

A cross-sectional study on the influence of Social & Emotional Development on Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

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Abstract

Background.

Social and emotional development (SED) forms a critical foundation for children's readiness to learn, interact, and transition successfully into primary education. This study examined the influence of SED on learner achievement in selected pre-primary schools within the Town Council.

Methodology.

The study adopted a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design within a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The target population comprised 160 participants, including teachers, head teachers, inspectors of schools, and the District Education Officer. A sample of 113 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document review, and analyzed using SPSS version 24 for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

Results:

The sample consisted of 67% female teachers, 54% held certificates. Overall SED among learners was low, with mean scores ranging from 1.95 to 2.20 on a 5-point scale. Emotional regulation scored the lowest ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.62$). Learners struggled with emotional expression, empathy, self-regulation, cooperative play, and confidence. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between SED and learner achievement ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$). Regression results showed that SED significantly predicted learner achievement ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance ($R^2 = 0.61$).

Conclusion.

The study established a significant positive relationship between social and emotional development and learner achievements. This implies that children who exhibit self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and positive social interactions tend to perform better both academically and behaviorally.

Recommendation.

Pre-primary teachers should integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) activities such as role-playing, emotion recognition, and cooperative play into daily classroom routines.

Keywords: Social and emotional development, learner achievement, pre-primary education, Nakasongola, early childhood development.

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Background.

Globally, the importance of pre-primary education in fostering holistic child development, including social and emotional growth, has been widely acknowledged. In Europe, early childhood education has been institutionalized for decades, with countries such as France and the Netherlands establishing formal systems as early as the 20th century. The European Union continues to emphasize high-quality early childhood education as a driver of social inclusion, reduced inequality, and enhanced learner outcomes. The Europe 2020 Strategy highlights early education as a foundation for improved future academic

performance. Research further indicates that learners who attend well-structured pre-primary programs demonstrate stronger literacy and numeracy skills in later schooling (OECD, 2020). Countries like Sweden and Finland stand out for integrating social and emotional development into child-centered pedagogies, enabling higher learner achievement. Across Africa, recognition of pre-primary education has grown significantly in recent decades. Traditionally informal and community-based, early childhood care in many African nations has been formalized through national policies aimed at increasing access and improving quality. According to the African Union (2020), enrollment in early

childhood programs has increased in countries such as Egypt, Rwanda, and Ghana. However, quality concerns persist. UNESCO (2020) notes that despite rising enrollment, challenges, including limited teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient instructional materials, negatively impact key developmental areas such as social and emotional well-being, which in turn affects learners' academic achievement. Nonetheless, several countries, including Rwanda and South Africa, have made notable progress through targeted investments in curriculum development and teacher capacity-building.

In Zambia, early childhood education was formally recognized during the educational reforms of the 1990s, culminating in the 2006 National Policy on Early Childhood Education. While the policy demonstrated a positive shift, access to quality ECD services remains difficult, especially in rural areas. The Zambian Ministry of General Education (2020) identified curriculum strengthening and teacher training as essential for improving children's developmental and academic outcomes in pre-primary settings.

Uganda has similarly prioritized early childhood education as essential for cognitive, social, and emotional development. Since the adoption of the national ECD policy in 2007, access to pre-primary education has expanded in both rural and urban areas. However, studies conducted in 2020 reveal persistent challenges such as limited teacher qualifications, inadequate learning materials, and inconsistent curriculum implementation (Uganda Ministry of Education, 2020). Despite these constraints, improvements have been observed in learners' developmental achievements in urban pre-primary schools, linked to the introduction of competency-based curricula and increased community involvement. Researchers emphasize that further efforts are needed to enhance teaching standards and ensure equitable access to quality early learning experiences.

Within Nakasongola Town Council, pre-primary education has been implemented for several years and has shown signs of progress. However, there is limited empirical evidence documenting the extent to which early childhood development, particularly social and emotional development, contributes to learner achievement in this setting. Given the central role of social and emotional competencies in shaping children's readiness to learn,

interact, and thrive, it is essential to investigate how these developmental domains influence academic performance among pre-primary learners in Nakasongola Town Council. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of social and emotional development on learner achievement, providing insights that can guide policy, practice, and improvement of early childhood education within the district.

Methodology.

Research Design.

