
TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF REGGIO EMILIA'S APPROACH FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT
AMONG PRESCHOOLERS IN SABON GARI LGA OF KADUNA STATE

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Abstract:

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia approach as a strategy for promoting moral development among preschoolers in the Sabon Gari Local Government Area (LGA) of Kaduna State. Employing a descriptive research design, the study was guided by two research questions concerning the components of the Reggio Emilia approach that support moral development and its perceived impact. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 120 public primary school teachers using a validated and reliable questionnaire titled Teachers' Perception of Reggio Emilia's Approach in Promoting Moral Development among Preschoolers (TPREPPMD). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating the instrument was reliable. Findings revealed that teachers generally agreed that certain components of the Reggio Emilia approach supported moral development. These included encouraging reflection during group discussions, collaborative projects fostering empathy, and the use of art and storytelling to explore emotions. Findings also reveal that the Reggio Emilia approach effectively promotes empathy among preschoolers through collaborative activities, and the Reggio Emilia approach cultivates and creates ethical awareness among others. The impact of Reggio Emilia's Approach on promoting moral development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA. It was recommended that adequate teacher training be provided to ensure that educators are well-equipped to implement the Reggio Emilia approach effectively, especially in fostering empathy and specific techniques for active listening and respectful communication.

Introduction

In every society, it is believed that education is the key to national development, and there is a need to maintain every level of education, especially the pre-primary stage, because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels are built. Once a child misses this early stage, it is usually difficult for the learner to get back to the basics. The early years of a child's life are foundational for both cognitive and moral

development, setting the stage for future learning and ethical behaviour. In this critical period, preschool education plays a vital role in shaping young minds and instilling fundamental values. That is why the Reggio Emilia approach, an internationally recognised educational philosophy originating in Italy, offers a unique perspective on early childhood education, emphasising child-led inquiry, collaborative projects, and a rich, stimulating environment. This foundation

would not have been possible without teachers. Teachers are key to creating a value-based learning environment that fosters positive relationships with children to produce responsible and effective citizens.

Early childhood education is the starting point for a child's development and the key foundation of the Nigerian educational system. This type of education is recognised by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) outlines several key objectives for preschool education in Nigeria. These include: Effecting a smooth transition from home to school, preparing children for primary-level education, providing adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work, inculcating in children the spirit of inquiry and creativity through exploration of nature, art, music, and play, developing a sense of cooperation and team spirit, inculcating social norms and values, teaching good habits, particularly health-related habits, and introducing rudimentary concepts of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms through play. Among these objectives, the one that emphasises inculcating social norms and values directly addresses moral development. This objective seeks to instil virtues such as honesty, empathy, respect, responsibility, and fairness in young learners. By nurturing these values early in life, preschool education lays the foundation for ethical

behaviour and good citizenship (Salami, 2016). However, studies have shown that despite these goals, Nigeria's educational system has struggled to fully instil moral values due to societal challenges such as corruption, dishonesty, and indiscipline. This is why inculcating morals in children early is important.

Children are like clay that can be moulded, and moral values are the essentials that should be instilled in children. It is the foundation of behaviours that should be instilled in children from a young age. As children grow, the moral values they are instilled with reflect how they behave with others. Moral development in early childhood is extremely important. Moral development refers to the process through which children acquire the ability to discern right from wrong, develop empathy, fairness, and social responsibility, and internalise ethical values that guide their behaviour and interactions with others (TeachKloud, 2024). It is a gradual and complex progression influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors, in which young children begin to understand moral concepts such as benevolence, responsibility, and justice, often initially oriented toward family and close relationships before expanding to broader social and environmental concerns (Kaya & Öztürk, 2021). Moral development helps to determine right and wrong. It is a behaviour, a thought, or a feeling to treat others in the right way. The judgment

between one's thoughts and actions can reveal the moral values that a person possesses. Moral development influences how a person behaves and how they interact and make decisions. It is a lifelong process that evolves with age. It can be influenced by numerous factors. These factors include family influence, social interactions, cultural factors, and education. It takes time and effort to implant moral values in children, but it can be fast-tracked by integrating tools, strategies, and support from parents and schools (Kangaroo, 2024). Thus, moral development in preschoolers is foundational for nurturing socially responsible, empathetic, and morally conscious individuals capable of contributing positively to society. These strategies can be more effective if they start in preschool.

