

# **OPTIMIZING SAFE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO ENHANCE PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN FOR TOTAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Education in Nigeria as well as the larger society today experiencing series of problems of security ranging from radicalization, to kidnapping, abduction, banditry to herdsmen as well as distraction from porous marketing area which causes distractions. It is been debated generally on the idea that children who attended learning facility provided by Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are more likely to be successful when they started schooling even prior their entering age into primary school, among these security problems, looking for a place, neutral and at the same time like home environment to children learning and at the same time their development make parent find early childhood environment soothing the need. This paper therefore tends to look into the concepts of early learning which is otherwise known as pre-primary education (early childhood education) as the basis for learning, at the same time types of classroom environments for learning of these young children and also indoor safety and outdoor safety measures, even characteristics of a safe classroom environment learning as well as sample of daily schedules and routines ( for ages three, four and five years old) among other security measures

**Keywords:** Safety, classroom environment, pre-school children, Total development, Enhancement

## **Introduction**

Education, as generally known takes place from birth all through adulthood, which has become general saying. Therefore, School play has a role to play which is very vital in the provision of training of the mind and as well education of young ones to have skills required for successful living and integration into the society as potential useful members of the community as well become useful to the larger world

The school also has a complex, varied and intricate relationship with the immediate environment. Thus, optimum care must be taken to ensure that the relationships are mutually beneficial to the the receiver of knowledge and all effort must be made to make the school environment a safe for learning of these young learners. (Katniyon&Atumba, 2016)

Child's learning environment being described as a designated area are said to be where children are connected with people-teachers as well as other adults, other children (peers); materials, tools, symbols, ideas knowledge, etc. In other words, it could be described as the physical space in which instruction and learning take place. It is also a place where knowledge and understanding are constructed through social interactions. Again, it has been a place is a place where essential

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information is provided, as well as time, experiences and opportunities for children to respond creatively to their world. (Oduolowu,2011)

The school has been a special social space where education, as well as learning and training and personality development of children who are future assets of the society are founded and run by series of proper training methods, appropriate spacious physical and favorable psychological environment (Raccoon Gang,2018).

Classroom environment of the child as learning environment of the child is composed of different components influencing the children's learning pace. These components according to Balog (2018) include; people and teaching materials, as well as technical tools. Others are learning resources; curriculum, training, and instruction, as well as physical environment/learning space. The people are the individuals that affect the student directly or indirectly through connection or relationship which can contribute to students' growth and success in their career aspect. The teaching materials, technical tools, and learning resources are the teaching materials, highly advanced tools or others instructional resources that are aligned with the curriculum as a part of student learning support. The curriculum, training, and instruction are the core foundations of the learning process; they influence one another and play vital roles to facilitate the flow of knowledge and delivery of instructional content/curriculum. The physical environment/learning space refers to the physical setting of children's learning environment which should bring about positive responses and hold the interests of those children within the classroom setting (Balog,2018)

There are certain factors identified that may affect learning process to include Intellectual factor which refers to the individual mental level which are quite important. Factors of learning are factors owing to faulty working or studying methods, and narrowness of experimental background which may cause adverse effect on the learning process. In other words, Physical factors include health, physical development, nutrition, as well as visual and physical defects, with glandular abnormality. Also, for mental factors are attitudes such as interest, cheerfulness, and open mindedness etc that are quite important in the development of personality. Personal factors on its own, and such include instincts and emotions, and social factors, such as cooperation and rivalry, are directly related to a complex psychology of motivation. An important factor has been regarded as teacher who is also regarded as an individual personality important factor in the class room and learning environment generally. (Mondal 2012)

### **Concept of Classroom Environment**

A learning environment designated for receiving knowledge such this classroom is a space where students and teachers gather together to continue in a serene and safe environment that will allow their knowledge and learning to thrive. A classroom environment consists of many areas that should be taken into consideration. Such as the physical environment: what should be physically placed in the classroom for learning activities to make it better for your students to grow both in mind and brain or what could be added that could aid as a distraction and should not be included? Psychological environment: what kind of mood should the classroom pursue? Think of the music, students individually, your presence as well as tone of voice. (knilt, 2014)

