

## Assessing the Influence of Montessori and Conventional Schools on Preschool Children Creative Performance in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja , Nigeria.

By

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### Abstract

*This study assessed the influence of Montessori and conventional schools on the creative performance of preschool children in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. Guided by two research questions and corresponding null hypotheses, the study adopted an ex-post facto design. Twenty preschool children aged four to five years—ten each from one Montessori and one conventional school in Bwari Area Council—were purposively selected. Data were collected over seven weeks using a modified version of the Torrance Observation Score Card for Creative Performance and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, regression analysis, and independent t-test at a 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that the Montessori classroom environment had a significantly greater positive effect on creative approaches and independent exploring abilities of children compared to the conventional school. Specifically, Montessori children recorded a cumulative mean of 3.52 (78%) on creative approaches versus 1.12 (32%) for their conventional counterparts. For independent exploration, Montessori preschoolers achieved a higher mean score ( $M = 84$ ,  $SD = 30.72$ ) than those in conventional schools ( $M = 56$ ,  $SD = 22.38$ ). Both null hypotheses were rejected, indicating significant differences in creative outcomes between the two educational models.*

*The study concludes that Montessori environments provide more opportunities for fostering creativity through child-centered, resource-rich, and exploratory learning conditions. It recommends wider implementation of Montessori methodologies in early childhood education, including regular teacher training and improved classroom resources. These measures can help create learning environments that stimulate creativity and prepare children for future challenges.*

**Keywords:** Montessori school, Conventional School, Preschool, Children, Creative Performance

### Introduction

Creativity is the currency of the future, and the foundation of that creativity is laid during the earliest years of life. As societies evolve toward complexity, there is an increasing need to cultivate flexible thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators from a young age. Early childhood education, particularly between birth and six years—the preschool period—plays a crucial role

in shaping these foundational capacities. Preschools, whether operating under the Montessori method or the conventional approach, serve as the first structured environments where children's cognitive, emotional, and creative potentials are either nurtured or constrained.

In Nigeria, early childhood development has been formally recognized as the cornerstone for lifelong learning, with a national curriculum structured to support holistic child development. However, research indicates significant disparities in how various types of schools—particularly Montessori and conventional schools—interpret and implement these guidelines in practice. Montessori education, characterized by child-centered learning, exploration, and a carefully prepared environment, contrasts sharply with the conventional model's teacher-led, structured, and product-focused methodology. These differences raise critical questions about their respective impacts on children's creative development, especially within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The problem guiding this study stems from the observation that despite national curricular reforms, most Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers—especially conventional schools—continue to operate rigid, highly structured programs that leave little room for independent exploration or creative expression. Concerns have been raised that these environments may stifle rather than stimulate children's natural creative impulses, thus impacting their readiness for the increasingly dynamic future labor market.

The purpose of this research is to assess the influence of Montessori and conventional schools on preschool children's creative performance in the FCT, Abuja. Specifically, it seeks to (1) determine the effect of Montessori and conventional classroom environments on the creative approaches of preschool children and (2) examine the differences in independent exploring abilities between children attending Montessori versus conventional schools. This study hypothesizes that there are no significant differences in creative performance between the two types of schools.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform early childhood education policy, teacher training, and curriculum development efforts in Nigeria. By critically examining the influence of different educational models on children's creative capacities, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving preschool learning environments to better foster innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving skills—attributes critical for personal and national development.

Following this introduction, the paper is structured into key sections: a review of relevant literature on creativity and early childhood education approaches; a detailed methodology outlining the study's design, participants, and instruments; presentation and analysis of results; discussion of findings in light of existing research; and conclusions alongside practical recommendations for stakeholders in Nigeria's early childhood education sector.

## **Literature Review**

### **Early Childhood Education and Development**

Early childhood education, covering the period from birth to six years, serves as the cornerstone of a child's lifelong learning and development. It provides the foundational skills, values, and attitudes that shape future educational success and societal contributions. This stage is a period of both great potential and vulnerability, where experiences can have permanent effects on the child's growth trajectory, (Morris, 2019). As such, the preschool environment must foster creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities to prepare children for an uncertain future

job market where many current professions may cease to exist.

The importance of stimulating creativity in preschool settings has been widely recognized. Fox (2021) emphasized that early childhood programs yield significant benefits, not only for the child and family but also for the larger community, reinforcing the need for educational strategies that promote exploration, imagination, and critical thinking from an early age. Creativity in Early Childhood.

