

## THE ROLE OF CAREGIVER-CHILD INTERACTION IN ENHANCING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AMONG EARLY LEARNERS IN NSUKKA EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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### Abstract

*This study examined the role of caregiver involvement in early childhood language development, focusing on communication strategies, vocabulary acquisition, and associated challenges. Five research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and the study was conducted in Nsukka Education Authority, Enugu State. The population comprised 298 caregivers, with a sample selected using a stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was primary structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled: Caregiver Language Development Questionnaire (CLDQ). The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one from Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability was established through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. The decision rule was based on a benchmark of 2.50, with items rated above the threshold accepted. The findings of the study revealed that verbal and non-verbal communication significantly contribute to language development, with structured caregiver-child interactions enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, challenges such as limited caregiver literacy and lack of resources hinder effective language development. It was recommended that regular training programs be organized to equip caregivers with effective language stimulation techniques. This study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical insights into evidence-based strategies for strengthening caregiver involvement in early childhood language development, thereby supporting sustainable learning outcomes.*

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**Keywords:** Caregiver, language development, communication strategies, early childhood

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### Introduction

Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, playing a crucial role in cognitive, social, and academic growth. Effective communication skills are essential for young learners as they form the foundation for literacy, social interactions, and overall intellectual development (Hoff, 2022). The process of language acquisition is influenced by various factors, including caregiver-child interaction, which has been widely recognized as a critical determinant in shaping linguistic abilities among early learners (Shneidman & Goldin-Meadow, 2023). Caregiver-child interaction involves verbal and non-verbal communication between children and their primary caregivers, including parents, teachers, and guardians. This interaction provides a rich linguistic environment that fosters vocabulary expansion, sentence formation, and comprehension skills (Rowe, 2021). Studies have shown that frequent and meaningful engagement between caregivers and children significantly enhances language acquisition, as children learn through observation, imitation, and responsive communication (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2023). Furthermore, the quality and quantity of caregiver speech exposure influence the development of phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic language skills (Gilkerson et al., 2022). In the context of Nsukka Education Authority, early learners encounter diverse linguistic environments shaped by cultural, socioeconomic, and educational factors. The extent to which caregivers engage in interactive communication, including storytelling, singing, and guided conversations, determines the

effectiveness of language development in this region (Odo & Eze, 2023). However, challenges such as limited caregiver literacy, lack of awareness about early childhood linguistic needs, and socio-economic constraints may hinder optimal language acquisition among early learners (Uchendu, 2023). Given the significance of caregiver-child interaction in enhancing language development, it is essential to explore its role in fostering linguistic competence among early learners in Nsukka Education Authority. This study aims to examine how different forms of caregiver interaction contribute to language acquisition, identify barriers to effective communication, and propose strategies for improving early childhood language development in the region.

Caregiver-child interaction plays a fundamental role in shaping early language development. It encompasses verbal and non-verbal communication between children and their caregivers, including parents, teachers, and guardians. Through direct engagement such as storytelling, conversations, gestures, and shared activities, caregivers create a linguistic environment that fosters vocabulary development, sentence structure, and communication skills. Research has shown that the frequency and quality of caregiver interaction significantly influence children's linguistic competence, with responsive and engaging communication promoting better language acquisition. Children who experience consistent verbal exchanges with caregivers tend to develop stronger cognitive and social skills, as language serves as a primary tool for expressing thoughts, emotions, and social connections. Language development in early learners involves the progressive acquisition of speech sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills. It is influenced by both innate cognitive abilities and environmental interactions. Early exposure to language-rich environments, including spoken words, reading, and interactive play, facilitates the development of phonological awareness and literacy skills. Studies have demonstrated that children who receive rich language input from caregivers tend to have enhanced verbal fluency and academic readiness. In contrast, limited exposure to caregiver communication may result in delayed language acquisition, affecting a child's overall cognitive and social development. Given the importance of caregiver-child interaction, understanding the mechanisms through which language development occurs is essential for improving educational strategies and early childhood interventions.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky in 1978, emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive and language development. This theory posits that children acquire language and cognitive skills through meaningful interactions with more knowledgeable individuals, such as caregivers and teachers. A central tenet of this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the gap between what a child can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance and support from a more experienced individual. Another key concept is scaffolding, where caregivers provide structured assistance to help children progress in their learning. The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its emphasis on social interaction as a crucial factor in language acquisition. It suggests that caregivers play a significant role in enhancing language development through verbal engagement, modeling, and feedback. Understanding this dynamic can help in designing interventions that improve caregiver-child interactions to promote early language development. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, introduced by Jean Piaget in 1952, focuses on how children's cognitive abilities evolve through distinct developmental stages. The theory proposes that language acquisition is closely tied to cognitive development, as children construct knowledge through active exploration and interaction with their environment. One of the core tenets of this theory is that children progress through four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (0–2 years), preoperational (2–7 years), concrete operational (7–11 years), and formal operational (11+ years). The preoperational stage, which is most relevant to early language development, is characterized by the use of symbols, including words, to represent objects and ideas. Piaget argued that cognitive maturation, rather than social interaction alone, drives language development. The relevance of this theory to the present study is its emphasis on how children acquire language as part of their broader