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Classroom of pre-school children as their own environment for learning activities which encompasses learning resources and technology, means of teaching, modes of learning, as well as connections to societal and global contexts. This term also includes human behavioral and cultural dimensions, which also include the vital role of emotion in learning. The learning environment is a composite (that is the multiple components) of human practices and material systems, much as an ecology is the combination of living things and physical environment Contemporary learners deserve learning spaces that meet their individual and collective needs. To meet this challenge, educational leaders must provide physical and cultural environments that are empowering and engaging for successful learning (Orlu,2013)

Classroom as learning environment vary from classroom to classroom and context to context each with unique and peculiar elements. learning environments can be learner-centered; as well as knowledge ecentered; assessment - centered; and community - centered. Learner-centred classrooms specifically designed for the active construction of knowledge by and for children as learner's Knowledge-centred learning environments are those which support students' deep investigations of big ideas through generative learning activities. Assessment-centred classroom environments provide frequent, and ongoing, as well as varying opportunities for assessment, including opportunities for revision and self and peer assessment. Community-centred classroom for learning activities are value collaboration, negotiation of meaning, respect for multiple perspectives around which knowledge is constructed, and connections to the local community as well as culture and race (Raccoon gang (2018)

### **Different Types of classroom (Learning) Environments**

According to Scott Lee (2024) Classroom as Learning environments of the preschoolers can be categorized into three different types or “landscapes” which include the following:

- Physical environment
- Psychological environment
- Emotional environment

#### **Physical Environment for learning**

classroom is composed of a physical learning environment which encompasses all the tangible aspects of a learning space. This includes the physical layout and design of classrooms for different activities from vibrant and playful settings in elementary schools to more structured arrangements in colleges and universities. Physical environments also extend to home and distance-learning setups, where creating a distinct and comfortable learning space free from distraction has become increasingly important.

#### **Psychological Environment**

Also, an effective psychological environment of classroom for various learning activities encourages these young learners to engage with the curriculum and each other in ways that enhance their personal and professional development. By building trust with students and fostering a safe for learning activities as well as inviting space, teachers can create a positive learning environment where students have more opportunities to participate actively, to ask questions without reluctance

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and as well receive feedback. This type of learning environment can enable students to take risks or make mistakes without fear, infact they are to be more confident and without fear of rejection. Learners are more likely to feel comfortable and valued in well-nurtured psychological classroom environments.

### **Emotional Environment**

Emotional classroom environment is also beneficial to these learners, because activities of the School can be stressful at any particular age, which is why students need a positive emotional environment that actually supports and guides their educational path for active learning. Part of creating a well psychological environment's safe space means addressing the emotional environment's the need for self-expression and the freedom to express emotions of an individual. Scott Lee (2024)

There are several things that parents and teachers can do to create better classroom or environments for better and active learning for children and students generally. Below are some useful tips.

#### **In the Classroom**

- a. teachers might consider the layout and structures of the building and how it supports student learning for active engagement. Is there a better way to position chairs and desks so that everyone can focus at the front of the room and see the teacher and the board? Would you rather try semi circles instead of rows create more face-to-face engagement and camaraderie? Don't get scared of trying new things.
- b. teachers may encourage students to take part in creating their own learning environment a part of their active role in classroom learning. For example, students might create artwork to decorate the walls or be involved in open forums where they can ask questions or express concerns. Students will likely feel more connected to their environment if they are connected the shaping the structure
- c. teachers can employ one or more of the five most common educational theories to adapt learning of the lessons to individual students, engaging them and their unique learning needs. (Scott Lee, 2024)

**Early Childhood Care Education:** The period from birth to eight years old is aid to be one of remarkable brain development for children and represents a crucial window of opportunity for education. UNESCO believes that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) that is truly programme of inclusive is much more than just preparation for primary education. It can be the solid foundation for emotional wellbeing and learning throughout life and one of the best and key investments a nation and the society can make as it promotes holistic development, gender (balance), i.e gender equality and social cohesion. (UNESCO,2024)

The concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as The International Standard Classification of Education 2011 (ISCED) which classifies it as a either a school-based or otherwise a facility called institutionalized care and learning for a group of young children which can be centre-based or community-based, as well as home-based. In other world, the general term ECE is often referred to in different terms across different countries. These include Early

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Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Early Childhood Care and Education, Early childhood Development (ECD), Early Childhood Education (ECE), Early Childhood Education, care, and development (ECECD), and early childhood education and development (ECED). Again, ISCED further classifies ECCE into two subcategories by age group which are as follow;

Early childhood Educational Development (in other words Child Care) that is designed for children between ages 0-2 years. This is designed specifically for children in a child care unit and examples are creches and child care services in an organised setup.