Creativity in children is not merely about artistic talent but encompasses the ability to think divergently, explore possibilities, and produce original ideas. Morris (2021) defined creative performance as a blend of realistic and imaginative thinking that leads to novel solutions. Similarly, Barron and Harrington (2020) asserted that creativity during early childhood emerges more from engagement with processes rather than the pursuit of finished products. This process-oriented view highlights the importance of providing young learners with environments rich in opportunities for play, exploration, and independent discovery.

Conners (2020) emphasized that creativity in children involves forming original ideas through exploration and discovery rather than excelling in traditionally measured skills such as intelligence or manual proficiency. Hendrick (2022) described creativity as producing novel thoughts and solutions based on prior experiences, while Fox (2021) stressed that creativity involves finding connections between seemingly unrelated ideas. Taken together, these definitions suggest that creativity is an innate potential in every child that flourishes under the right environmental and pedagogical conditions.

### **Montessori Education Approach**

The Montessori Method, developed by Maria Montessori in 1907, presents a distinctive model of early childhood education centered on fostering independence, exploration, and holistic development through a carefully prepared environment (Montessori, 1912/2009). Montessori classrooms are characterized by multi-age groupings, hands-on didactic materials, and child-led activities that promote self-directed learning. According to Hainstock (2020), the Montessori approach allows children to manipulate specially designed learning tools such as the Pink Tower, Red Rods, and Sandpaper Letters, encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving through tangible, sensory experiences.

The emphasis in Montessori settings is on creating an environment that stimulates all senses and supports children's natural desire to explore, question, and innovate (Edward, 2021). Teachers act as facilitators rather than directors, enabling children to engage with their environment freely within structured limits. Such environments are believed to enhance children's creative capacities by allowing independent decision-making and discovery (Bruce, 2010).

### **Conventional School Approach**

In contrast, conventional preschool education tends to be teacher-centered, structured, and focused on rote learning. Conventional schools emphasize memorization of basic academic content such as letters, numbers, colors, and shapes. Classrooms are often dominated by teacher-driven instruction, commercialized learning posters, and limited opportunities for open-ended exploration (Edward, 2021). Broughton (2021) noted that conventional education largely

involves product-based activities, where the focus is on completing tasks correctly rather than encouraging imaginative or critical thinking.

Morris (2019) criticized highly structured instructional methods, warning that they may create "right answer fixation," hindering young children's creative development. In conventional settings, creativity is often unintentionally suppressed as children are pressured to conform to rigid expectations and passive learning patterns.

The distinguishing features between Montessori and conventional schools, particularly in the context of Abuja, Nigeria, revolve around the degree of autonomy given to children and the structure of learning environments. Montessori education supports children's independent exploration and personal agency, fostering creativity through hands-on experiences and minimal adult interference. Meanwhile, conventional schooling models prioritize direct instruction and uniform academic outcomes, often limiting opportunities for spontaneous creative expression.

Research consistently highlights the critical role of the learning environment in shaping creative development. Bruce (2010) emphasized that psychologically safe environments where exploration is encouraged are essential for nurturing creativity. Isbell and Raines (2022) also supported the view that physically and intellectually stimulating classrooms enhance children's learning and creativity.

In sum, understanding how Montessori and conventional models influence creativity in preschool children is crucial for designing early childhood education systems that can meet the developmental needs of young learners in Nigeria's rapidly changing socio-economic context.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to assess the Influence of Montessori and Conventional Schools on Preschool Children Creative Performance in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nigeria. In line with the above, the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on creative approaches of preschool children.
2. determine the difference between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools.

### **Research Questions**

In line with the specific objectives of the study, the following research questions were answered:

1. What is the effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on the creative approaches of preschool children?
2. What is the difference between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in

### **Montessori and Conventional schools?**

#### **Hypotheses of the Study**

In line with the specific objectives and research questions, the researchers formulated and tested the following null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho1. There is no significant effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on the creative approaches of preschool children.

Ho2. There is no significant difference between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed an ex-post facto research design. According to Bello and Ajayi (2000), an ex-post facto design is a systematic empirical investigation where the researcher does not manipulate the independent variable because it is inherently difficult or impossible to do so. The aim of using this design was to identify factors that are closely associated with specific behaviours, occurrences, or conditions in the study population.

