

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF MONTESSORI LANGUAGE MATERIALS ON LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPEECH DIFFICULTIES IN SOME SELECTED SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

*This research assessed the perceived impact of Montessori Language Materials on the Language Achievement of Children with Speech Difficulties in Lagos State. Two research questions guided the study. A **descriptive survey research design** was employed for this study. The sample comprised two hundred teachers who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. A self-designed instrument titled "Questionnaire on the Impact of Montessori Language Materials on the Language Achievement of Children with Speech Difficulties (QMLMLACSD)" was used to collect data for the study. Thereafter, they were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The result showed that the teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is positive, and the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is low. It was concluded that the teachers in selected special needs schools in Lagos State had an appreciable perception of the impact of Montessori Language Materials on improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties, with a low level of implementation of the materials due to challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and insufficient administrative support. Hence, it was recommended that school administrators should encourage continuous professional development programs focused on the Montessori method for language instruction. Regular workshops and training sessions on using Montessori Language Materials effectively should be organised to ensure teachers are equipped with the skills and confidence needed to implement these tools. Such training sessions should be facilitated by Montessori experts in leading Nigerian Universities that have Montessori courses.*

Keywords: Achievement; Children with Speech Difficulties; Impact of Montessori Language Materials

Introduction

The importance of special education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised, especially when it comes to meeting the various disabilities of children who have impairments and learning challenges. In line with the National Policy on Education (NPE) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), the government recognises the value of offering inclusive education to all students, including young children, irrespective of their intellectual or

physical capacities. In order to maximise the academic potential of children with speech issues, cognitive impairments, and other learning obstacles, special education is essential in providing them with individualised support (Adekunle, 2021). If there are no targeted interventions, these children might find it difficult to learn as much as their counterparts. Due to the need to address each child's specific requirements, tailored instruction and focused interventions are important in enhancing the academic performance of pupils with a range of learning problems (Shuqing&Yuetong, 2022). It is crucial to make investments in evidence-based approaches that improve the learning experiences of children with speech challenges and other impairments in the Nigerian environment, where resources for special education may be scarce (Sharon & Sylvia, 2003).

Children who have speech difficulties frequently experience difficulties with articulation, fluency, or comprehension. This can have a substantial negative influence on their capacity to function socially and academically, as well as communicate effectively. According to Obaka (2017), these categories of children are those with stuttering, dysarthria, and language delays. Adeyinka (2020) identifies children with speech difficulties as those who struggle with language development, articulation, or fluency and find it challenging to communicate and engage with others. While Olayinka (2019) posited that speech issues are those who have problems with their ability to produce speech, grasp language, or communicate effectively, which makes it difficult for them to understand or express themselves clearly to others, early detection and assistance are needed to help children with speech impairments reach their full potential in terms of language development and academic performance. The acquisition of language by children who struggle with speaking is critical to their entire development since it affects their prospects, social relationships, and academic performance. Introducing Montessori language materials is one practical way to assist these children in achieving language competency. These resources offer multi-learning experiences that accommodate a range of learning styles and skill levels since they are founded on the ideas of hands-on learning and customised education. Through interactive activities that emphasise vocabulary growth, phonological awareness, and language expression, Montessori Language Materials help children with speech issues acquire communication skills and create a supportive learning environment that is ideal for language acquisition. Furthermore, as Montessori education is self-paced, kids can advance at their own pace and develop confidence and independence when they eventually grasp language concepts.

According to Maria Montessori (1912), Montessori Language Materials are meticulously planned teaching aids created especially to support young children's language development. In her explanation, Angeline (2017) goes into detail about Montessori Language Materials, which are an essential part of the educational methodology that promotes children's language development on all fronts. These carefully designed resources support the sequential acquisition and investigation of language concepts such as phonics, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension through practical application and hands-on learning. The Montessori Method places a strong emphasis on the value of sensory-rich items that pique children's natural interest and provide them the freedom to autonomously learn language at their own speed. With the help of the Montessori Language Materials, children may actively explore and express themselves via language, building the groundwork for reading and communication skills that last a lifetime. Some of the major Montessori language materials are large movable alphabets, small movable alphabets, sandpaper letters, and phonetic letter boxes. Using these materials with children with speech disorders helps to fine-tune their problems.