Preschool plays a foundational role in the moral development of children by creating an environment in which they learn to distinguish between right and wrong, develop empathy, and internalise values such as respect, fairness, and responsibility. During the preschool years, children transition from egocentric thinking to understanding the perspectives and feelings of others, which is critical for moral development and growth. This process is supported through structured activities, interactions with peers, and guidance from teachers. Moral and values development is primarily concerned with nurturing in pupils a set of beliefs and values about right and wrong, good and

bad, justice and injustice, fairness and unfairness, and other ethical principles teachers play a vital role by modelling moral conduct, facilitating discussions about feelings and consequences, and creating a positive classroom environment that supports social justice and reflective thinking (Seattle PI, 2023). Values are the principles and fundamental convictions that serve as general guides to human behaviour. They enable one to make judgements and decisions on what is important, influence and motivate the actions of the individual, and act as a standard for judging and justifying actions made. As values are acquired through socialisation based on dominant group values and the unique learning experiences of individuals, teachers are models of emulation for the children. Teachers can use several approaches to inculcate moral development, and Reggio Emilia is one such approach.

The Reggio Emilia approach complements these moral development strategies by emphasising collaboration, exploration, and reflection in a child-centred learning environment. It aligns with preschool objectives by fostering empathy, respect, and responsibility through experiential learning. This type of preschool curriculum was developed in post-World War II Italy, where the citizens of Reggio Emilia decided to utilise materials from destroyed buildings to construct a school focused on early childhood education. Loris Malaguzzi, a

local educator, created the Reggio Emilia approach within its walls (Brightwheel, 2024). Malaguzzi founded the Reggio Emilia approach based on his belief that children are capable members of the classroom and should have control over how they learn as they explore, question, and make sense of the world. Instead of the traditional hierarchy present in many classrooms, this co-learning environment establishes a partnership between children, teachers, and families. Children shape their learning experiences with active support and participation from educators and their families.

The Reggio Emilia approach emphasises child-centred learning, encouraging children to explore and discover through hands-on experiences and collaborative projects. It promotes a supportive and enriching environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and social skills. The Reggio Emilia approach is guided by several key principles that shape its educational philosophy. The approach also emphasises the importance of relationships between children and adults and among children. By honouring these principles, educators aim to create a learning environment that supports children's innate curiosity, creativity, and love of learning (Garcia, 2023).

The Reggio Emilia approach is a child-centred educational philosophy that fosters moral development in preschoolers through several key components. It emphasises collaborative learning, in which children

work together to develop empathy and respect for others' perspectives. The environment is viewed as a "third teacher," encouraging exploration and responsibility. The approach also incorporates an emergent curriculum, in which projects evolve from children's interests, allowing them to grapple with real-world ethical dilemmas. Documentation and reflection help children evaluate their actions and moral choices. Additionally, the approach values family and community involvement, reinforcing ethical values and collective responsibility. By treating children as capable and resilient, Reggio Emilia encourages autonomy and self-directed learning, which are essential for moral growth. Overall, this approach provides a holistic framework for moral development by integrating social, emotional, and cognitive learning in a supportive and collaborative environment (Garcia, 2023).

The Reggio Emilia Approach indirectly but significantly fosters moral development in preschoolers by prioritising collaboration, communication, and respect for diverse perspectives, which cultivates empathy and social understanding. Child-centred, project-based learning empowers children with agency and responsibility, while the emphasis on relationships and the environment nurtures respect for others and the world around them. Through collaborative projects and opportunities for negotiation, the approach encourages prosocial behaviours and equips children with the skills for constructive conflict

resolution, ultimately contributing to their moral growth (The Education Hub, 2020).

The Reggio Emilia approach to education emphasises the cultivation of several moral values within its pedagogical framework. These moral values provide a foundation for appropriate social skills and behaviour, such as sharing, cooperation, and fairness, which help children understand how to interact with others in a respectful and considerate manner. It promotes positive relationships, conflict resolution, and empathy, fostering a harmonious and inclusive learning environment. These values guide children throughout their educational journey and beyond, influencing their behaviour, choices, and relationships as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. Against this backdrop, this study investigated teachers' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia's approach as a strategy for promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

Statement of the Problem

Preschool teachers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State have been exposed to the Reggio Emilia approach, in which children are seen as active learners who construct knowledge through interactions with their environment and peers. The components include an emergent curriculum, project-based learning, and the environment as a "third teacher." These elements are designed to encourage

children to explore and discover through hands-on experiences and collaborative activities. Despite the recognised importance of moral development in early childhood education and the alignment of the Reggio Emilia approach with this goal, the reality in many classrooms in Sabon Gari falls short of this ideal. The present situation is marked with several challenges, ranging from cultural values and practices, parental involvement, availability of resources in creating an environment that encourages exploration and creativity, teachers' understanding and applications of the Reggio Emilia's approach, and overcrowded classrooms. With all these challenges, one wonders how the teachers can effectively implement the Reggio Emilia's Approach as a strategy for promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to determine teachers' perceptions of the Reggio Emilia's approach as a strategy for promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA. Specifically, this study intended to determine the following:

- The components of Reggio Emilia's Approach that support moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA.
- The impact of Reggio Emilia's Approach as a strategy in promoting

moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- What are the components of Reggio Emilia's Approach that support moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA?
- What impact does Reggio Emilia's Approach have in promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA?

Methods

This study examined teachers' perceptions of Reggio Emilia's Approach as a strategy for promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State. Two research questions guided the study, and a descriptive research design was used. The population consisted of 1206 public primary school teachers from 63 public primary schools in Sabon Gari LGA of

Kaduna State. A sample size of 120 teachers was selected a simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire titled Teachers' Perception of Reggio Emilia's Approach in Promoting Moral Development (TPREAPMD) was used for data collection on a four-point Likert scale *Strongly Agree = (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree = (1 point). The instrument was validated for face and content validity by three experts: two from the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education and one from the Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Educational Foundations at the Federal University of Education, Zaria. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, with a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable. The research questions were analysed using the mean statistics and standard deviation, where a mean score of 2.5 or above indicated agreement and a mean score below 2.5 indicated disagreement

Results

Research Question One: What are the components of Reggio Emilia's approach that support moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the components of Reggio Emilia's approach that support moral development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State

S/N	Components of Reggio Emilia's approach that support moral development among Preschoolers include:	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Children are encouraged to reflect on how their actions affect others during group discussions.	2.50	3.74	Agree
2	The classroom environment promotes inclusivity by displaying diverse ideas and materials equally.	2.46	3.92	Agree
3	Collaborative projects help children develop empathy by working through peer conflicts.	2.74	7.79	Agree
4	Teachers model respectful communication by actively listening to children's perspectives	2.39	6.69	Disagree
5	Art and storytelling are used to explore complex emotions like kindness and fairness	2.50	6.00	Agree
6	Documentation of children's work helps them reflect on their moral choices	2.43	3.56	Disagree
7	Parents and community members are involved in reinforcing ethical values.	2.33	6.68	Disagree
8	Projects evolve from children's interests to address real-world ethical dilemmas.	2.38	7.87	Disagree
9	Teachers act as co-learners rather than authority figures, fostering mutual respect.	2.59	2.94	Agree
10	Peer mediation strategies (e.g., role-playing) are taught to resolve conflicts respectfully	2.58	3.56	Agree
Cluster Mean		2.50		Agreed

The data analysis presented in Table 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on teachers' perceptions of the component of Reggio Emilia's approach that supports

moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State. Items 1,2,3,5,9, and 10 were all agreed upon by respondents with a mean ranging

from 2.50 to 2.59. while items 4,6,7, and 8, with mean rating of 2.39, 2.43, 2.33 and 2.38, were disagreed by the respondents. The grand mean of 2.50 shows that the respondents agreed with teachers'

perceptions of the component of moral development in Reggio Emilia's approach among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State.

Research Question Two: What impact does Reggio Emilia's approach have on promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the impact of Reggio Emilia's Approach on promoting moral development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA.

S/N	Reggio Emilia's Approach to Promoting Moral Development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA.	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The Reggio Emilia approach effectively promotes empathy among preschoolers through collaborative activities.	2.37	6.53	Disagree
2	The Reggio Emilia approach cultivates and creates ethical awareness	2.59	6.78	Agree
3	Reggio Emilia's Approach reduces aggressive behaviour by encouraging peer negotiation through collaboration during play.	2.57	4.24	Agree
4	The Reggio Emilia approach encourages children to consider the impact of their actions on others.	2.50	6.16	Agree
5	Parental involvement in Reggio Emilia reinforces the importance of ethical values in daily life.	2.49	1.83	Agree
6	Children in Reggio Emilia-inspired classrooms frequently work together on projects, fostering cooperation.	2.34	4.97	Disagree
7	Reggio Emilia approach instils positive ideas and values in preschoolers	2.48	5.10	Agree
8	Children in Reggio Emilia classrooms develop a strong understanding of fairness and justice	2.56	2.71	Agree
9	The approach helps children develop strong moral reasoning skills through exploration and discussion.	2.50	2.16	Agree
10	The ability of the teachers to document children's work enhances self-awareness and accountability in preschoolers	2.67	6.22	Agree
Cluster Mean		2.50		Agreed