**Pre-Primary Education:** This is designed and is otherwise known as pre-school which is defined as the initial stage of organised instruction and primarily to introduce young children between age range of three years to the age of compulsory education (i.e usually between four-six) to a school-type environment, that is, to provide a bridge between home and formal schooling.

Therefore for this paper; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is designed as programmes for children between the age range of zero to the start of starting primary education. an example includes both early childhood educational development (ECED) and pre-primary education.

Early Childhood Educational development (ECED) refers mainly to child care services which meant for children between the age zero to 2 (or) 3

Pre-primary education designed mainly for children who are in pre-school between the range age of 3 to the starting age of primary school education which is noted as officially compulsory age

**Education provider:** An organization (either corporate or an individual) who provides education, either as a main or subordinate unit. Such provider can either be a public educational institution, or private enterprise, non-governmental organization providing such educational facility as well as non-educational public body.

**Formal education:** education that is designed as well as planned specifically intentional through public organizations and recognised private bodies, and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Therefore, formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by those relevant national education or equivalent authorities, e.g., any other institution in cooperation with the national or sub-national education authorities.

**Private institutions:** this designed as well to provide educational programme in educational institutions that are not operated by a public authority but controlled and managed, whether for profit or not, by a private body, such as a non-governmental organisation, or religious body, special interest group, foundation, or business enterprise

Oduolowu, (2011) asserts that the sum period right from birth to toddlerhood (0 to 24 months) and play years (2 to 6 years) is often referred to as early childhood. This is a stage that cogent in human development. Early childhood education therefore, consists of activities and experiences that are intended to effect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into the primary school for learning activities. It is also opined that educational provisions that are informal as well as that are that are available for children from age of zero to six years. Oduolowu(2006) sees this unique

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field as a branch of knowledge and an essential component of all family and programme and arrangement for young children's learning right from birth to the statutory school age of six.

Other different names given to Early childhood education are; Nursery Education (commonly called Nursery school). Others include; Pre-School Education, Kindergarten, Early Childhood Education, and so on. The following terms according to Martin and Dombrowski, (2008) may be used for educational establishments for the following age group:

**Pre-Primary education programme:** this was said to be an institution (commonly called pre-primary school) for children from 6 weeks old to 6 years old. It is an educational childcare facility and service that can enroll child(ren) in before the age of entering primary school. It may also be used to define services for children younger than kindergarten age. The Pre-Primary programme takes place in a facility called Nursery School environment.

Nursery School (UK and US) was said to be for children from 0 months to 5 years old- which is specifically for a facility of pre-primary educational child care institution.

Daycare (US) this is designed for children from 0 months to 2½ years old- held in a Nursery School, but can also be called "a child care service" or a "crèche (Martin and Dombrowski, 2008)

In Nigeria, it is referred to as Pre-Primary Education as contained in the national policy on education (1998) which is education given in educational institution to children age 3 plus to 5 years of age prior the age of entering primary school. (Oladebinu,2012).

While early childhood education given to children from birth to the school age of six. It is seen as a unique field of branch of knowledge and an essential component of all family and programme arrangement for young children from birth to the statutory school age of six (Oduolowu,2006)

**Health and safety:** children's health and safety should always come first. It is the responsibility of the teacher to oversee the building, room, and playground and equipment safety. The environment should be a place where child can feel safe and feel comfortable. Young children should never be left unsupervised. Potential hazard should be greatly minimized in young children's learning environment:

Learning environment is divided into Indoor and outdoor safety

a. **Indoor safety should include:**

- (i) Covering all electrical outlets except when they are not in use
- (ii) Extension cords should not be strung together across pathways
- (iii) Children must be supervised when using any electrical appliance.
- (iv) All chemical should be put out of reach of children
- (v) Children be taught to recognized common symbols indicating danger
- (vi) Sharp object such h as razorblade, knife and medicine should also be put out of reach of children
- (vii) First-Aid kit must be available for treating minor injury

**b. Outdoor safety should include:**

- (i) fencing is important, so that children will not stray away, the terrain must not be slippery
- (ii) shades and shelter-trees must be planted and where there is no tree, try to create shade where children can stand to play
- (iii) the playground should be located near the classroom for easy supervision.
- (iv) The equipment should be made sturdy and safe
- (v) There should be enough space to accommodate group activities and private places for children when they need time to themselves
- (vi) The ground should be grassy for children's game and large muscles activities
- (vii) There should be balance of sunny and shady areas