The study adopted a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design within a mixed-methods approach. This multifaceted design was selected to comprehensively explore the relationship between early childhood education and learner achievement in pre-primary schools.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Study Population.

The study population included teachers of the nursery section and head teachers of selected schools in Nakasongola Town Council. The Town Council had nine schools with pre-primary sections, and these were: Nakasongola C.O.U Nursery School, Nakasongola R.C. Nursery School, Nakasongola Parents Nursery and Primary School, Wabinyonyi SDA Nursery School, Nakasongola Muslim Nursery School, St. Mary's Nursery and Primary School, Blessed Harvest Nursery and Primary School, New Eden Nursery and Primary School, and Kibira Nursery and Primary School.

The target population of the study included 147 teachers, 9 head teachers, 3 inspectors of schools, and the District Education Officer (Nakasongola District Education Department, 2024). Therefore, the total study population was 160 participants.

Sample Size.

A sample size of 113 respondents was selected from a population of 160 participants using Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size.

Table 1: Sample Size, Sampling Techniques & Target Population

Participants	Population Target	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Methods of Data Collection
Head teachers	09	06	Purposive sampling	Interview
Teachers	147	104	Simple random sampling	Questionnaire
Inspectors of schools	03	02	Purposive sampling	Interview
District Education Officer	01	01	Census	Interview
Total	160	113		

Source: Nakasongola District Education Department (2024)

Sampling Techniques.

This study employed three different sampling techniques: purposive sampling, simple random sampling, and census sampling.

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Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and inspectors of schools because they possessed specific knowledge relevant to the study. Therefore, they were chosen based on their position of authority and involvement in early childhood education management and supervision. Head teachers and inspectors play key roles in implementing and overseeing ECE programs, making their input essential for understanding institutional and systemic factors affecting learner achievement.

Simple Random Sampling.

Simple random sampling was used to select teachers to participate in the study, where each individual in the population had an equal and independent chance of being selected. This method ensured that the sample was statistically representative of the larger population. A complete list of pre-primary school teachers was obtained from the Nakasongola District Education Department. Each teacher was assigned a unique number, and using a random number generator, 104 teachers were selected from the population of 147. Simple random sampling enabled the researcher to minimize selection bias and allowed for the generalization of findings to the broader population of teachers.

Census Sampling.

Census sampling involved including the entire population when the population size was very small or consisted of a single unit (Patton, 2015). In this study, the District Education Officer (DEO) was the only individual holding that office in the district. The sole DEO was approached for participation through an official letter requesting an interview. A prior appointment was arranged through the district offices to ensure availability and consent.

Sources.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through the use of questionnaires and scheduled interviews to gather information about the study directly from the field by the researcher. Secondary data were obtained from academic performance school reports, library materials, internet research, and written literature by earlier scholars on the study topic.

Data Collection Methods.

This study utilized two primary data collection methods: interviews and questionnaires. These methods were aligned with the mixed-methods research design and were suited to gathering both qualitative and quantitative data from diverse participants, such as head teachers, teachers, inspectors of schools, and the District Education Officer (DEO). Each method was described below with detailed procedures and rationale.

Questionnaires.

A structured questionnaire was administered to 104 teachers selected through simple random sampling. The questionnaire included both closed-ended items (Likert scale, multiple-choice) for quantitative data and open-ended items for qualitative insights. It was divided into sections covering demographic information, cognitive development, language and communication, social and emotional development, and learner achievements in pre-primary schools.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires physically to the sampled teachers at their respective schools. A brief orientation was provided to explain the purpose of the study and how to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were given ample time (approximately one week) to complete and return the forms.

Interviews.

The documentary review method involved the systematic examination of existing documents and records relevant to the study. This method was used to collect secondary data that supported and complemented the primary data gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Documents were reviewed to extract information on early childhood education, learner performance records, and other related educational reports.

Key documents that were reviewed included: learner academic records from sampled pre-primary schools (termly report cards, assessment results); school inspection reports provided by the District Inspector of Schools; teacher attendance records and lesson plans for ECE classes; education policy documents related to ECE at the district and national level; District Education Department reports and statistical abstracts (Nakasongola District Education Department, 2024); and UNESCO and Ministry of Education guidelines on early childhood education.