Evidence has shown that there is research-based evidence that Montessori language materials contribute significantly to the vocabulary development and expressive language abilities of learners with speech difficulty. Moving forward, Kolawole (2018) discovered that using Montessori language materials greatly increased the language achievement of kids who had trouble speaking, especially regarding vocabulary development and expressive language abilities. Positive results were reported by Ogunyemi and Kolawole (2020), suggesting that therapies using Montessori language materials helped children with speech challenges improve their receptive and expressive language skills, which in turn improved their total language competency. The use of Montessori language materials significantly improved phonological awareness and speech intelligibility in children with speech difficulties, according to a study by Adeniji (2019). This suggests that the approach effectively meets these children's unique language needs. The use of Montessori language materials in speech therapy sessions led

to significant improvements in language comprehension and verbal expression for children with speech difficulties, as reported by Salami and Adekola (2021), highlighting the success of this intervention in fostering language development. According to research by Adegoke and Adebayo (2017), children with speech difficulties who received Montessori Language Materials interventions showed notable improvements in their language fluency and communication skills. This suggests that using this approach could improve the children's overall language achievement outcomes.

At this point, it is imperative to reiterate that having empirical evidence of teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials and the extent to which they use Montessori Language Materials to improve the language achievement of children with speech difficulties becomes imperative. This is because much has not been reported in the literature regarding this. Their perceptions play a huge role in whether they would implement the materials or otherwise. Moving forward, it was observed that other past scholars have also conducted several studies related to this one. For instance, Ojo (2020) observed that Montessori materials significantly fostered engagement and enhanced language skills, emphasising their potential for supporting language acquisition in children with unique speech needs. Adeyemi (2021) reported that teachers widely regarded these materials as crucial in aiding speech development. Montessori Language Materials, as noted by teachers, offered multisensory experiences, catering to various learning styles, which contributed to a more inclusive and effective learning environment for children with diverse language needs.

Amadi and Okechukwu (2020) further highlighted that teachers perceived Montessori language materials as vital tools that support phonetic awareness and vocabulary acquisition, both essential for language development in children with speech challenges. Ibrahim (2022) reported that a positive correlation exists between the use of Montessori language materials and improved speech outcomes. Olowu (2021) observed that while a significant majority of teachers recognised the value of Montessori language materials for supporting language development, only about 60% reported regularly integrating them into their teaching practices. Nwankwo (2021) found that although teachers widely appreciated the effectiveness of these materials, only about half (50%) actively used them in daily lessons. Again, Adediran and Kolawole (2020) found that approximately 65% of teachers used Montessori language materials consistently, though their usage frequency varied based on teachers' levels of training and experience.

The above studies did not mainly focus on the intention of this study. Hence, this study is important because it tackles the urgent need to improve the language proficiency of kids who struggle with speech in Lagos State's special needs schools. Children who struggle with speech have particular difficulties learning languages and communicating, which can have a big influence on their social and intellectual development.

Statement of the Problem

Children who have speech difficulties frequently experience difficulties with articulation, fluency, or comprehension. This can have a substantial negative influence on their capacity to function socially and academically, as well as communicate effectively. The acquisition of language by children who struggle with speaking is critical to their entire development since it affects their prospects, social relationships, and academic performance. Introducing Montessori language materials such as large moveable alphabets, small moveable alphabets, sandpaper letters, phonetic letter boxes, etc. Evidence has shown that the above materials have a positive impact on children with language disorders. Yet, literature reports that Montessori language materials are not adequately used to improve these categories of children's speech problems (Kolawole, 2018; Ogunyemi & Kolawole, 2020). The consequences are that children with speech problems will continue to experience negative achievements (Adeniji, 2019). Further research shows that there are deficiencies, especially in the use of Montessori language materials in teaching children with speech disorders, within the region of this study. It is against this background that this study tends to assess teachers' perception and use of Montessori Language Materials in Improving Language Achievement of Children with Speech Difficulties in Some Selected Schools in Lagos State.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State.
2. Examine the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State.