### **Population of the Study**

The population comprised all Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres and all registered 100% Montessori-based pre-schools within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nigeria.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Two sampling techniques were used: Simple random sampling was used to select one Area Council within the FCT. Purposive sampling was employed to select one Montessori school and one Conventional school within the chosen Area Council (Bwari). From these two schools, 20 preschool children aged four to five years were purposely selected — 10 from each school.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The study used a validated standardized instrument titled “Observation Score Card for Preschool Children”, originally developed by Torrance for measuring creative performance. The researcher modified the instrument to align with the study's objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. The instrument spanned seven weeks and included 55 observational items for 20 children (10 from each school). It collected basic background information, such as the child's name and age. In addition to Torrance's tool: The Early Childhood Observational Rating Scale-Revised (ECORS-R) by Harms and Clifford (1980) and revised by Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (2010) was used to answer Research Question One. This scale uses a five-point rating format (Excellent = 5 to Poor = 1). The Torrance Creative Ability Scale (TCAS) revised in 2006 was used to answer Research Question Two. It rates children as Highly Creative, Creative, Averagely Creative, Fairly Creative, and Not Creative on a five-point scale.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Data were collected through systematic observation using the standardized and adapted instruments over a period of seven weeks. Observers recorded the children's behaviours and creative expressions in natural classroom settings across both selected schools.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and mean scores, to address the research questions. The numerical values assigned to the scales facilitated quantitative analysis of the observational ratings. The null hypotheses were tested

using regression analysis for hypotheses one, and Independent t-test for hypothesis two. All statistical tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

**The scores/values attached to each rating are as follows:**

Highly Creative	Creative	Averagely Creative	Fairly Creative	Not Creative
5	4	3	2	1

**Source:** Torrance (2006)

Data collection was carried out in stages in both schools and it lasted for a period of seven weeks. Each week had specific and number of items the researchers observed.. Data collected was subjected to appropriate statistical analysis in a tabular form. Data obtained in the two research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Null hypotheses one was tested using regression analysis.. Null hypotheses two was tested using Independent t-test statistics. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The total number of respondents that were used for the research work is presented in the Table 1

**Table 1 Number of Respondents/groups used**

Groups	Frequency	Percentage(%)
A. Montessori	10	50.0
B. Conventional	10	50.0
Total	20	100.0

A total of 20 preschool children were used in this study. Group A consist of 10 preschool children representing 50.0% that were taught in Montessori school, while the Group B equally consist of 10 preschool children representing 50.0% that were taught in Conventional school.

Answers to Research Questions

**Research Question One:** What is the effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on the creative approaches of the preschool children?

The result of the data used to answer the research question is presented in Table 2



**Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of the effect of Montessori and Conventional Classroom Environment on Creative approaches of the pre-school children**

Indices	Variables	Options					SD	Dec.
		Exce llent	Good	Ave r	Fair	Poo r		
In the classroom, there is availability of children's personal work stations that encourages children to think and act without adult direction, yet within the limits of rules.	Montessori	55	52	36	20	9	3.1	19.
	Conventional	10	8	0	6	1	3	93
There is appropriate setting of work area with hands on materials to enhance creativity of pre-school children.	Montessori	100	48	27	16	4	3.5	37.
	Conventional	35	4	0	2	2	5	75
The desks are arranged into open networks that encourages group discussion and independent learning.	Montessori	80	72	33	14	7	3.7	33.
	Conventional	45	16	27	12	7	5	28
Environment/classroom is arranged according to subject area.	Montessori	70	64	48	10	4	3.5	30.
	Conventional	25	0	0	6	1	6	55
Furniture and tools are adapted so that even the smallest child can use them with ease and develop ideas from what they see in their surroundings.	Montessori	55	76	39	14	5	3.4	29.
	Conventional	35	32	21	10	6	4	15
The classroom environment is set in a way that children can be grouped in mixed areas, and according to common interest.	Montessori	115	48	33	12	3	5.8	44.
	Conventional	25	16	18	8	4	4	36
The classroom environment has adequate space and freedom for easy movement to explore during activities.	Montessori	80	48	30	18	8	3.3	28.
	Conventional	40	18	3	4	1	5	38
The class environment is designed to stimulate senses of the children in other to enhance creative problem solving.	Montessori	100	48	33	16	4	3.6	37.
	Conventional	40	8	3	2	0	5	37
The classroom is designed in such axs way as to provide children with both novelty	Montessori	95	48	27	14	8	3.4	35.
	Conventional	20	8	0	2	2	9	16
Cumulative mean:		Montessori = 3.52 (58%) Conventional =					1.12 (42%)	