Sand, water, animal and plant life are important parts of natural world that should be included outdoors (Frost, worthman,& Reitel, 2005, quoted by Oduolowu, 2011)

**Child-friendly environment:** children must feel excited and motivated by the learning environment: children must feel excited and motivated by learning environment it should be a place that will encourage growth, exploration and risk-taking. Children should imbibe respect, independence and accountability. They should be responsible for keeping the classroom clean and organized. It should be children's environment and not the teacher. it should be a place t5hat reflects interest and needs of children. Materials and activities that of interest to children should be included in the environment.

**Comfortable:** Other than environment to be safe, it should also be comfortable. The temperature should be right, not too cold or too hot. There should be cross ventilation to allow fresh air circulation and light should be adequate. Children should be able to use work and play areas easily and comfortably. They should be feel comfortable being themselves and not worrying about whether or not they are good enough.

**Beautiful, attractive and welcoming:** children should feel welcome when they enter the learning environment. It should be warm and exciting .it should be designed to make it inviting to the children as well as attractive environment to them.

**Space:** learning space must be large enough to accommodate gathering of different group of children where teacher and children can meet for class meeting to share information and do some planning.

**Accessible:** a good classroom learning environment should be accessible to all levels of learning, says Oduolowu,(2011). The room should free from obstruction. Teacher should plan the environment to allow children to move from place to place in orderly manner. Pathways should be wide enough for children to walk on without bumping into other children or interfering with the work and play of others

**Functional and Purposeful :** the learning environment should be a place for children. It should be a place where they can be very independent. It should be a place where they will successful.

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They should be able to learn by themselves and be responsible for everything that they do if it is they can do themselves.

**Storage:** here should be a careful selection, storage and display of learning of materials in the learning environment. Materials should be closed to where they will be used. Materials such as pencil, scissors, markers, sharpeners, etc that are used regularly should be readily accessible near the teachers table where they are used. In contrast, those that rarely used can be put away and retrieved when needed. NOTE: materials many pieces or small in size can be stored in plastic containers

**Sound:** a generally noisy environment from which children cannot get relief is not conducive to the overall cognitive development and academic achievement or healthy development of children. If a particular learning environment is noisy, there will be unproductive and disruptive behaviour on the part of the children as a result of congestion

**Equipment and Material Size:** furniture, tools and equipment should be appropriate for the size and age of the children using them. Children’s feet should be able to touch the floor when sitting on the chairs. Their knees should not bump into the tables. If not, they will experience serious discomfort. equipment should not have sharp edges and materials should be non-toxic (Oduolowu,2011)

In a specific manner, designated environment for learning not only for children but also for adults, and it could be large or small, it could be large and also be spacious for children to run around and it could be small to create a quiet atmosphere where children can be intimate and interact:

- (i) child-to- child:it could be a quiet atmosphere where children can be intimate and interact
- (ii) child-to –adult: designated environment for learning not only for children but also for adults ...
- (iii) child-to-materials:the materials must be age appropriate to suit children’s learning

### **What to Consider for Safety of Learning Environment**

- 1.Not Near Market: children’s learning environment must not near market in order to prevent noise that may be distraction for them
2. not near heavy industrial place
3. not under power cable
4. not near busy road
5. Indoor environment (indoor space)
6. The environment is flexible; therefore, you turn it to music ground,
7. ventilation, lightening: children are not to be kept in dark, correct temperature, heat of sun, put ceiling to prevent sun,

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8. flooring (which should be appropriate, other appropriate materials for flooring and the floors must be covered (tiles, carpet or mats ), depending on your economic power ... the floor must be covered

9. walls of indoor – colours that are bright and over stimulating should not be used but use neutral colours

10. there must also be indoor space

11. cleaning supplies must also be provided, such as mop, brooms, extra furniture

12. administrative materials such as log book, register

13. storage and display: for display motto and mission of the school should be displayed, also organogram of the school, missionary works and pictures and maps of the country...there must be a Place where you display these

### **Characteristics of A Safe Learning Environment**

What a normal learning environment should look like is what Katnison & Atumba(2016) regard as sustainable safe learning environment for children's education, What this normal learning environment should look like are;

