

**TEACHERS COMPETENCE AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES AS  
PREDICTOR OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S WRITING  
SKILLS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The study determined the influence of teacher competence on pre-school children's writing skills and assessed the composite contribution of classroom literacy practices to pre-school children's writing skills in the study area. It investigated the relative contribution of teacher competence and preschool children's writing skills and examined the relationship between relationship between classroom literacy activities and preschool children's writing skills. in the study area. These were with a view to providing information on the influence of teacher competence and classroom practices on pre-school children's writing skills in Southwestern Nigeria. The study used a mixed methodology that combined correlational and observational design. For this investigation, three self-designed instruments were used. All of the preschoolers and their teachers in Southwest Nigeria made up the study's population. 120 preschool teachers and 600 preschoolers made up the study's sample population. The investigation used a multi-stage sampling technique. Through a voting process, three states were chosen at random from a total of six in the southwest of Nigeria. The basic random sample technique was used to choose one senatorial district from each state and one LGA. Then, using a stratified sample technique based on school ownership, 20 preschools were chosen from local governments. Ten preschools were chosen at random from both private and public schools. Depending on whether pre-primary classrooms were available, two pre-primary school teachers from each chosen school were chosen. Based on the requirements that they are between the ages of 3 and 5 and enrolled in preschool, 20 children were chosen. The instruments used were: "Teacher Writing Competence Rubric" (TWCR), "Engagement in Prewriting Activities Checklist" (EPAC), "Classroom Literacy Activities Checklist" (CLAC) and "Preschool Children Writing Skill Rubric" (PCWSR). Data were subjected to reliability test using intra class Correlation Coefficient and reliability index yielded 0.80, 0.73, 0.80 and 0.72 respectively. Multiple linear regressions, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used as inferential statistics to analyze the data. The result revealed positive medium-to-moderate relationship between teacher writing competence and preschool children's writing skills ( $r = .356$ ). It also indicated the composite contribution of classroom practice to pre-school children's writing skills of 6.3% and statistically significant ( $F_{(2,597)} = 19.975$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ). The classroom literacy activities had the relative contribution to the pre-school children's ( $r = -.251$ ;  $t = -6.288$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) while engagement in pre-writing activities had the contribution of ( $r = .053$ ;  $t = 1.334$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, the relative contribution of engagement in pre-writing activities to the pre-school children's writing skills was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.334$ ;  $p = 0.18$ ), while that of the classroom literacy activities was found to be statistically significant ( $t = -6.288$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The study concluded that teacher competency and classroom literacy practices have been found to be the factors that could influence the writing skills of preschool children. Therefore, it was recommended that training and retraining programs on writing skills for preschool teachers are needed to keep

them in touch with effective teaching strategies that could enhance the writing skills of preschoolers.

### **Introduction**

Teacher competence plays a vital role in shaping preschool children's writing skills, a foundational aspect of early literacy development. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of teachers in a child's development since they foster an environment of emotional support and act as learning architects. Teachers are critical components of every educational business and teachers' quality determine the system's effectiveness. A good teacher is necessary for an excellent education to exist. Odewumi, Ajibewa, and Ajibade (2015) assert that teachers determine educational quality since it affects students' overall growth. There is ample evidence that teachers are the single most critical factor in determining how a school will be for children. For instance the teachers are to prepare children for examinations and motivating them to enhance their social, personal, and professional skills to the best of their abilities (Machin & Richardson (2015). In addition, the teacher is crucial to a preschool child's writing skills.

Many teachers have traditionally been regarded as noble human beings and as children's second parents. Since pre-schoolers spend the majority of their time in school being watched, teachers typically have an impact on them. As a result, teachers are in a position to aid learners in comprehending what is being taught. Teachers classify efforts to develop learners' writing as both a social and meaningful activity and a technical skill. As a result, researching teacher competence as predictor of preschool children's writing skills is crucial, if teachers are to help children understand what is being taught, particularly in writing. Teacher writing competence is very essential to be investigated.

Preschool children's writing skills are also aided by classroom practices, which relate to the pre-writing activities that children engage in prior to the introduction of actual writing. Engagement in pre-writing activities and classroom literacy activities are examples of classroom practices. Engagement in pre-writing activities is the involvement of preschool children in the activities that can prepare children fingers for writing. It could also contribute to the child's capacity to handle and use a pencil. These pre-writing activities include: drawing, colouring, moulding, painting, tracing, beading, cutting and other letter-related activities. These are some finger dexterity activities that children can participate in. As vital as pre-writing skills activities are, observation has shown that some schools do not implement

them. If teachers do not present these activities to preschool children, it may affect their legibility in the future.