cognitive development. It highlights the need for caregivers to provide rich and stimulating environments that promote cognitive growth, thereby supporting language acquisition in early learners.

Through integrating both Vygotsky's and Piaget's perspectives, this study seeks to examine how caregiver-child interactions enhance language development among early learners in the Nsukka Education Authority. Vygotsky's theory underscores the importance of social interaction, while Piaget's theory highlights cognitive readiness. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how language development occurs in young children and the role caregivers play in shaping linguistic competence. Research has underscored the pivotal role of caregiver-child interaction in shaping language skills among early learners. Tamis-LeMonda, Kuchirko, and Song (2023) emphasized that the quality of caregiver engagement, particularly in verbal exchanges, plays a crucial role in expanding children's vocabulary, sentence structures, and comprehension abilities. Their study demonstrated that caregivers who frequently engage in meaningful conversations with children facilitate stronger linguistic development, as these interactions provide opportunities for exposure to new words, sentence patterns, and contextual usage. Similarly, Hoff (2022) found that language-rich environments, where caregivers respond promptly and elaborately to children's vocalizations and questions, contribute significantly to their grammatical development and phonemic awareness. Rowe (2021) further revealed that when caregivers incorporate storytelling, reading, and open-ended questioning into daily routines, children develop more advanced expressive and receptive language competencies, laying a solid foundation for literacy and academic achievement. Beyond spoken language, non-verbal communication has also been identified as an essential component in early language development. Shneidman and Goldin-Meadow (2023) examined how gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues enhance children's understanding of language. Their findings revealed that children whose caregivers use expressive gestures alongside spoken words develop stronger word associations and better conceptual understanding. Tomasello (2019) argued that pointing, eye contact, and facial expressions serve as fundamental tools in early communication, aiding in language acquisition by reinforcing meanings and establishing shared attention. Similarly, research by Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2023) indicated that caregivers who incorporate intentional body language and visual engagement into interactions create richer linguistic experiences, fostering deeper comprehension and conversational skills in young children. These studies highlight the importance of integrating both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to optimize early language learning.

The body of literature reviewed aligns with theoretical perspectives that emphasize the significance of social interaction in cognitive and language development. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that learning occurs within a social context, with caregivers acting as primary facilitators in children's linguistic growth (Vygotsky, 1978). His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights how caregivers scaffold children's language abilities by providing appropriate linguistic input and gradually withdrawing support as children develop independence in communication. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1952) complements this view by asserting that language emerges as children interact with their environment, constructing meaning through experiences and cognitive processing. While Vygotsky emphasizes the social dimension of language learning, Piaget focuses on the cognitive readiness necessary for linguistic progress, illustrating the interplay between interaction and cognitive development. The reviewed studies have consistently demonstrated that caregiver involvement is fundamental to early language acquisition, as both verbal and non-verbal interactions contribute to linguistic proficiency. The combination of direct communication, environmental stimulation, and responsive engagement supports children's ability to articulate thoughts, comprehend meanings, and build a strong linguistic foundation. However, existing research has primarily focused on Western contexts, with limited studies exploring how cultural dynamics shape caregiver-child interactions in specific regions such as

Nsukka Education Authority. Further investigations are needed to examine the unique linguistic environments of early learners in this region and develop context-specific strategies for enhancing caregiver engagement in language development.

This study holds significant relevance for multiple stakeholders, including teachers, caregivers, parents, universities, and policymakers, as it provides valuable insights into the role of caregiver-child interaction in fostering language development among early learners. By highlighting effective communication strategies and engagement techniques, the findings will contribute to improved language acquisition and cognitive development in early childhood education. Teachers stand to benefit from this study as it will enhance their understanding of how caregiver-child interaction influences linguistic development. By integrating research-based strategies into classroom practices, educators can create a more language-rich environment that promotes vocabulary expansion, sentence formation, and conversational skills. Furthermore, the study will provide empirical evidence supporting the inclusion of caregiver engagement programs in early childhood curricula, equipping teachers with tools to bridge the gap between home and school learning experiences.