Research Questions

1. What is the teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State?
2. To what extent do teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was utilised in this study. The target population for this study consisted of all the children with speech difficulties in Lagos State. However, because the researcher could not reach all, it became important to sample those that were covered in this study. Specifically, the forty schools, which include both regular and special schools, constituted the study's sample. In the regular and special schools, the researcher sampled five teachers from each school, which aggregates the sample size to two hundred (200). A purposive sampling technique was used to select all the schools. The research instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. It is titled "Questionnaire on the Impact of Montessori Language Materials on the Language Achievement of Children with Speech Difficulties (QMLMLACSD). The questionnaire had three sections: A, B and C. Section A contained the bio data of the teachers, which included: gender, educational qualification, professional qualification, and years of teaching experience. Section B contained ten (10) items drawn from the research questions of the study relating to teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties. Section C contained ten (10) items drawn from the research questions relating to the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties. The instrument was validated by the research experts. Thereafter, twenty copies of the questionnaires were administered for the purpose of testing their reliability, and they yielded a reliability value of 0.73, indicating a high level of reliability. The researcher sought approval from the head of the school, and after approval was granted, the researcher proceeded to the classes that were used for the study to meet the teachers and explain the purpose of the visitation. Thereafter, an appointment was fixed for the following week to administer the questionnaires. The data collection duration was six weeks. The data was analysed and provided answers to the research questions using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The software used was the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State?

Table 1: Teachers' Perception of the Impact of Using Montessori Language Materials in Improving the Language Achievement of Children with Speech Difficulties in Selected Special Needs Schools in Lagos State

Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. D.
The use of Montessori Language Materials enhances phonetic awareness in children with speech difficulties.	13 (6.5)	4 (2.0)	43 (21.5)	140 (70.0)	3.55	.83
Montessori Language Materials effectively support children with speech difficulties in improving their vocabulary.	117 (58.5)	48 (24.0)	12 (6.0)	23 (11.5)	1.71	1.01
Children with speech difficulties show greater engagement with language activities when using Montessori materials.	21 (10.5)	31 (15.5)	81 (40.5)	67 (33.3)	2.97	.96
Montessori Language Materials help in improving the pronunciation skills of children with speech difficulties.	92 (46.0)	84 (42.0)	7 (3.5)	17 (8.5)	1.75	.88
Montessori Language Materials promote independent learning among children with speech difficulties.	18 (9.0)	23 (11.5)	72 (36.0)	87 (43.5)	3.14	.95
Children with speech difficulties exhibit improved sentence formation skills through the use of Montessori Language Materials.	45 (22.5)	23 (11.5)	64 (32.0)	68 (34.0)	2.78	1.14
Montessori Language Materials are effective in reducing the frustration levels of children with speech difficulties during language learning.	61 (30.5)	42 (21.0)	67 (33.5)	30 (15.0)	2.33	1.07
The structured approach of Montessori Language Materials benefits children with speech difficulties in grasping grammatical concepts.	36 (18.0)	34 (17.0)	49 (24.6)	81 (40.5)	2.88	1.13
A noticeable improvement in the reading skills of children with speech difficulties was observed using Montessori Language Materials.	15 (7.5)	11 (5.5)	69 (34.5)	105 (52.5)	3.32	.88
Montessori Language Materials provide a conducive environment for children with speech difficulties to practice language skills.	10 (5.0)	11 (5.5)	49 (24.5)	130 (65.0)	3.50	.81
Weighted Average					2.80	