- (i) Walls and floors of classrooms, toilets are clean/scrubbed at least every day.
- (ii) Such school has access to clean water for drinking and hand washing
- (iii) Has consideration for gender by having separate and private restrooms for boys and girls
- (iv) Windows to have netting in keeping away insects
- (v) There are two exits in all the rooms occupied by learners
- (vi) Security measures (vigilant staff, padlocks, locked doors) are in place to protect children from unauthorized visitors. Fire equipment are also to be present in every building
- (vii) Play areas are enclosed by a fence
- (viii) Large equipment such as lockers and book shelves are firmly anchored to the ground, knowing that toddlers enjoy climbing
- (ix) Rules are based on developing appropriate expressions, so as to promote children's cooperation and understanding of how to use play equipment safely
- (x) Children are taught positive ways of expressing anger or frustration
- (xi) Teachers and school management carryout regular risk assessment. Any amount of time and effort are worthwhile, even if it spares only one child from injury. Fire equipment are also present in every building
- (xii) Teachers and caregivers supervise children and look out for potential hazard and risk
- (xiii) Teachers who have training in life skills, child-centered and participatory teaching methods, peer education and gender sensitivity

### **Sample of daily schedules and routines (three, four and five years old)**

7:00am-8:30am arrival and free play, individual time with teacher and each child

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8:30am-9:00am opening: prayer, songs and dance

9:00am-9:30am activity time

Small group, large group and individual time with teacher to talk about what to do and what they want to do. It is stimulating activities

9:30am-10:00am washing hands for snacks, snacks and clean up

10:00am-11:00am indoor and outdoor play, walks, small group and large group activities.

11:00am-12:00am toileting, washing hands, share time with books, picture, quiet conversation, listening to music, finger plays, songs, stories, reading books

12:00pm-12-45pm naptime or rest

12pm-1:00pm wake-up time, put on shoes, toileting, getting ready for snacks, snack and clean up

1:00-1:45pm table games, stories, songs and music

1:45pm-200pm closing and getting ready to go home

In summary, a safe learning environment for children must have the following;

- it must be accessible to all children, i.e must have inclusive programme for children of all categories, including children with challenges, abino, disabilities, etc
- must be comfortable, i.e there should be enough sit, in other words must be child friendly.
- Must be child-oriented, i.e having the child in mind when putting structures in place
- Must be flexible, you can restructure it any time
- Age appropriate in term of facilities and material
- Entry and exit must be comfortable

## **Conclusion**

As it is believed that a learning environment with accessible and utilizable facilities will guarantee effective teaching and learning process as well as academic achievements of of pre-school children. Consequently, there is the ardent need for the government and relevant stakeholders in the education sector to intensify efforts towards creating friendly environments that are learner-centre and at the same time safe because children are deeply influenced by their learning environment, other than learning from their parents at home and other places, school remains the most frequent hours that young learners acquire learning and pre-school environment is such a place for such and no efforts should be spared to make the school environment a safe place for learning

## **Recommendations**

1. There should be a training and retraining for teachers and supporting staff on security plans and drills

2. Teachers should be encouraged to maintain alertness for suspicious activity and to report same
3. Teachers and school authorities should plan safety drills with children in advance. Also, the teachers who are the link between knowledge and learning in our educational system should be availed opportunities for regular training; mandatory professional career development and refresher courses to enable them have a good grasp of the principles and philosophies of education. This will help to normalize the teaching and learning environment and ensure quality assurance in the education of young children
4. Early Childhood Care and Education centres should have clearly defined perimeters for schools through the use of fences, gates, environment designs, signage and other professional security measures.
5. Regular monitoring, supervision as well as evaluation of school activities should be carried out by management in order to assess participation, involvement, and understanding of the students and offer support to those teachers also who lack competencies required to improve the learning situation and environment.
6. The education sector should be appropriately funded to enable the sector acquire the necessary facilities to make the learning environment very adaptable, useful and viable to meet the educational goals of Nigeria
7. Emphasis the importance of greetings and challenging strangers and reporting suspicious individuals around school environment
8. Community participation in the administration of schools should be encouraged so as to promote a harmonious school-community relationship that will enhance the security of staff, learners and learning facilities.
9. Verify the identity of service personnel and vendors visiting the school, including those coming into the school compound and premise.

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