To back up this claim, Mulvahil (2018) claims that pre-writing activities for pre-schoolers not only help them acquire the shape and structure of the letters in the alphabet but also serve a range of other reasons. Pre-writing activities, according to Dinehart (2015), can help children develop the necessary finger and hand strength, postural control to maintain their posture while seated, visual motor integration abilities, attention span, and focus. Along with motivation, additional necessary skills include motor planning, cognitive awareness of the work, bilateral coordination (one hand holds the paper while the other writes), a good pencil grip, good object handling, and the ability to judge the size and shape of an object using visual perception. Children must have all of these in order to write well and legibly.

Studies on the predictive impact of teachers' writing competence on preschool children's writing skills are sparse, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. For instance, research by Annika (2019) demonstrated how early assistance, stimulation, toys, and books can affect children's reading and writing development. It is crucial to ascertain whether teachers' writing competence can forecast preschool children's writing. According to observations, some preschool teachers are not early childhood professionals, and some are even high school dropouts; this means that trainers who are to help pre-schoolers develop their writing skills are not early childhood educators if they lack the requisite experience; they may have little or no knowledge of how to direct and introduce basic pre-writing activities to help the children write legibly. Lack of professional experience among preschool teachers is another problem (Gündomuş 2018). In order to make sure that all children receive adequate help, Gunilla and Norling (2018) claimed that qualified knowledge about the development of writing, as well as how obstacles might be avoided, is crucial. This explains why the teacher is so important in helping preschool children develop their writing skills.

Classroom literacy activities assist children in gaining early pre-writing skills that will help them write legibly. These tasks involve labeling various classroom objects, retelling stories, and writing the alphabet in both upper- and lowercase. Children's interest in texts and success in reading, according to Oludipe (2009), are all correlated with reading aloud to them, engaging them in phonemic awareness exercises and exposing them to the alphabet. Kennedy (2019) continued by stating that because early literacy skills continue to produce and promote literacy development, it is important to intentionally develop children's oral language, vocabulary knowledge, understanding, and writing skills. However, research on how

classroom literacy activities affect young children's writing skills is scant or non-existent. It is crucial to investigate how literacy-related classroom activities affect the writing skills of preschool children in Southwestern Nigeria.

Developing writing skills of preschool children require special attention since it aids children to write legibly and neatly in books or other writing materials also impacting their later development and life prospects. These writing skills are also necessary for children to actively participate in school activities in order to get the most out of their current and future academic endeavours. However, observation revealed that many children have bad writing because it is difficult for them to write legibly. This poor handwriting can cause an individual to miss crucial events in their lives, as well as frustration and lack of willingness to participate in writing tasks, resulting in poor academic performance.

Research has been done on the effect of teacher background training on secondary school students writing skill (Khalid, Yasmin & Azeem 2011, Nadeem 2011). Some even combined variables such a teacher background and teacher experience ((Kishiwar, 2016)) but there has not been enough research to identify whether teacher competence and classroom practices can influence the writing skills of preschool children. This study did that.

The main objective of this study is to determine the influence of teacher competence and classroom practices on pre-schoolers' writing skills in Southwestern Nigeria. The precise goals are to:

#### **Purpose of the Study**

1. examine the influence of teacher writing competence on preschool children's writing skills in the study area;
2. assess the relative contribution of classroom practice variables to preschool children's writing skills in the study area;

A research question was raised and one hypotheses was formulated and tested at 0.05 levels of significances

**Research Question:** What is the relative contribution of classroom practice variables (engagement in pre-writing and classroom literacy activities) to preschool children's writing skills? The data collected was subjected to inferential statistics of multiple linear regressions and Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer this question. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Relative contributions of engagement in pre-writing activities and classroom literacy activities to pre-school children’s writing skills

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)			Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	32.438	2.083		15.569	.000			
Engagement in Pre-writing Activities	.076	.057	.053	1.334	.183	.025	.055	.053
Classroom Literacy Activities	-.258	.041	-.251	-6.288	.000	-.245	-.249	-.249
<b>Dependent Variable:</b> <i>Pre-School Children’s Writing Skills</i>								
* <i>Significant at 0.05 level</i>								