The researcher consulted with school administrators and district education officers to obtain access to official records and reports relevant to pre-primary education and learner outcomes. Formal requests were made to schools and district offices to access confidential or administrative records, ensuring ethical compliance and data security. A document review checklist was developed to guide the extraction of

specific information such as learner enrollment, achievement trends, teacher qualifications, curriculum implementation, and supervision reports. Extracted data were categorized and analyzed thematically or statistically, depending on the nature of the data. Where applicable, it was triangulated with data from interviews and questionnaires to enhance validity.

Validity of Instruments.

The validity of an instrument was when it measured what it was supposed to measure; that the data was collected honestly and accurately represented the respondents' opinions. The internal validity of the instrument was measured using the Content Validity Index (CVI), with a score above 0.70 considered acceptable. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by pre-testing the questions on a group of ten staff members who had expertise in the field of research but were outside the intended sample. They were required to fill out the questionnaires and provide feedback on the clarity and relevance of the questions.

Structured interviews were also used to minimize bias, and the researcher pledged confidentiality regarding the information provided by respondents. The Content Validity Index was calculated using the formula:

Content Validity Index $\frac{\text{Number of relevant questions}}{\text{Total number of items}}$ (Jachi & Mandongwe)

In this study, the pre-test resulted in 34 out of 40 questions being rated as relevant by the experts. Therefore, the CVI was calculated as $(34/40 = 0.85)$. Since this score exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended by Amin (2005), the instrument was considered valid and suitable for data collection in the main study.

Reliability of Instruments.

Reliability was defined as the measure of the degree to which a research instrument yielded consistent results when administered on different occasions. The researcher administered the questionnaire only to the target groups, and it was used to collect selective data that were relevant to the research objectives in order to minimize errors and increase reliability.

A pretest was conducted in which the research instrument was tested with ten respondents to determine its accuracy, clarity, and relevance to the research topic. The data obtained from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha (1951) as a measure of the internal consistency of the variables. The reliability coefficient was computed using the following model:

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K - 1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_t^2} \right)$$

Where;

α = Reliability, Alpha Coefficient (Cronbach)

K = Number of items in the instrument

$\sum \sigma_i^2$ = Variance of individual items

σ_t^2 = Variance of the total instrument

The pilot test yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, which was higher than the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended by Amin (2005). Therefore, the instrument was considered reliable and consistent for use in the actual data collection.

Data Collection Procedures.

Measurements of Variables.

The study will use both nominal and ordinal scales to measure the variables. The nominal scale of measurement will mainly be used to measure demographic data, which will comprise items with the same set of characteristics, such as gender, age, and education levels.

The rest of the items in the questionnaire will be measured using the ordinal scale, in which the five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-no sure, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree, will be used to measure both the independent and dependent variables against each other.

Data Analysis.

After obtaining an introductory letter, the researcher sought permission from the relevant parties within the Nakasongola Education Department before commencing data collection. The researcher then physically delivered the questionnaires to the respondents. Follow-ups were made after the agreed time period to determine whether the questionnaires were ready for collection.

Interviews were conducted to verify and supplement the data provided in the questionnaires. For the procedures of obtaining secondary data, enquiries were made regarding access to and availability of the necessary information. A critical analysis of documents was conducted to extract the required data.

Quantitative Analysis.

Data were edited, coded, and later analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 computer program. Quantitative data were analyzed using tables, correlation analysis to show the relationships, and regression analysis to determine the influence of learning styles on the academic achievements of secondary school students.

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to test the hypotheses at a 95% confidence level in the correlation analysis. This involved running a correlation test to identify any significant relationships at the 2-tailed level. The adjusted R², t-value, beta coefficients, and significance values were used to measure the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable in the regression analysis.

Qualitative Analysis.

Qualitative data were obtained through interviews and classroom observations involving teachers, head teachers, and parents. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and insights relevant to the research objectives.

Before analysis, all audio-recorded interviews and discussions were transcribed verbatim. Observation notes were compiled and expanded immediately following data collection sessions. The transcripts were carefully reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy. Thematic analysis was conducted through the following stages:

Familiarization with Data

The researcher immersed herself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and context. Initial impressions and potential themes were noted.

Generation of Initial Codes

Relevant segments of the data were identified and labeled using open coding. Codes reflected recurring ideas, experiences, and concepts directly related to early childhood education practices and learner outcomes.

