

Enhancing Social Competences among Preschool Children in Anambra State

Obi-Okeke, C. A & Igbo, C. A

Department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management
Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The major purpose of the study was to identify ways of enhancing social competence among preschool children in Anambra State. Specifically, the study determined ways of enhancing negotiation competence, cooperation competence and compromise competences among preschool children. The study adopted descriptive survey research design and was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of this study was made up of 2,315 subjects which was made up of 2269 preschool teachers and 46 lecturers of Home Economics & Early Childhood Education in higher institutions of Anambra state. The total sample frame for this study was 386 subjects made up of 340 preschool teachers and 46 lecturers. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The data for this study was analyzed using mean. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability. Based on the data analyzed, the study identified 12 ways of enhancing negotiation, 9 ways of enhancing cooperation and 11 ways of enhancing compromise among preschool children in Anambra State. The study among others recommended that administrators and proprietors of preschools must ensure that these institutions provide regular opportunities for child initiated social activities, adequate play materials, time and all favorable conditions that will enable a child develop social competence.

Key words: Social, Competence, Preschoolers, Negotiation, Compromise, Cooperation.

Introduction

Preschool children are children between the ages of 2-5 years. The most critical aspect of this stage of life phase however, is children's adaptation to new environment. Sarah, (2005) enumerated the following as the social characteristics of preschool children: easily encouraged; affectionate;

demonstrate intense fear, joy, anger, love; may show off and demand attention; display independence and engage in pretend play; develop friendship; easily encouraged. This period of adaptation often entails a series of transition in the social life of these children as they move from the familiarity of their home environment

to new public places, notably, kindergarten, crèche and preschool. To achieve their balance, Corcoran (2012) noted that young children need to develop certain social competences, some of which look inwards towards themselves and some of which look to the other individuals in their group.

Social competence is the ability to get along well with other people. It encompasses social, emotional and intellectual skills, and conduct needed to thrive as a member of the society. More specifically; Kostelnik, Gregory, Soderman and Whiren, (2012) breaks the simplistic understanding into seven components that integrate knowledge, values and skills as they relate to self and others which are social values(e.g. caring, helpfulness, flexibility, honesty); positive self-identity (e.g. self-awareness, sense of competence, sense of worth); interpersonal skills (e.g. communication ideas and needs, adjust behaviour to fit societal circumstances, acknowledge other people's right; self-regulation (e.g. control impulses, delay gratification, resist peer pressure); planning and decision making (e.g. make choice, solve problems, plan ahead); cultural competence (e.g. recognizes and question unfair treatment, demonstrates knowledge, respect for individuals of varying backgrounds); intelligence (e.g. recognizes emotion in self and others, demonstrates empathy, gives and receives emotional support).

Social competences require improved complex socio-cognitive and emotional knowledge, behaviour and competences such as negotiation,

sharing, helping, cooperating and compromising (Encyclopedia of Children health, 2013). This study focused on compromise, cooperation and negotiation competences.

Negotiation is a method by which people settle differences. It is a process by which agreement is reached while avoiding argument. The point of negotiation is to try to reach agreement without causing future barrier to communication. Gwen (2018) is of the view that preschoolers find it difficult to learn social skills such as taking turn, negotiation and conflict resolution, he advised that these social skills can be taught and enhanced by modelling them, encouraging the preschoolers to practice them and engage them in pretend plays. Children need to know what these skills look like and they need to practice them to get better at making and keeping friends. According to Family Education (2017), children who learn to negotiate have enhanced confidence, self-esteem, empathy and social relationship skills, moreover that negotiation involves empathy and compromise. On the hand, Halil (2001) stated that language development, communication skills, allowing & encouraging children to solve their problems improves their negotiation skills and social competence. Military Families (2015) also suggested that setting rules, giving every child a say, and allowing children make suggestion for solution helps them learn negotiation, compromise and resolving conflicts among themselves.