Caregivers and parents play a fundamental role in early childhood language development, and this study will offer practical recommendations on fostering meaningful interactions with children. By understanding how verbal and non-verbal communication contributes to linguistic growth, caregivers can adopt strategies such as active listening, storytelling, and responsive conversations to enhance their children's language skills. Additionally, the study will emphasize the importance of providing a supportive and stimulating linguistic environment at home, ensuring that children receive consistent language exposure beyond the classroom setting. Universities and higher education institutions will benefit from this study as it will provide empirical data for further research on language development in early learners. Findings from this study can contribute to curriculum development in early childhood education programs, preparing future educators and caregivers with evidence-based methodologies for fostering language acquisition. Additionally, the study may inspire further research on cultural and contextual influences on language development, particularly in regions such as Nsukka Education Authority. Policymakers and education stakeholders will find this study valuable in shaping policies that promote early childhood language development. By identifying key factors that enhance linguistic skills, the study will provide data-driven recommendations for implementing caregiver support programs, early intervention strategies, and language-rich learning environments. Policymakers can use these insights to design training programs for caregivers and educators, ensuring that language development initiatives align with best practices in early childhood education. Furthermore, the study's findings can inform national and regional policies that emphasize the importance of caregiver involvement in early learning, ultimately contributing to improved literacy rates and cognitive development outcomes. Hence, this study will serve as a valuable resource for teachers, caregivers, parents, universities, and policymakers by providing evidence-based insights into the significance of caregiver-child interaction in language development. Its findings will help strengthen early childhood education practices, inform policy decisions, and enhance the overall linguistic growth of young learners in the Nsukka Education Authority and beyond.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of caregiver-child interaction in early language development, highlighting how verbal and non-verbal communication enhances vocabulary acquisition, sentence formation, and overall linguistic competence. Research trends advocate for interactive storytelling, dialogic reading, and responsive communication as effective strategies for fostering language growth in early learners. Additionally, advancements in early childhood education stress the need for caregiver training programs to improve language-rich environments. Despite these insights, existing studies focus largely on Western contexts, with limited research on caregiver-child interaction in Nigerian early learning environments, particularly in Nsukka Education Authority. Furthermore, gaps exist in

understanding how cultural, socio-economic, and educational factors influence language acquisition through caregiver engagement. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the role of caregiver-child interaction in enhancing language development within this unique context, offering practical recommendations for early childhood educators, caregivers, and policymakers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, as it serves as the foundation for communication, literacy, and cognitive growth. Ideally, children should acquire language skills through consistent and meaningful interactions with caregivers, who provide verbal and non-verbal communication cues to enhance learning. Research indicates that a language-rich environment, characterized by responsive conversations, storytelling, and interactive engagement, fosters optimal linguistic development in early learners. In such an ideal setting, caregivers, including parents and teachers, play an active role in stimulating children's language acquisition through structured and spontaneous interactions. However, in many early learning environments, especially within the Nsukka Education Authority, gaps exist in caregiver-child interactions, limiting children's exposure to language-rich experiences. Factors such as inadequate caregiver training, limited awareness of effective communication strategies and socio-economic constraints contribute to reduced linguistic engagement between caregivers and children. Additionally, in some cases, caregivers may prioritize disciplinary or routine-based interactions over conversations that stimulate language development. As a result, many early learners struggle with vocabulary acquisition, sentence formation, and overall communicative competence, which can have long-term implications for their academic and social development. Specified these challenges, this study seeks to examine the role of caregiver-child interaction in enhancing language development among early learners in Nsukka Education Authority. The study will explore how verbal and non-verbal communication strategies employed by caregivers contribute to linguistic growth and identify factors that influence the effectiveness of these interactions. By providing empirical evidence on the significance of caregiver engagement in language acquisition, the study aims to offer practical recommendations for improving early childhood education practices, caregiver training, and policy interventions to ensure that children receive the necessary linguistic support during their formative years.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the role of caregiver-child interaction in enhancing language development among early learners in Nsukka Education Authority. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. examine the role of verbal and non-verbal communication in caregiver-child interaction for language development.
2. Identify the strategies caregivers use to support language acquisition among early learners.
3. assess ways does caregiver-child interaction support vocabulary development and sentence formation?
4. Investigate the challenges caregivers encounter in promoting language development in early learners.
5. Determine strategies to improve caregiver engagement in early childhood language development.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does verbal and non-verbal communication contribute to language development in early learners?