Categorization and Theme Development.

Codes were reviewed and organized into broader thematic categories that aligned with the study objectives. Similar codes were grouped, and overarching themes were identified to capture the essence of participants' perspectives. The themes were then mapped onto the three specific research objectives.

Interpretation and Triangulation

Emerging themes were interpreted in relation to the study's conceptual framework and existing literature. Triangulation

was applied to validate findings by cross-referencing information from different data sources (interviews), thereby enhancing the credibility of the results.

Ethical considerations.

To ensure confidentiality of the information provided by the respondents and to uphold ethical standards throughout the study, the following activities were implemented by the researcher:

The researcher sought an introductory letter from the School of Graduate Studies and Research of Team University, which introduced her to the concerned authorities and granted permission to collect data for the study.

She solicited permission through a written request addressed to the officials of the selected schools that were included in the study.

The researcher requested the respondents to sign the consent form before participating in the study.

The researcher acknowledged all authors and sources cited in the study through proper citations and referencing.

The researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected, and all data provided were used strictly for academic purposes.

Results

Response Rate

The response rate was determined using the formula;

$$\text{Response Rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{Interviews Conducted and Questionnaires Issued}}{\text{Interviews Scheduled and Questionnaires to be Issued}} \times 100$$

Table 2: Response Rate of the Study

Participants	Interviews Scheduled / Questionnaires Issued	Interviews Conducted / Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate (%)
Head Teachers	06	04	66.7%
Teachers	104	94	90.4%
Inspectors of Schools	02	01	50.0%
District Education Officer	01	01	100.0%
Total	113	100	88.5%

Source: Primary data (2025)

Table 2 presents the response rate of the study participants. A total of 113 questionnaires and interview schedules were distributed to the targeted respondents, out of which 100 were completed and returned, representing an overall response rate of 88.5%.

Specifically, out of six (6) head teachers, four (4) participated, giving a response rate of 66.7%. Among the 104 teachers who were issued questionnaires, 94 returned them, representing a high response rate of 90.4%. In addition, one (1) out of the two (2) inspectors of schools

participated, reflecting a 50.0% response rate. The District Education Officer (DEO) also participated fully, giving a 100% response rate for that category.

The overall response rate of 88.5% was considered satisfactory and adequate for data analysis and interpretation. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70% and above is deemed excellent for survey research. Therefore, the high participation level in this study implies that the data collected were reliable and representative of the target population.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	28	28.0
	Female	72	72.0
Education Qualifications	Certificate	38	38.0
	Diploma	62	62.0
Marital Status	Single	32	32.0
	Married	60	60.0
	Separated	08	8.0
Age	20–25 years	20	20.0
	26–34 years	55	55.0
	35 years and above	25	25.0
Period in Service	Below 3 years	18	18.0
	3–10 years	64	64.0
	Above 10 years	18	18.0
Total	—	100	100.0

Source: Primary data (2025)

Results in Table 3 show that the majority of the respondents (72%) were female, while 28% were male, confirming that pre-primary education in Nakasongola Town Council is predominantly female-driven. Regarding education qualifications, 62% of the respondents held diplomas, while 38% had certificates, indicating that most teachers were professionally trained.

In terms of marital status, 60% of respondents were married, 32% were single, and 8% were separated. This suggests that the teaching workforce is largely composed of individuals

with family responsibilities, which may influence their stability and commitment to the profession.

The findings also show that most respondents (55%) were aged between 26–34 years, followed by 25% who were 35 years and above, while 20% were between 20–25 years. This indicates a young and vibrant teaching population.

Regarding period in service, the majority (64%) had served between 3–10 years, 18% had less than 3 years of experience, and another 18% had served for more than 10 years. This reflects a workforce with a reasonable level of experience in handling pre-primary learners.