Compromise is reaching an agreement in which each person or group gives up something that was wanted in order to end an argument or a dispute (The Hanen Center, 2011). Compromise is a concept of finding agreement through communication, through a mutual acceptance of terms—often involving variations from original goal or desire. Family-Times (2016), defined compromise as the ability to make concession, or adjust our position or opinion to reach a settlement or an agreement, and further pointed out that, modelling, teaching empathy & compassion, and plays are ways improving compromise, negotiation and cooperation among young children. Pickle-burns (2014) noted that though compromise may be difficult but it remains an important skill for lifelong impact on children relationship. On ways of enhancing compromise competence, Darlene (2017) identified turn taking as a very vital skill for compromise while Family Times (2016) and Andrew (2018) agreed that care givers, adults and older children in the home are the best model for teaching how to behave and interact with people, and that families should make sure that that there is enough caring, kindness and generosity in the home. Cheryl (2018) noted that manners can be role played and practiced. Pretend play, emotion charade games and teaching empathy are important ways the children learn about negotiation, compromise, cooperation and form friendship (Family times, 2016) and (Gwen, 2018).

Cooperation is any activity that involves the willing interdependence of two or more people. It should be distinguished from compliance, which may represent something that was wanted in order to end an argument or a dispute (Parenting Resource, 2010). Cooperation is about working together and helping others. When kids cooperate, they have more optimistic social interactions and are more capable to make and retain friends. Parents and teachers can help their children improve the skills needed for a lifespan of friendships and positive social connections by training and encouraging cooperation skills early. Parenting resources (2010) supported by Kids (2018) agreed that helping kids to understand the meaning of cooperation, praising children's effort to cooperate, role playing cooperation, doing chores together and teaching children turn taking are some of the ways of helping preschool children learn cooperation, more so that providing non-threatening environment, grouping and pairing of children, watching out for bullying and rejection, and providing opportunity for pretend play are ways cooperation can be enhanced among preschool children. Deborah (2013) also noted that cooperation is enhanced among children by encouraging team work, communication and collaboration. According to Dodge (2006), children who are rejected by peers at early stage shows higher rate of antisocial behaviour four years later. Kids (2018) identified some tips on improving young children's social competences to include modeling cooperation, role

playing cooperation and praising cooperation effort.

Social competences are important for preschool children because it influences peer acceptance and friendship, school adjustment and success. Corcoran, (2012) stated that children who are not socially competent find it difficult to be easily accepted by their peers because they interrupt others, converse disconnectedly, draw attention to themselves and lack emotional understanding such as identifying the emotions of others, reading social cues and expressing and controlling their own behaviors. They may also lack self attributes of confidence, self-esteem and autonomy. They find it difficult to negotiate and compromise; they find it difficult to take turns, share toys and other play materials; their plays are often short, and marked with squabbles; some are aggressive and use force on others to have their way. Katz & McClellan (1997) purported that children who do not have a basic level of social competence between the age of (2^{1/2} – 5) may have trouble with relationship when they are adults. Adrian (2010) in a study on social competence and its relationship on peer preference reported that there is greatest peer acceptance in children who are socially competent, and that children are familiar with their preferred peers on several dimension of social competences. In another study carried out by Bree, Malinda and Eric (2012) on preschool children's conflict and social competence, it was discovered that preschool children peer

conflict is positively associated with their social competence.

Considering the lifetime significances of social competences in the life of the preschoolers, it becomes necessary that the current study was carried out for the purpose of enhancing social competence among preschool children. Children may be not born socially competent, but they can be assisted to develop social competences. Early childhood/preschool education and families must address and provide more structures for enhancing young children's social competences via providing the time, opportunities and support for social interaction (Corcoran, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out possible ways to be adopted for enhancing social competence among preschool children in Anambra state. Specifically, this study determined

1. ways of enhancing negotiation competence among preschool children in Anambra state.
2. ways of enhancing cooperation competence among preschool children in Anambra state.
3. ways of enhancing compromise competence among preschool children in Anambra state.