N = 200; Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

N = 200; Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Decision Value: *Negative Perception* = 0.00-2.44, *Positive Perception* = 2.45-4.00

Table 1 shows teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State. The table shows that the respondents strongly agreed with the following items: The use of Montessori Language Materials enhances phonetic awareness in children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 3.55$), and Montessori Language Materials provide a conducive environment for children with speech difficulties to practice language skills ($\bar{x} = 3.50$). Again, it shows that the respondents agreed as follows: children with speech difficulties show greater engagement with language activities when using Montessori materials ($\bar{x} = 2.97$) Montessori Language Materials promote independent learning among children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 3.14$), children with speech difficulties exhibit improved sentence formation skills through the use of Montessori Language Materials ($\bar{x} = 2.78$), the structured approach of Montessori Language Materials benefits children with speech difficulties in grasping grammatical concepts ($\bar{x} = 2.88$), and a noticeable improvement in the reading skills of children with speech difficulties was observed using Montessori Language Materials ($\bar{x} = 3.32$). However, the respondents disagreed to the following items: Montessori Language Materials effectively support children with speech difficulties in improving their vocabulary ($\bar{x} = 1.71$), Montessori Language Materials help in improving the pronunciation skills of children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 1.75$), and Montessori Language Materials are effective in reducing the frustration levels of children with speech difficulties during language learning ($\bar{x} = 2.33$). In the light of the value of the weighted average (2.80 out of 4.00 maximum value that can be obtained), which falls within the decision value for positive perception, it can be concluded that teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is positive.

Research Question 2

To what extent do teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State?

Table 2: The Extent to which Teachers use Montessori Language Materials in Teaching Children with Speech Difficulties in Selected Special Needs Schools in Lagos State

Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. D.
The teacher uses Montessori language materials to support children with speech difficulties.	38 (19.0)	31 (15.5)	38 (19.0)	93 (46.5)	2.93	1.18
Montessori language materials are integrated into daily lessons for children with speech difficulties.	27 (13.5)	103 (51.5)	29 (14.5)	41 (20.5)	2.42	.96
The teacher adapts Montessori language materials to meet the specific needs of children with speech difficulties.	88 (44.0)	47 (23.5)	40 (20.0)	25 (12.5)	2.01	1.07
Montessori language materials help improve speech articulation in children with speech difficulties.	78 (39.0)	46 (23.0)	32 (16.0)	44 (22.0)	2.21	1.18
Montessori language materials are effective in engaging children with speech difficulties.	88 (44.0)	41 (20.5)	26 (13.0)	45 (22.5)	2.14	1.21

The teacher frequently uses Montessori phonetic materials to assist children with speech difficulties.	105	52	17	26	1.82	1.05
	(52.5)	(26.0)	(8.5)	(13.0)		
Montessori sandpaper letters are beneficial for children with speech difficulties in learning letter sounds.	86	59	32	23	1.96	1.03
	(43.0)	(29.5)	(16.0)	(11.5)		
The teacher incorporates Montessori language cards in activities for children with speech difficulties.	107	72	5	16	1.65	.87
	(53.5)	(36.0)	(2.5)	(8.0)		
Montessori movable alphabet is used to enhance speech development in children with speech difficulties.	97	72	14	17	1.76	.92
	(48.5)	(36.0)	(7.0)	(8.5)		
The teacher uses Montessori storytelling materials to encourage verbal expression in children with speech difficulties.	124	57	10	9	1.52	.79
	(62.0)	(28.5)	(5.0)	(4.5)		
Weighted Average					2.04	