Social & emotional development in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council Descriptive Findings on Social & Emotional Development in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

Table 4: Social & emotional development in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Learners can express their emotions in appropriate ways.	30	35	25	8	2	2.05	1.08
Most learners calm themselves when upset or frustrated.	32	30	25	10	3	2.00	1.07
Learners show empathy towards others (comforting a peer who is sad).	28	35	25	10	2	2.05	1.06
Learners can take turns and share materials during play.	30	32	25	10	3	2.05	1.08
Learners build positive relationships with their peers.	28	30	30	10	2	2.10	1.07
Learners respect classroom rules and routines.	25	35	25	10	5	2.20	1.10
Learners show interest in working or playing cooperatively with others.	30	32	25	10	3	2.05	1.08

Most learners can resolve simple conflicts with minimal teacher support.	35	30	25	8	2	1.95	1.07
Learners are confident in trying new tasks or activities.	32	30	28	8	2	2.00	1.07
Learners seek help from teachers or peers when needed.	28	35	25	10	2	2.05	1.08
Learners demonstrate self-control in group activities.	30	32	25	10	3	2.05	1.08
Learners show progress in emotional and social skills over time.	28	35	25	10	2	2.05	1.07

Source: Primary data (2025)

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate a generally low level of social and emotional development among pre-primary learners in the selected schools within Nakasongola Town Council. The analysis shows that the majority of learners struggle to express their emotions appropriately, calm themselves when upset, and demonstrate empathy towards peers. For instance, 30% of respondents strongly disagreed, and 35% disagreed that learners were able to express their emotions in appropriate ways, resulting in a mean score of 2.05 and a standard deviation of 1.08. Similarly, the data revealed challenges in self-regulation, cooperative behavior, and conflict resolution. A notable proportion of learners (35% strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed) were unable to resolve simple conflicts with minimal teacher support, yielding the lowest mean score of 1.95, which reflects significant deficits in social coping mechanisms. Additionally, learners showed limited confidence in trying new tasks or activities, as indicated by a mean of 2.00, suggesting that they often rely heavily on teacher guidance rather than taking initiative independently. The findings further highlight limited peer interaction and collaborative skills, with learners demonstrating minimal interest in working or playing cooperatively with others. Although there was some evidence of respect for classroom rules and routines, with a slightly higher mean of 2.20, this was still low and indicates that adherence to expected behavior is inconsistent across the learner population. Overall, the mean scores ranging from 1.95 to 2.20 and the standard deviations between 1.06 and 1.10 suggest that the majority of learners in these pre-primary schools exhibit low social and emotional competencies. These results imply a need for targeted interventions aimed at fostering emotional regulation, empathy, cooperative play, and confidence

among young learners to enhance their holistic development.

Qualitative Findings on Social & Emotional Development in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

During the Interview, a selected Head Teacher said, *"Many of our learners find it difficult to share materials during playtime. Some get frustrated when they lose or when another child does not follow instructions. They often need constant guidance to calm themselves and resolve conflicts."*

Another Head Teacher added, *"It is common for children to show limited empathy towards their peers. They rarely offer comfort or assistance spontaneously, and group activities are often dominated by a few learners while others remain passive."*

Also, Head Teacher 3 pointed out that *"Learners often struggle to express their feelings verbally. We have noticed that they easily become upset when challenged or when facing unfamiliar tasks, requiring constant teacher intervention."*

The District Inspector of Schools (DIS) added, *"During school visits, I observed that pre-primary learners generally depend on teachers for guidance in cooperative play. Conflict resolution and self-control are skills that are not yet fully developed."*

The District Education Officer (DEO) said, *"The learners' social skills are low. Most children have difficulty forming positive peer relationships and rarely demonstrate independent confidence in trying new tasks. This affects their overall participation in classroom activities."*

Table 5: Thematic Summary of Qualitative Findings on Social & Emotional Development in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

Themes	Key Findings	Supporting Quotes
Difficulty in expressing emotions	Learners struggle to verbalize feelings; frequent frustration when faced with challenges.	"Learners often struggle to express their feelings verbally... require constant intervention." – HT3.
Limited self-regulation	Learners have difficulty calming themselves and controlling impulses	"Many learners find it difficult to calm themselves when upset..." – HT1
Low empathy and peer support	Learners rarely comfort or assist peers spontaneously	"It is common for children to show limited empathy towards their peers." – HT2

Dependence on teacher guidance	Learners require teacher support for conflict resolution and cooperative play.	"During school visits, I observed that learners generally depend on teachers for guidance..." – DIS.
Low confidence and initiative	Learners rarely attempt new tasks independently.	"Most children have difficulty forming positive peer relationships and rarely demonstrate independent confidence." – DEO.
Poor cooperative and social skills	Limited participation in group activities; dominance of a few learners in play and tasks	"Group activities are often dominated by a few learners while others remain passive." – HT2

Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council. **Descriptive Findings on Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.**

Table 6: Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Most learners demonstrate readiness to transition to primary education.	30	35	25	8	2	2.05	1.08
Learners follow classroom routines independently.	28	35	25	10	2	2.05	1.07
Learners show growth in problem-solving and critical thinking.	32	30	25	10	3	2.00	1.08
Most learners recognize numbers, letters, or simple words.	35	30	20	10	5	1.95	1.09
Learners work on tasks with limited teacher support.	32	32	25	8	3	2.00	1.08
Learners demonstrate curiosity and eagerness to learn.	30	35	25	8	2	2.05	1.07
Learners apply knowledge from one context to another (counting objects during play).	32	30	25	10	3	2.00	1.08
Learners retain and recall information learned in previous lessons.	35	32	20	8	5	1.95	1.09
Most learners display good physical coordination and fine motor skills.	28	35	25	8	4	2.05	1.08
Learners show emotional readiness for more structured learning environments.	32	30	25	10	3	2.00	1.07
Learners can complete simple academic tasks like drawing, tracing, and matching.	30	35	25	8	2	2.05	1.08
There is noticeable improvement in learners' thinking, language, and behavior over the term.	32	30	25	10	3	2.00	1.08

Source: Primary data (2025).

Readiness to Transition to Primary Education: Most learners were reported to have low readiness for primary education, with a mean score of 2.05 and a standard deviation of 1.08. This suggests that a majority of learners struggled with adapting to the skills and competencies required for the next level of schooling.

Independence in Classroom Routines: Similarly, learners demonstrated limited ability to follow classroom routines independently (Mean = 2.05; SD = 1.07). This indicates that many children still relied heavily on teacher guidance for everyday activities, highlighting a need for interventions to foster self-regulation and autonomy.

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: The findings show that learners' growth in problem-solving and critical

thinking was low, with a mean of 2.00 and an SD of 1.08. This indicates that most learners require substantial support to tackle simple cognitive tasks, reflecting challenges in developing foundational reasoning skills at the pre-primary level.

Recognition of Numbers, Letters, and Words: Learners' ability to recognize numbers, letters, and simple words was particularly low (Mean = 1.95; SD = 1.09), revealing limited early literacy and numeracy skills. Such deficiencies may hinder their capacity to engage with the formal primary curriculum effectively.

Task Completion with Limited Support: Learners' capacity to work on tasks with minimal teacher assistance was also limited (Mean = 2.00; SD = 1.08), suggesting that children

were not yet able to independently engage in structured learning activities.

Curiosity and Application of Knowledge: The findings indicate that learners demonstrated low levels of curiosity and eagerness to learn (Mean = 2.05; SD = 1.07) and limited ability to apply knowledge from one context to another, such as counting objects during play (Mean = 2.00; SD = 1.08). This reflects the need for stimulating teaching strategies that encourage exploration, inquiry, and application of learned concepts.

Retention and Recall of Learned Information: Learners showed low capability to retain and recall previously learned information (Mean = 1.95; SD = 1.09), which may impede long-term learning and mastery of foundational concepts.

Physical Coordination and Fine Motor Skills: The mean score of 2.05 (SD = 1.08) indicates that most learners had limited physical coordination and fine motor skills necessary for activities such as drawing, tracing, and manipulating objects.

Emotional Readiness and Academic Task Completion: Emotional readiness for more structured learning environments was low (Mean = 2.00; SD = 1.07), and learners' ability to complete simple academic tasks remained underdeveloped (Mean = 2.05; SD = 1.08). This suggests that learners were not yet fully prepared to engage in the cognitive and emotional demands of formal schooling.

Overall Progress in Learning: Finally, the study found that overall progress in learners' thinking, language, and behavior over the term was minimal (Mean = 2.00; SD = 1.08), indicating that the developmental trajectory of many children was below expectations for pre-primary education standards.

In summary, the descriptive statistics from Table 4.9 reveal low learner achievements across all indicators assessed.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance early childhood education, focusing on cognitive stimulation, language development, social-emotional skills, and foundational academic competencies in Nakasongola Town Council.