Research Questions

1. what are the ways of enhancing negotiation competence among preschool children?
2. What are the ways of enhancing cooperation competence among preschool children?

3. What are the ways of enhancing compromise competence among preschool children?

Methodology

Design of the study: A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study to gather information from the preschool teachers, Early childhood education lecturers and Home Economics lecturers of higher institutions of Anambra state on the possible ways of enhancing social competence among preschool children in Anambra state.

Area of the study: The area studied was Anambra state. Educationally, Anambra has six zones which include: Aguata educational zone, Awka educational zone, Ihiala educational zone, Nnewi educational zone, Ogidi educational zone, and Onitsha educational zone. According to Basic Education Profile, National & Regional Statistics, Anambra state has the highest enrolment of preschool children in preschools with the net enrolment of 111,163 (Universal Basic Education Commission, Awka, 2010).

Population of the study: The population for this study was made up of preschool teachers, and lecturers from early childhood education and home economics from the higher institutions in the state. Anambra state has a total no of 2,269 preschool teachers (National Bureau of Statistics - NBS, 2016). Departments of home economics and early childhood education in Anambra state has a total no of 46 lecturers consisting of 13 home economics lecturers and 3 early

childhood lecturers from Nwafor Orizu college of education, Nsugbe; 8 lecturers from early childhood education, Nnamdi Azikiwe university , Awka; 16 lecturers from early childhood education & home economics departments of Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze; and 6 early childhood education lecturer from Odumegwu Ojukwu university, Uli. (Source: Personnel department Nwafor Orizu College of Education; unizik.ed.com; Statistics Department, FCE (T) Umunze).

Sample and sampling techniques: The total sample frame for this study was 386 preschool teachers and lecturers from departments of home economics and early childhood education of higher institutions in Anambra state. Total sample of 340 preschool teachers were obtained through stratified random sampling from the six educational zones of Anambra state. The entire population of the lecturers (46) was used.

Instrument for data collection: Questionnaire was used to collect the information on the possible ways of enhancing social competence among preschool children in Anambra state. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability which a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained for the instrument.

Method of Data collection: The three hundred and eighty-six (386) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by hand by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. The administration

and retrieval of the instrument lasted for a period of four weeks. Out of the 386 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 369 copies were completely filled and retrieved. This represents 95.4 percentage rate of return.

Method of data analysis: The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, cut off point of 2.50 was used

for decision making. For the research questions, the items with the mean values of 2.50 and above were accepted as ways of enhancing social competences among preschool children while any item with the mean value below 2.50 was rejected.

Findings

Table 1: Mean Rating & standard deviation of the responses of preschool teachers and lecturers on the ways of enhancing negotiation competences among preschool children. Teachers (N=325), lecturers (N=44)

S/N	Ways of enhancing negotiation	X ₁	X ₂	X _G	SD	RK
1	Provide opportunity for good listening & concentration.	3.51	3.86	3.67	0.55	A
2	Provision of materials that encourage language development & communication skills.	3.75	3.73	3.74	0.50	A
3	Provide opportunity for children to solve problems themselves.	3.69	3.67	3.68	0.50	A
4	Encourage the children to verbally express thought & feeling	3.63	3.64	3.64	0.60	A
5	Avoid blaming anybody during negotiation	3.42	3.41	3.42	0.63	A
6	Never allow physical and verbal aggression	3.38	3.42	3.40	0.62	A
7	Set ground rules for negotiation	3.59	3.59	3.59	0.68	A
8	Let each person have a say	3.48	3.66	3.57	0.60	A
9	Let each person suggest a solution	3.37	3.56	3.47	0.65	A
10	Ask each person to suggest a solution	3.46	3.47	3.47	0.61	A
11	Help them to analyse the solution and put them into effect	3.37	3.56	3.47	0.65	A
12	Be calm with an upset child	3.46	3.47	3.47	0.61	A

Note: X₁= Means of the preschool teachers, X₂ of the lecturers, X_G=grand mean. SD =Standard Deviation. RK = Remarks, A = Agreed, N= number of respondents.