Data analysis presented in Table 2 shows the Mean Ratings of Respondents on the impact of Reggio Emilia's Approach to promoting moral development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA. Respondent agreed with Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 with mean scores of 2.59, 2.57, 2.50, 2.50, 2.50, 2.56, 2.50, and 2.67, respectively, indicating their perception of positive impact on moral development. Respondent agreed with Items 1 and 6 with a mean of 2.37 and 2.34, respectively, which are below the decision mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 2.50 indicates that respondents agreed that the Reggio Emilia's approach is important for promoting moral development among preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that teachers generally agreed that certain components of the Reggio Emilia approach supported moral development. These include encouraging reflection during group discussions, collaborative projects fostering empathy, using art and storytelling to explore emotions, teachers acting as co-learners, and peer mediation strategies. These findings align with those of Brightwheel (2024) and The Education Hub (2020), noting that the core principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasise collaborative learning, child-centred, project-based learning, empower children with agency and responsibility,

while the emphasis on relationships and the environment nurtures respect for others and the world around them. Garcia (2023) also aligns with the positive evaluations of the approach as a holistic framework for moral development, with an emphasis on child-centred learning, exploration, and collaboration, resonating with the view that children are active participants in constructing their knowledge and values.

Despite these ideals, this research indicates that not all teachers consistently model respectful communication by actively listening to children's perspectives. The study found that respondents disagreed with the statement that teachers model respectful communication by actively listening, with a mean rating below the threshold for agreement. This suggests that, while the Reggio Emilia approach advocates for such practices, real-world implementation may be hindered by factors such as traditional teacher-centred norms, limited training, or resource constraints. This finding resonates with Garcia (2023), who argues that teachers in Reggio Emilia-inspired settings are encouraged to view themselves as co-learners and collaborators rather than traditional authority figures. This shift in role fundamentally changes classroom communication dynamics, emphasizing mutual respect and active listening.

Similarly, the study assessed teachers' perceptions of the impact of the Reggio Emilia approach on promoting moral development. While the overall mean

indicated agreement that the approach cultivates ethical awareness, reduces aggressive behaviors through peer negotiation, encourages children to consider the impact of their actions, and reinforces moral values through parental involvement. This also aligns with the findings of Seattle (2023), who emphasize that the Reggio Emilia approach helps children develop a sense of right and wrong and become aware of ethical issues in their environment. By engaging in collaborative projects and discussions, children encounter situations that require them to consider different perspectives, negotiate solutions, and make ethical decisions. This process encourages them to internalize honesty, fairness, and respect. Parental involvement is a key component of the Reggio Emilia approach. Brightwheel (2024) argues that parents actively participate in their children's learning, reinforce the importance of ethical values, and demonstrate the connection between school and home.

The findings show that teachers disagreed that the Reggio Emilia approach effectively promotes empathy among preschoolers through collaborative activities. This is surprising, as collaborative activities are central to the Reggio Emilia approach and are often cited as a means of fostering empathy (The Education Hub, 2020, & Garcia, 2023). This finding resonates with Brightwheel (2024), who argues that the Reggio Emilia approach complements these moral

development strategies by emphasizing collaboration, exploration, and reflection in a child-centered learning environment. It aligns with preschool objectives by fostering empathy, respect, and responsibility through experiential learning.

Conclusion

The study on Teachers' Perception of Reggio Emilia's Approach for Moral Development among Preschoolers in Sabon Gari LGA of Kaduna State indicates that teachers in Sabon Gari LGA generally agreed that the Reggio Emilia approach fosters moral development through reflection, inclusivity, and collaborative empathy building, while recognizing the value of documentation for reflection and guiding ethical inquiry. However, they expressed concern about the consistent modelling of respectful communication and the effective promotion of empathy through collaboration, indicating a potential need for targeted professional development to enhance practical implementation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Provide adequate teacher training to equip educators to effectively implement the Reggio Emilia approach, particularly in fostering empathy and specific techniques for

active listening and respectful communication.

- Schools should design events or training to inform parents of the roles that they can play in fostering ethical values in children for better moral development. These collaborative efforts will help align home, school, and community environments to provide a comprehensive ethical foundation.
- Teachers should foster Peer-to-Peer communication and implement activities and projects that require working as partners or in pairs. This will promote environment that fosters and encourages cooperation among pupils.

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