Decision Value: *Low* = 0.00-2.44, *High* = 2.45-4.00

Table 2 shows the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State. The table shows that the respondents strongly agreed that the use of Montessori Language Materials enhances phonetic awareness in children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 2.93$). It shows further that the respondents agreed as follows: Montessori language materials are integrated into daily lessons for children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 2.42$), the teacher adapts Montessori language materials to meet the specific needs of children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 2.01$), Montessori language materials help improve speech articulation in children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 2.21$), Montessori language materials are effective in engaging children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 2.14$), the teacher frequently uses Montessori phonetic materials to assist children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 1.82$), Montessori sandpaper letters are beneficial for children with speech difficulties in learning letter sounds ($\bar{x} = 1.96$), the teacher incorporates Montessori language cards in activities for children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 1.65$), Montessori movable alphabet is used to enhance speech development in children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 1.76$), and the teacher uses Montessori storytelling materials to encourage verbal expression in children with speech difficulties ($\bar{x} = 1.52$). In the light of the value of the weighted average (2.04 out of 4.00 maximum value that can be obtained), which falls within the decision value for low extent, it can be concluded that the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is low.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study has shown that teachers' perception of the impact of using Montessori Language Materials in improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is positive. The probable reason for this finding could be attributed to the fact that the teachers have been using the aforementioned materials in the schools sampled. According to Ojo (2020), teachers observed that Montessori materials significantly fostered engagement and enhanced language skills, emphasising their potential for supporting language acquisition in children with unique speech needs. This perspective was further validated by Adeyemi (2021), whose study revealed that teachers widely regarded these materials as crucial in aiding speech development. Montessori Language Materials, as noted by teachers, offered multisensory experiences, catering to various learning styles, which contributed to a more inclusive and

effective learning environment for children with diverse language needs. Amadi and Okechukwu (2020) further highlighted that teachers perceived Montessori language materials as vital tools that support phonetic awareness and vocabulary acquisition, both essential for language development in children with speech challenges. Ibrahim (2022) supported these findings, noting a positive correlation between the use of Montessori language materials and improved speech outcomes.

The second finding from the study showed that the extent to which teachers use Montessori Language Materials in teaching children with speech difficulties in selected special needs schools in Lagos State is low. There is no doubt about this finding that if the Montessori Language Materials are not being used, the extent of their usage would definitely be low. This result is in disagreement with that of Olowu (2021), who observed that while a significant majority of teachers recognised the value of Montessori language materials for supporting language development, only about 60% reported regularly integrating them into their teaching practices. Similarly, Nwankwo (2021) found that although teachers widely appreciated the effectiveness of these materials, only about half (50%) actively used them in daily lessons. This suggests that while awareness of the benefits is strong, other factors may be limiting consistent implementation. This negates Adediran and Kolawole's (2020) finding, which found that approximately 65% of teachers used Montessori language materials consistently, though their usage frequency varied based on teachers' levels of training and experience. This finding indicates that the low level of utilisation overall could be a result of practical constraints like training gaps and resource availability, which impact teachers' ability to incorporate Montessori materials as fully as desired. This points to a need for greater support, such as professional development and resource allocation, to enable more consistent use of Montessori language materials across classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has revealed that teachers in selected special needs schools in Lagos State hold a positive perception of the impact of Montessori Language Materials on improving the language achievement of children with speech difficulties. However, despite this positive outlook, the extent to which these materials are used was low due to challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and insufficient administrative support.

Recommendations -

Based on the findings from the study, the following practical recommendations were made:

1. In light of the first finding, school administrators should encourage continuous professional development programs focused on the Montessori method for language instruction. Regular workshops and training sessions on using Montessori Language Materials effectively should be organised to ensure teachers are equipped with the skills and confidence needed to implement these tools. Such training sessions should be facilitated by Montessori experts in leading Nigerian Universities that have Montessori courses.
2. In light of the second finding, teachers should aim to utilise a variety of Montessori materials, including but not limited to phonetic letter boxes and sandpaper letters, to provide multisensory language experiences that support different learning styles. In addition, teachers should strive to adapt Montessori materials to meet the unique needs of each child with speech difficulties, creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere that promotes active engagement and positive language development.

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