Table 1 shows that the preschool teachers and the lecturers agreed that 12 items in the table are ways of enhancing negotiation among preschool children, since the mean rating ranged from 3.40

to 3.74 which are greater than the cut-off point value of 2.50 used for decision making. The SD ranged from 0.50 to 0.68 which shows closeness in the mean opinion of the respondents.

Table 2: Mean rating & standard deviation of the responses of preschool teachers on the ways of enhancing cooperation competences among preschool children. Teachers (N=325), lecturers (N=44)

S/N	Ways of enhancing cooperation	X ₁	X ₂	X _G	SD	RK
1	Provide friendly non-threatening environment	3.38	3.42	3.41	0.62	A
2	Grouping & pairing preschoolers during classwork, play & games	3.59	3.59	3.59	0.68	A
3	Encourage children's creativity & not teacher's sheet or craft behaviour	3.48	3.66	3.57	0.60	A
4	Provide verbal encouragement rather than focus on negative behaviour	3.37	3.56	3.47	0.65	A
5	Watch for rejection & bullying among the preschool children	3.46	3.47	3.47	0.61	A
6	Model cooperation	3.51	3.86	3.67	0.55	A
7	Role play cooperation	3.75	3.73	3.74	0.50	A
8	Reward children's cooperative effort	3.69	3.67	3.68	0.50	A
9	Plan activities that encourage cooperation e.g. passing the ball	3.63	3.64	3.64	0.60	A

Note: X₁= Means of the preschool teachers, X₂ of the lecturers, X_G=grand mean. SD =Standard Deviation. RK = Remarks, A = Agreed, N= number of respondents.

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed that the 9 items are ways of enhancing cooperation among preschool children, since the mean rating ranged from 3.41 to 3.74 which is greater than 2.50 cut-off used for decision making. The standard deviation ranged from 0.50 to 0.68 which indicates closeness in the mean responses of the respondents.

Table 3: Mean rating & standard deviation of the responses of preschool teachers on the ways of enhancing compromise competences among preschool children. Teachers (N=325), lecturers (N=44)

S/N	Ways of enhancing compromise	X ₁	X ₂	X _G	SD	RK
1	Provide friendly, non-threatening environment for the preschoolers	3.62	3.68	3.65	0.50	A
2	Show care and support to the children	3.43	3.74	3.59	0.54	A
3	Model prosocial behaviour such as compromise	3.45	3.50	3.48	0.58	A
4	Provide opportunities for pretend play that encourage compromise	3.42	3.51	3.47	0.61	A
5	Encourage independence & assertiveness	3.45	3.45	3.45	0.56	A
6	Role play compromise	3.69	3.67	3.68	0.50	A
7	Teach empathy and kindness	3.63	3.64	3.64	0.60	A
8	Choose emotion charade games	3.37	3.56	3.47	0.65	A

9	Choose television games that promote social skills	3.46	3.47	3.47	0.61	A
10	Choose games that reward compromise	3.37	3.56	3.47	0.65	A
11	Teach turn taking	3.46	3.47	3.47	0.61	A

Note: X_1 = Means of the preschool teachers, X_2 of the lecturers, X_G =grand mean. SD =Standard Deviation. RK = Remarks, A = Agreed, N= number of respondents.

Table 3 indicates that the respondents agreed that the 11 items are ways of enhancing compromise among preschool children, since the mean rating ranged from 3.45 to 3.68 which is greater than 2.50 used for decision making. The standard deviation ranged from 0.50 to 0.65 which indicates closeness in the men responses of the respondents.