Table 1 shows the relative contributions of classroom practice variables (engagement in pre-writing and classroom literacy activities) to preschool children’s writing skills. The table reveals that classroom literacy activities had the highest unique relative contribution to the preschool children’s writing skills (= -.251; t = -6.288; p 0.05), while engagement in pre-writing activities had the least unique relative contribution ( =.053; t = 1.334; p > 0.05). Meanwhile, the relative contribution of engagement in pre-writing activities to the preschool children’s writing skills was not statistically significant (t = 1.334; p = 0.18), while that of the classroom literacy activities was found to be statistically significant (t = -6.288; p = 0.00). Based on these results, it can be claimed that classroom literacy activities has highest relative contribution.

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between teachers’ writing competence and preschool children’s writing skills. In testing this hypothesis, the data collected was subjected to the inferential statistic of Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in the table 2

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation of relationship between teachers’ writing competence and pre-School children’s writing skills

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	sig	Remark
Teacher Writing Competence	24.73	4.81	600	.356*	.000	Significant
Pre-school Children’s Writing Skills	26.15	5.99				
* <i>Significant at 0.05 level</i>						

Table 2 shows a positive *medium-to-moderate* relationship between teacher writing competence and preschool children's writing skills ( $r = .356$ ). Furthermore, it indicates that upward movement or improvement in teacher writing competence will lead to an upward trend or improvement in preschool children's writing skills, meaning that teacher writing competence influences their writing skills. The table shows a moderate relationship between teacher writing competence and preschool children's writing skills is statistically significant ( $N = 600$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). Based on this result, null hypothesis was equally rejected, while the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between teachers' writing competence and preschool children's writing skills was accepted.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The result reveals that classroom literacy activities had the highest relative contribution to preschool children's writing skills, while engagement in prewriting activities had a minor relative contribution. This outcome is consistent with the research of Zhang, Hur, Diamond and Powell (2015) which demonstrates a substantial relationship between prewriting activities and preschoolers' writing abilities. It means that if there is room for some classroom activities and prewriting activities that can aid children's writing skills, such classroom literacy is reached. When a classroom provides activities related to literacy, it will automatically translate to literacy skill development in children in areas like listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, engagement in prewriting activities aids the development of hands. Of course, when the children are engaged in such activities, the expectation is that their writing competence will be improved. It could be the reason why this result shows that engagement in prewriting activities contributes jointly with classroom literacy activities.

Classroom literacy also has to do with activities to develop language skills in children. For example, when children are engaged in literacy activities such as teaching children to write letters of the alphabet and reading story books, it makes them realize that things that are read from books are also things that are written down, and this can also translate to their competence in writing.

The result also revealed positive medium-to-moderate relationship between teacher writing competence and preschool children's writing skills ( $r = .356$ ). The result is consistent with Kishwar (2016), who found a significant influence between teachers' professional competence and students' academic achievements at the secondary school level. The study is

also in contract with sociocultural theory which believed that having competent adults or knowledgeable adult around children is related to the highest levels of development; this means that a child's highest degree of cognitive development depends on the help of someone more skilled than they are (such as an adult or a peer). Young children gain knowledge by observing and discussing adults' writing and environmental print. The implication is that children learn through what they see; they learn through the model, they see their teachers as a model, and when a teacher displays good competence in how he or she puts down his writing on the chalkboard, children would want to copy as the teacher writes on the board.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the finding, a positive relationship exists between teacher writing competence and preschool children's writing skills. This finding proved that some pupils write legibly because their teachers have developed particular skills that allow them to write clearly on chalkboards. Background training and writing competence are strong factors that jointly contribute to the writing skills of preschool children. The classroom practice variables, when combined, have a positive relationship with the preschool children's writing skills.

### **Recommendations**

1. Training and retraining programs on writing skills for preschool teachers are needed to keep them in touch with effective teaching strategies that could enhance the writing skills of preschoolers.
2. Also, the preschool classroom environment should be equipped with literacy-rich materials that can aid the writing skills preschool children's writing skills, making them more legible.

### **Special Acknowledgements**

The authors of this article warmly acknowledge TETFund for sponsoring this research. Also, the authors acknowledge the comments provided by University TETFund Desk Officer and CERAD Desk Officer, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti). We appreciate your contributions to this study.

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