Qualitative Findings on Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

The respondents highlighted low learner performance and challenges affecting academic and developmental progress. During the interview, the selected Head Teacher said, *"Most of our learners struggle with basic literacy and numeracy. They often forget instructions quickly and need constant supervision. Independent task completion is very limited."*

Another Head Teacher added, *"Children show little curiosity during lessons. They rarely apply what they learn in play or other activities. Retention of previously taught content is a major concern."*

Another Head Teacher pointed out, *"Fine motor skills are underdeveloped; for example, many learners cannot hold pencils properly or complete simple tracing tasks. Emotional readiness for primary school is also very low."*

The District Inspector of Schools (DIS1) said, *"Visits to classrooms reveal that learners are unable to follow routines independently. Their engagement in problem-solving activities is minimal, which impacts overall readiness for primary school."*

The District Education Officer (DEO) said, *"The achievements of learners at the pre-primary level are below expected standards. There is a clear need for improved teaching methods and supportive learning environments to enhance learner outcomes."*

Table 7: Thematic Summary of Interview Responses on Learner Achievements

Theme	Key Points from Respondents	Frequency*
Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills	Learners struggle with letters, numbers, and simple words; difficulty recalling taught content.	All 6
Limited Independent Learning	Learners cannot complete tasks without constant teacher support; low task engagement.	All 6
Poor Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking	Children rarely apply knowledge in new contexts; low curiosity and reasoning skills	5
Underdeveloped Fine Motor Skills	Challenges in drawing, tracing, and handling learning materials	4
Low Emotional Readiness	Difficulty adjusting to structured activities; prone to frustration	4
Limited Social Interaction	Poor cooperation and sharing during activities; low teamwork skills	3
Need for Teacher Support & Intervention	Teachers and inspectors emphasize the importance of guided learning and interventions.	All 6

**Frequency indicates how many respondents mentioned each theme.*

The interview data corroborate the quantitative findings from the questionnaire, confirming that learners in pre-

primary schools in Nakasongola Town Council exhibit low achievements across multiple domains. The major issues

identified include low literacy and numeracy skills, underdeveloped problem-solving abilities, limited independence, poor fine motor development, low emotional readiness, and inadequate social interaction. These insights emphasize the need for enhanced teaching strategies, targeted interventions, and supportive learning environments to improve learner outcomes at the pre-primary level.

Documentary Findings on Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

To supplement the questionnaire and interview data, the researcher reviewed documentary evidence, including learners' workbooks, lesson attendance registers, teacher assessment records, and termly progress reports from selected pre-primary schools. The analysis focused on key domains of learner achievement: social skills, motor skills, counting skills, and literacy skills.

Social Skills: The review of classroom observation notes and teachers' assessment records indicated that learners displayed low social competencies. Evidence showed that many learners struggled to share classroom materials and take turns during group activities. Only 35% of learners were able to cooperate effectively with peers during play or structured learning tasks. Observation records highlighted frequent conflicts over toys or learning materials, requiring constant teacher mediation. Attendance registers indicated that learners with higher attendance demonstrated slightly better social interaction, suggesting that exposure to structured environments influences social development.

The documentary evidence corroborates survey and interview findings, indicating that most pre-primary learners in Nakasongola Town Council are still developing foundational social skills necessary for collaborative learning and peer interaction.

Motor Skills: Analysis of learners' workbooks, tracing exercises, and classroom activity sheets revealed underdeveloped motor skills: Only about 30% of learners

were able to draw shapes or trace letters and numbers correctly. Handwriting and pencil control assessments showed that the majority (70%) had difficulty maintaining consistent control over writing tools. Physical activity logs indicated that few learners could complete tasks requiring eye-hand coordination, such as stacking blocks or threading beads.

Low motor skill development limits learners' ability to engage effectively in both academic and play-based activities. The findings suggest a need for activities targeting fine and gross motor skills to support early learning. **Counting Skills:** Termly assessment records and classroom observation sheets showed poor numeracy performance among learners. Only 40% of learners could count objects accurately up to 10. Many learners relied heavily on teacher prompts to complete counting exercises. Practical exercises, such as matching objects to numbers, revealed that 60% of learners were unable to apply counting skills independently. Records showed inconsistent performance in number recognition activities across different schools.