The Data in Table 2 showed the results on the effect of both Montessori and Conventional school classroom environment on creative approaches. The results revealed that the mean scores for Montessori classroom environment was higher than Conventional classroom environment in terms of availability of children personal work station (3.13 and 0.91) with standard deviation of (19.93 and 10.37) respectively, appropriate settings of work area (3.55 and 0.78) with standard deviation of (37.75 and 14.83), arrangement of desks into open networks (3.75 and 1.95) with standard deviation of (33.28 and 15.11), classroom arrangement set according to subject area was (3.56 and 0.54) with standard deviation of (30.55 and 10.69), furniture and tools were adapted to suit children's independent learning was (3.44 and 1.89) with standard deviation of (29.15 and 12.87), setting of classroom into mixed areas according to children's common interest was (3.84 and 1.29) with standard deviation of (44.36 and 8.32), classroom environment set with adequate space and freedom for easy movement (3.55 and 1.16) with standard deviation of (28.38 and 16.30) respectively, designing of classroom to stimulate senses of the children (3.65 and 0.96) with standard deviation of (37.37 and 16.70) respectively, and classroom environment designed to provide children with novelty and variety of creative ideas (3.49 and 0.58) with standard deviation of (35.16 and 8.17) respectively.

The result also revealed that Montessori classroom environment had 78% effect on creative approaches, while conventional classroom environment had 32% effect on creative approaches. Also, the cumulative mean scores indicated that, Montessori classroom environment was greater than bench mark point of (3.52>3.0). This implied that Montessori classroom environment had more effect on creative approaches of preschool children than the Conventional classroom environment.

**Research Question Two:** What is the difference between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional school?

The result of data used to answer the research question is presented in Table 3

**Table 3.** Mean and Standard Deviation of the difference between Independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools.

Category	N	Mean Score	Std. dev.
Montessori School	10	84	30.72
Conventional School	10	56	22.38

Table 3 revealed data on creative performance in independent exploring of preschool children in Montessori and conventional schools. The mean score of 84 with a standard deviation of 30.72 stood for the preschoolers in Montessori school, while the mean score of 56 with a standard deviation of 22.38 stood for preschoolers in conventional school. The result showed a high difference in independent exploring ability preschool children observed in Montessori school than the children in conventional school. This therefore suggests that preschool children in Montessori school performed better in exploring independently than preschoolers in Conventional school.



### Test of Null Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses stated in the study, data collected was analyzed using IBM 23 version for the computations. Null hypothesis one was tested using regression analysis. And null hypotheses two was tested using Independent t-test statistics. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Results of the test of the null hypotheses are presented as follows:

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on creative approaches of pre-school children.

**Table 4. Regression Analysis on the effect of Montessori and Conventional classroom environment on creative approaches of pre-school children**

Group	B	Std. Error	T	R-cal	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	P-value
Montessori Classroom Environment on creative approaches	17.953	.676	8.808	2.701	0.492	0.482	0.001
Conventional classroom environment on creative approaches	.390	.098	7.164				

P < 0.05

The result on Table 4 and 2 indicates significant effect of Montessori classroom environment on creative approaches of preschool children. Calculated constant (Beta) value of 17.953 with a T-value of 8.808 for Montessori classroom environment was greater than the co-efficient value of .390 with a T value of 7.164 for Conventional classroom environment. The standard deviation and calculated mean value of the two groups (Montessori and Conventional) has confirmed that.

The table also presented the r-cal at 2.701 as against the table value of 0.088. The R<sup>2</sup> was 0.492 and the P-value stood at 0.001. The P-value which is 0.001 was less than 0.05 level of significance. This implied that the Montessori classroom environment provides a better platform for creative approaches of the pre-school children. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools.

**Table 5: t-test analysis on the differences between the independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and conventional schools**

Group	Mean	Std. dev.	N	t-cal	t-crit	Sig.(2-tailed)
Montessori	17.953	.676	18	2.243	1.96	0.038
Conventional	.390	.098				

P<0.05

In table 5 presented independent t-test analysis conducted to compare the mean difference between independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools. The analysis revealed a mean score of 45.8 with standard deviation of 18.9 for independent exploring ability of preschool children in Montessori school, against the mean score of 21.3 with standard deviation of 11.3 for preschool children in Conventional school; the t-cal was 2.243, and greater than 1.96 critical-t value, under the degree of freedom of 18 with a p-value of 0.038. The calculated p-value was less than the alpha value (0.05) indicating that there is significant difference between the independent exploring ability of preschoolers in Montessori school than Conventional school. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The research study was to assess the creative performance of preschool children in Montessori and Conventional schools in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Two groups of respondents (Preschool children in Montessori and preschool children in Conventional schools) were used. In order to achieve the stated objectives of the study, two null hypotheses were stated and tested. The statistical interpretations were done, and detailed discussions of findings were enunciated thus:

Table 2 and 4 data revealed that Montessori classroom environment had significant effect on creative approaches of pre-school children in FCT. This means that the Montessori classroom environment provides a more enabling environment for creative performance of pre-school children. This finding agrees with Bruce (2010) who asserts that environments must be psychologically safe to support the efforts of each child's creativity. Barron (2010) further stresses that environment facilitates children to become self confident and independent. This enables them to be playful and participate in new experiences. Also, Isbell and Raines (2022), posit that physical classroom environment enhances children learning. Edward (2021), states that a prepared environment enhances children's academic development at different stages.