Discussion of the findings

The findings on research question 1 show that opportunity for good listening, language development, communication skills and children ability to solve problems themselves enhances negotiation. This finding is in agreement with Halil (2014) who noted that language development, communication skills, allowing & encouraging children to solve their problems improves their social competence. The findings also indicated that encouraging the children to verbally express their thought, to never allow physical and verbal aggression, setting ground rules for negotiation and allowing each person have a say and suggesting solutions are ways negotiation can be enhanced among preschool children. These are in corroboration with Military Families (2015) who suggested setting rules, giving every child a say, and allowing

children make suggestion for solution helps them learn negotiation and resolve conflicts among themselves.

The findings on research question 2 acknowledged that providing non-threatening environment, grouping and pairing of children, watching out for bullying and rejection, and providing opportunity for pretend play are ways cooperation can be enhanced among preschool children. These are in corroboration with Deborah (2013) who noted that cooperation is enhanced among children by encouraging team work and communication; and that collaboration improves preschoolers' social competence. Dodge (2003) also pointed out that, children who are rejected by peers at early stage shows higher rate of antisocial behaviour four years later. Other findings in research question 2 indicates modeling and role playing cooperation; rewarding children's cooperative efforts and planning activities that encourage cooperation as ways of enhancing cooperation among preschool children. The findings are in alliance with Kids (2018) which stated that modeling and role playing cooperation supports young children's cooperation skills. On the other hand, Parenting Resources (2010) advised that children should be praised when they make cooperation effort.

Furthermore, the findings on research questions 3 pointed out that friendly environment; care & support; model prosocial behaviour; opportunity for pretend play as ways of enhancing compromise competencies. This is in alignment with Andrew (2018) and Family Times (2016), who stated that adults, and older children in the home are the best model for teaching how to behave and interact with people, and that families should make sure that there is enough caring, kindness and generosity in the home while Cheryl (2018) specified that manners can be role played and practiced. Family times (2016) pointed out that pretend play and teaching empathy are important ways the children form friendship, learn about negotiation and compromise. Other findings in research question 3 shows that emotion charade games, choosing television programmes that promotes social skills, and encouraging independence and assertiveness will aid the children compromise skills. These findings are supported by Gwen (2018) who stated that emotion charades games and some television programmes help children strengthen their social skills.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendation are made:

- ❖ Administrators and proprietors of preschools must ensure that these institutions provide regular opportunities for child initiated social activities; adequate play materials; recruitment of trained

and competent preschool teachers for effective teaching and all favorable conditions that will enable the enhancement of social competence among preschool children.

- ❖ Preschool teachers, parents and every other care giver should be role models/ model prosocial behaviours to the preschoolers. There should be quality attachment with care givers and preschool teachers and quality of care giving setting as it has great impact on social competence.
- ❖ Young children become more socially competent when they have the opportunity to team up, and interact socially with their peers, therefore the need for federal and the state government through their respective parastatals to make quality preschool education compulsory and free for every child.

Conclusion

Social competences are important to the preschool child as it affects their acceptability among peers, friendship and even their academic outcome. Social competences include negotiation, compromise and cooperation competences. They are learnable if taught to the preschoolers. For enhanced social competence among preschoolers, there is need for quality opportunities and conditions which include: modelling prosocial behaviours; rewarding well behaved children; grouping and pairing children in different classroom & outdoor activities; showing care and support to

the children; and watching out for bullying and rejection among others.