2. What strategies do caregivers use to enhance language acquisition among early learners?
3. In what ways does caregiver-child interaction support vocabulary development and sentence formation?
4. What challenges do caregivers encounter in fostering language skills in early learners?
5. What measures can be adopted to strengthen caregiver involvement in early childhood language development?

## Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the role of caregiver involvement in early childhood language development. The design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the collection of data from a large population to describe existing conditions without manipulation. The study was conducted in Nsukka Education Authority, Enugu State, Nigeria, chosen for its diverse early childhood education institutions and the active involvement of caregivers in child development. The target population comprised 298 caregivers within Nsukka Education Authority. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants to ensure adequate representation. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, ensuring a manageable and representative number of respondents. The primary instrument for data collection was the caregiver language development questionnaire (CLDQ), which was designed to assess various aspects of caregiver involvement, including communication strategies, vocabulary support, and challenges encountered in language development. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one from Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the CLDQ was established through a pilot study, and the internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high reliability. The questionnaires were administered directly to the selected respondents, ensuring a high response rate. The collected data were carefully reviewed for completeness before analysis. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was based on a benchmark of 2.50, where mean values above 2.50 were considered acceptable, while those below were rejected. The findings were presented in tables, followed by a concise interpretation of the results.

## Results

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Role of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Early Language Development**

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Storytelling enhances language acquisition.	4.73	0.43	1	A
2	Non-verbal cues help clarify ambiguous words.	4.64	0.49	2	A
3	Frequent caregiver-child conversations improve sentence formation.	4.46	0.35	3	A
4	Repetitive exposure to words accelerates language retention.	4.20	0.69	4	A
5	Gesture-based communication aids vocabulary development.	4.12	0.52	5	A
6	Caregiver facial expressions reinforce word meanings.	4.10	0.58	6	A
7	Eye contact during communication strengthens engagement.	4.08	0.61	7	A
8	The absence of verbal stimulation delays language development.	3.94	0.43	8	A
9	Singing nursery rhymes supports phonological awareness.	3.89	0.51	9	A

10	The use of sign language benefits children with speech delays.	3.82	0.55	10	A
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		<b>4.03</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>A</b>	

Data in Table 1 show that verbal and non-verbal communication significantly contribute to early language development, with an overall mean of 4.03 and SD of 0.49. The highest-ranked item ( $\bar{X} = 4.73$ ) highlights storytelling as a key factor in enhancing language acquisition. Non-verbal cues ( $\bar{X} = 4.64$ ) were also found to support word comprehension, while frequent caregiver-child conversations ( $\bar{X} = 4.46$ ) improve sentence formation. These findings emphasize the role of both verbal and non-verbal communication in fostering early language growth.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Strategies Used by Caregivers to Enhance Language Acquisition**

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Reading storybooks aloud improves vocabulary development.	4.82	0.41	1	A
2	Engaging children in daily conversations fosters language growth.	4.70	0.47	2	A
3	Asking open-ended questions enhances children's verbal expression.	4.63	0.49	3	A
4	Singing songs and rhymes improves phonetic awareness.	4.51	0.52	4	A
5	Using visual aids strengthens word recognition.	4.38	0.55	5	A
6	Encouraging peer interactions enhances language use.	4.26	0.62	6	A
7	Correcting children's speech through modeling supports language development.	4.14	0.58	7	A
8	Limiting screen time encourages face-to-face communication.	4.02	0.64	8	A
9	Encouraging role-playing activities promotes expressive language.	3.96	0.66	9	A
10	Repeating and expanding children's sentences improves grammar use.	3.89	0.68	10	A
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		<b>4.23</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>A</b>	

Data in Table 2 show that caregivers use various strategies to enhance language acquisition, with an overall mean of 4.23 and SD of 0.56. The highest-ranked strategy ( $\bar{X} = 4.82$ ) is reading storybooks aloud, which significantly improves vocabulary development. Engaging children in daily conversations ( $\bar{X} = 4.70$ ) and asking open-ended questions ( $\bar{X} = 4.63$ ) were also identified as effective techniques for fostering language skills. These findings underscore the importance of interactive and engaging methods in supporting early language acquisition.