According to Bruce, (2010), in a Montessori classroom environment, the child is offered the universe and the world in a way that he/she can literally touch it! Step-by-step, the teacher sets up the environment so that children progress and explore in ways they can comfortably handle. From the findings above, the researcher opined that a prepared environment aids exploration and creative abilities of preschool children. The unattractiveness of the conventional classroom environment/lack of learning resources resulted to the above findings.

Table 3 and 5 revealed the findings in research question two and the null hypothesis two on independent exploring ability of preschool children in both Montessori and Conventional schools in FCT. The result showed that preschool children in Montessori school performed better in independent exploring than preschool children in Conventional school in FCT, with the  $P = 0.038 < 0.05$ . Researchers like Fisher (2010) and Craft (2020) support this finding. The researchers state that each child can be considered to have creative potential and be capable of creative expression if an appropriate teaching methodology is used. The researchers argue that all children are born with creative ability, but that they need practice in creative processes to develop their potential with appropriate teaching methodology. Essa (2013) also agreed that much of children's creative effort is expanded in the manipulative experience of trying and playing with learning materials, and become acquainted with them which Montessori methods may be suitable for children's creativity.

According to Hainstock (2020) Montessori created learning materials such as colour, cards, spool rods, sand paper numbers, and 3D shapes, pink tower, brown star, red rods. The ultimate aim of these creations was to ascertain that developments of these materials and methodology helped children prepare for life with a more organized approach to creativity in terms of problem solving skills and development of child's independence. Observing independent exploring ability of preschoolers in Montessori school, by the researcher, the children were able to independently select tools, assemble and join materials that led to creative performance. Such creations from the children include various shapes, dimensional concepts; and were able to give the items created names where applicable. During the music class, the research findings from this study similarly revealed that preschoolers in Montessori school could independently recognize and play different keys from the keyboard. Most of the children were able to produce familiar tone from the keys played.

Findings from this study on preschool children in Conventional school on independent exploring ability equally revealed that learning materials such as colours, cards, spool rods, sand paper numbers, brown star, red rods, 3D shapes and a host of other materials that inspires exploration in children were not available. Teaching was regimented and structured. Children were not given the freedom to independently explore and play during class activities. They were basically observed sitting and copying from board, or memorizing contents. This is in contrast to Morris (2019), which states that some road blocks to encouraging creativity can be highly structured materials and instructions. That, for young children, non evaluative and structured atmosphere is a critical factor in avoiding “right answer fixation”.

From the above result, the researchers opined that hundred percent Conventional approaches to learning should not be used in the preschool setting in Conventional school. This is because, it is narrow in orientation, structured, and teacher dominated or centered which does not give room/freedom for preschool children to develop their creativity in independent exploring ability.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that differences exist between the creative performance of preschool children in Montessori school than preschool children in Conventional school, in FCT. In Montessori school, teaching was child centered, and provided preschool children freedom within rules in the classroom, adequate resource/learning materials to explore, and the opportunity to play and act in a prepared environment. While in Conventional school, teaching was teacher-centered. This means that if adequate learning materials are provided, and the teachers in FCT owned preschools are trained in Montessori methodology, learning resources, and a prepared environment, that will help in instigating creativity, which is a natural impulse in children.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the research results and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. Capacity building workshop on Montessori system of education should be organized regularly by FCT Universal Basic Education to train and re-trained teachers for pre-school classes in FCT, ECCE centers. This is because methods of instruction in Montessori school have a key role to play in positive creativity inspiring experience in

- every stage of a child's educational development.
2. Majority of the ECCE centers in FCT are confronted with the problem of inadequate preschool facilities and instructional materials which do not encourage meaningful and purposeful learning/creative performances. The stake holders in this sector particularly FCT UBEB should collaborate with international NGO's related to early childhood education, development partners such as UNICEF and UNESCO for funds to adequately equip the preschool classrooms and environment with learning resource materials, that will aid children to explore, as this is the only way the holistic development of the Nigerian child can be assured in the nearest future.

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