References

- Adrian, M (2010). *Social competence and its relationship with peer preference*. <https://bir.brandeis.edu>. Retrieved on 12th February, 2014.
- Andrew, L (2018). Promoting Social Competence- Simple Methods & Techniques. *Brainy Child*. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..** Retrieved on 4th May, 2018.
- Beauchat K.A, Blamey, K.I, & Walpole, S (2009). *Building preschool children's language and literacy*. Onlinelibrary.wiley.com
- Bree, A.D., Malinda, J.C., and Eric, L.C. (2012). *Preschool Children Conflicts and Social Competence: A Comparative View*. Texas: Texas University.
- Cheryl, L (2018). *Improving Kids Social Competence*. <http://www.parents.com>. Retrieved on 4th of May, 2018.
- Corcoran T.J. (2012). *Importance of Fostering Children Social Competence*. <http://www.willintonherald.com/opinion/columinist/the-importance-of-fostering-children-soc-comp>. Retrieved on 4th of March, 2013.
- Darlene, C (2017). Compromising activities for children. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..** Retrieved on 12th August, 2018.
- Deborah, J.S (2013). *Teach Preschool: Promoting Excellence in Early Childhood Education*. <http://www.teachpreschool.org/2013/07/five/activities>. Retrieved on 24th July, 2014.
- Denham, S.A., Mitchel-Copeland, J., Strindberg, K., Anerbach, S., and Blair K. (1997). Parental Contribution to Preschoolers Emotional Competence: Direct and Indirect Effects. *Motivation and Emotion*. 21:65-86.
- Dodge, K. A., Coie, J. D., & Lynam, D. (2006). Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Youth. In Damon, W., Lerner, R.M., & Eisenberg, N. (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology: Social, Emotional, And Personality Development 3* (6) 719-788). New York: Wiley.
- Dunn, J., and Cutting, A.L., (1999). Understanding Others, and Individual Differences in Friendship Interaction in Young Children. *Social Development*, 8, (2), 201-219. New York: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Family Education, (2017). *Teaching Children to Negotiate*. <http://www.familyeducation.com>. Retrieved on 21st September, 2017.
- Family Times (2016). Negotiation and the art of compromise. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..** Retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National Policy on Education, Nigeria*. (6th Eds.). Abuja: NERDC Press.
- Gale Encyclopedia of Children Health (2013). Social Competence. www.healthofchildren.com. Retrieved on 24th February, 2014.
- Gwen, D. (2018). Social skills activities for children and teens: evidence based games and exercises. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..** Retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- Halil, E (2014). *Relationship among the Parenting Styles and Social Competence and Prosocial Behaviour of the Children who are Attending State and Private Schools*. Ankara: Academia Ed. Community.
- Isadora, F (2014). Teaching Children to Mind Their Manners. *Meredith WomenNetwork*. <http://www.parent.com/free/stuff/psrc=pm>. Retrieved on 24th July, 2014.

- Jolanda, H. (2009). Characteristics of Preschool Children. *Work with Me Coordinators Handbook*. North America: Faith Alive Christian Resources.
- Kaiser B, & Rasminsky, J.S.,1999. *Meeting The Challenge: Effective Strategies for Challenging Behaviour in Early Childhood Environment*. Ottawa, ON. Canadian Child Care Federation. NAEYC
- Kart, L. G., and McClellan, D.E. (1997). *Fostering Children's Social Competence: The Teacher's Role*. Washington DC: The National Association of Young Children (NAEYC).
- Kids (2018). 5 tips for teaching cooperation. www.kidsintransitiontoschool.org. retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- Kostelink, M.J, Gregory, K.M., Soderman, A.K., & Whiren, A.P. (2012). *Guiding Children's Social development and Learning*. (7th Eds.). Belmont, C.A: Wadworth.
- La-Paro, K.M., and Pianta, R.C. (2003). *Class: Classroom Assessment Scoring System*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia.
- Military Families (2015). *Ways Child Care Providers Can Teach Young Ones to Resolve Conflicts*. articlesextension, org. Retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2016). *Universal Basic Public Education and Key Statistics, Nigeria*.
- Parenting Resource (2010). *Tips on helping your child to cooperate*. <https://www.zerotothree.org>. Retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- Pickle Burns (2014). *Compromise Is Not the Same as Giving In*. <https://pickleburn.com>. Retrieved on 15th August, 2018.
- The Hanen Center (2011). *Help The Child to be Outspoken and Polite During Negotiation*. <http://www.hanen.org/about/us>. Retrieved on 24th July,2014.
- UBEC, (2010). *Basic Education Profile*. National & Education regional statistics, Anambra state.