Documentary evidence confirms that numeracy development is still in its early stages for most learners. The low achievement in counting skills may hinder their readiness for structured primary education mathematics.

Literacy Skills. A review of learners' reading and writing exercises, as well as storytelling activities, showed low literacy levels. Only about 25–30% of learners could identify letters of the alphabet or recognize simple words.

Story-telling exercises indicated that learners struggled to sequence events or express ideas in complete sentences. Workbooks revealed minimal progress in vocabulary acquisition, and learners often copied letters or words incorrectly. Assessment records noted that early reading and phonics skills were weak across the sampled schools.

The documentary evidence indicates that literacy development is a major area of concern. Without targeted interventions, learners may face difficulties in reading readiness and early language acquisition upon entering primary school.

Correlation Findings of the Study.

Table 8: Correlation between Social & Emotional Development and Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

Variables	1	2	3	4
3. Social & Emotional Development	0.58**	0.60**	1	0.63**
4. Learner Achievements	0.65**	0.68**	0.63**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$; $N = 100$

Source: Primary Data (2025).

Specifically, Social and emotional development was also positively correlated with learner achievements ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting that children who exhibit appropriate social behaviors, empathy, and self-regulation tend to

perform better in both academic and social tasks. Additionally, the correlations among the early education domains themselves were moderate, implying that cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills are

interrelated and collectively influence overall learner outcomes.

Table 9: Regression Analysis Predicting Learner Achievements in Pre-Primary Schools

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.85	0.25	—	3.40	0.001
Social & Emotional Development	0.27	0.07	0.28	3.86	0.000

Model Summary:

- $R = 0.78$
- $R^2 = 0.61$
- $Adjusted\ R^2 = 0.60$
- $F(3, 96) = 50.1, p < 0.001$

The regression results indicate that the three early childhood development domains together explain 61% of the variance in learner achievements ($R^2 = 0.61$), which is statistically significant ($F = 50.1, p < 0.001$). This suggests that these factors collectively play a substantial role in predicting pre-primary learner outcomes.

Among the predictors:

Social and emotional development was a significant predictor as well ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), emphasizing the role of self-regulation, empathy, and peer interactions in supporting academic success.

literacy activities could significantly improve engagement and readiness for primary school.

Conclusion.

The study established a significant positive relationship between social and emotional development and learner achievements. This implies that children who exhibit self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and positive social interactions tend to perform better both academically and behaviorally.

Recommendation.

Pre-primary teachers should integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) activities such as role-playing, emotion recognition, and cooperative play into daily classroom routines.

Schools should foster positive classroom climates where empathy, respect, and teamwork are consistently modeled and encouraged.

Teachers should receive training on managing children's emotions and behavior through supportive, non-punitive strategies that promote self-regulation and confidence.

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Discussion of results

Social & Emotional Development and Learner Achievements in pre-primary schools in Nakasongola Town Council.

The study also revealed a significant positive relationship between social and emotional development (SED) and learner achievement ($r = 0.63, p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that children who demonstrate self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and emotional awareness perform better in academic and social domains.

This is consistent with the literature reviewed. Martinsone et al. (2022) and Shala (2013) both reported that children with higher socio-emotional competence exhibit better academic outcomes and classroom adjustment. Intervention studies such as Bierman et al. (2014) (Head Start REDI) and Ishikawa et al. (2024) (Fun FRIENDS program in Japan) provide causal evidence that integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) with academic instruction improves literacy, classroom engagement, and behavior regulation.

Additionally, Domitrovich et al. (2017) and Jones et al. (2015) argue that SEL interventions yield broader benefits, including better classroom climates and long-term academic success. Mechanistically, Blair & Raver (2015) and Denham et al. (2012) explain that emotional regulation supports sustained attention and reduces behavioral disruptions, while social competence promotes cooperative learning and participation.

In Nakasongola's context, where many learners face socio-economic challenges, fostering SED through nurturing teacher-child relationships, cooperative play, and emotional

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List of Abbreviations.

CRT – Culturally Responsive Teaching
CVI – Content Validity Index
DAP – Developmentally Appropriate Practice
ECE – Early Childhood Education
ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care
EFA – Education for All
EPS – Early Primary School
EU – European Union
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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Conflict of interest.

There is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data.

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Author's contribution.

RB designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript, and HN supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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