he/she teaches, plays with, disciplines, marks and corrects their assignments. The teacher's power is based upon the children's admiration and respect for the teacher. Additionally, it may be asserted that when children go to class or do wrong in the class they are willing to adjust their behaviour because they do not want to lose the love and respect of their teacher. It may be out of place to conclude that children need to feel that their teachers love and care for them, want the best for them, and will go out of their way to invest in their success before children will give their full effort and attention in class.

From all indications, this finding is strongly supported by Epstein and Willhite (2017) who argued that there is a tremendous

opportunity for children's social and emotional growth during the pre-school years if a teacher exhibits some degree of friendship with the children. Similarly, in their study, Sandilos, Rimm-Kaufman and Cohen (2017) state that improving learners' relationships with teachers has important, positive, and long-lasting implications for both learners' academic and social development. Additionally, Titsworth, Mazer, Goodboy, Bolkan and Myers (2015) reported that those learners who have close, positive, and supportive relationships with their teachers attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships. In the context of relevance of the theory to the findings, Vygotsky (1978) argued that in order to determine the nature of development in a child, it is important to look at the social setting in which the development happens. Vygotsky believed that children do not develop in isolation, instead in a social matrix. This social matrix is shaped by the interconnection of social relationships and interactions between the children and adults in the society.

In the context of the identification, presentation, and discussion of objects in the informal setting, findings indicated that the parents used language to identify an object for the children. It was revealed that children between the ages of one and three years old used the language spoken by their parents to identify objects such as spoon, ball, among others. It was through the identification of such objects that the children were able to know the object and its usefulness.

Similarly, it was reported that language significantly influenced children's identity. The participants argued that the child's acquisition of the language of a community allowed him/her to become a member of the community in spite of the fact that he/she came from another ethnic group. The ability of a child to speak his/her mother tongue gave him/her sense of oneness and cultural identity.

From the context of the formal setting, findings showed that the teachers in pre-primary schools adopted identification and demonstration as teaching strategies. It was found that children between the ages of one and three years easily learned through

identification of an object. From all indications, for children in pre-primary school to learn effectively and efficiently, the teacher has to demonstrate the task for them to see and imitate. Furthermore, the language the children used assisted them to improve their vocabulary which eventually led to the formation of new ideas and higher levels of comprehension of the subject content. For learning to take place, Nyaguthii (2011) argued children should be encouraged to be involved in putting ideas into language, testing their understanding with peers or teachers, and listening to and making sense of the ideas of other children.

The children's development of literacy skills was also mentioned as one of the potential impacts of language. It was asserted that the children used language to express themselves to other members of the family. From all indications, this was done through the mastery of words and concepts. For instance, as the child grew the language became increasingly complex and he/she began to combine morphemes. However, it was argued that the child uttered a consonant and vowel together hence improving his/her vocabulary and the length of sentence construction became increased. At school or at home, children often played around with one another using language as the vehicle of communication. During this play or any social interaction, children used language to express themselves and this significantly improved their communication skills.

## **Conclusion**

Learning among pre-primary school learners between the ages of three and five was seen as very complicated. This is because the learners' development especially in the context of learning skill is influenced by multidimensional forces. However, it was revealed that children's ability to learn either at home or school bordered on both internal and external dynamics. In the context of external factors, it was discovered that the children's level of maturity and the parents'/teachers' attitude significantly encouraged learning among children. Similarly, in the area of internal factors, the willingness

and readiness of the children to learn comes from the inside, that is, the mind.

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