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on How Caregiver-Child Interaction Supports Vocabulary Development and Sentence Formation**

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Regular conversations with caregivers improve children's vocabulary.	4.79	0.42	1	A
2	Caregivers' use of descriptive language enhances word acquisition.	4.68	0.46	2	A
3	Interactive storytelling promotes sentence structure development.	4.55	0.49	3	A
4	Repeating and expanding children's utterances strengthens grammar skills.	4.43	0.53	4	A
5	Asking children to describe objects around them builds word knowledge.	4.31	0.58	5	A

6	Encouraging children to express their thoughts improves sentence formation.	4.25	0.60	6	A
7	Engaging in question-and-answer dialogues enhances language fluency.	4.12	0.63	7	A
8	Providing feedback on children's speech refines language use.	4.05	0.65	8	A
9	Playing word games strengthens vocabulary retention.	3.94	0.67	9	A
10	Singing and rhyming activities improve phonological awareness.	3.86	0.70	10	A
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		<b>4.30</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>A</b>	

Data in Table 3 show that caregiver-child interaction significantly supports vocabulary development and sentence formation, with an overall mean of 4.30 and SD of 0.57. The highest-ranked item ( $\bar{X} = 4.79$ ) indicates that regular conversations with caregivers enhance vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, caregivers' use of descriptive language ( $\bar{X} = 4.68$ ) and interactive storytelling ( $\bar{X} = 4.55$ ) were identified as effective in developing sentence structures. These findings emphasize the role of caregivers in fostering language growth through meaningful interactions.

**Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Challenges Caregivers Encounter in Fostering Language Skills in Early Learners**

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Limited time for interactive communication due to work schedules.	4.72	0.44	1	A
2	Lack of adequate knowledge on effective language development strategies.	4.65	0.47	2	A
3	Inconsistent caregiver-child interaction affects language growth.	4.54	0.50	3	A
4	Socioeconomic constraints limit access to language development resources.	4.49	0.52	4	A
5	Excessive screen time reduces face-to-face communication.	4.37	0.56	5	A
6	Cultural and linguistic differences create communication barriers.	4.30	0.58	6	A
7	Caregivers struggle with maintaining children's attention during conversations.	4.19	0.62	7	A
8	Limited caregiver literacy levels hinder proper language modeling.	4.07	0.65	8	A
9	Lack of supportive learning environments affects language stimulation.	3.98	0.68	9	A
10	High caregiver-child ratio reduces one-on-one interaction.	3.89	0.70	10	A
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		<b>4.32</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>A</b>	

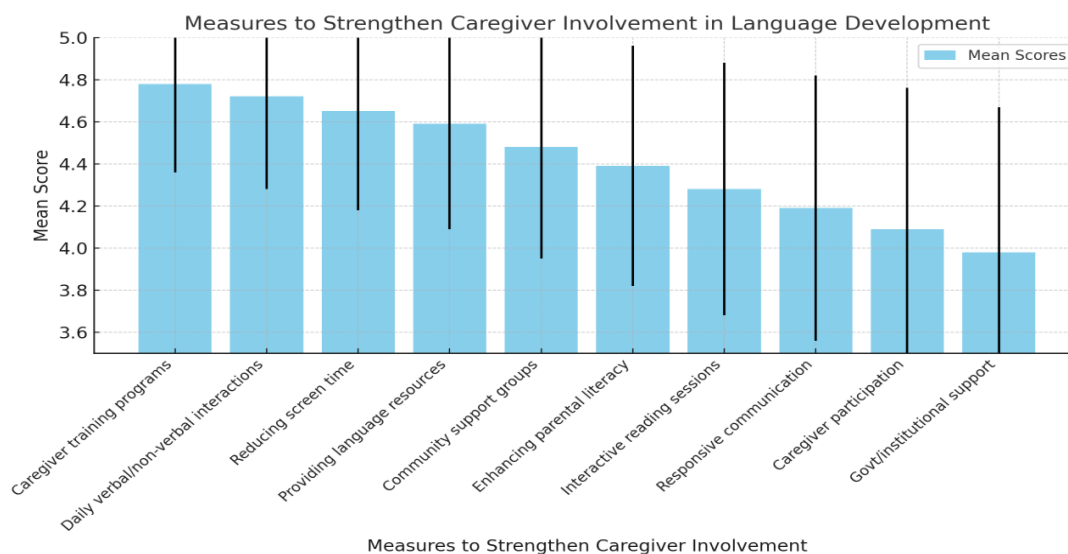
Data in Table 4 show that caregivers face significant challenges in fostering language skills in early learners, with an overall mean of 4.32 and SD of 0.57. The highest-ranked challenge ( $\bar{X} = 4.72$ ) is limited time for interaction due to work schedules. Additionally, inadequate knowledge of language development strategies ( $\bar{X} = 4.65$ ) and inconsistent caregiver-child interaction ( $\bar{X} = 4.54$ ) were highlighted as major obstacles. These findings suggest that structured support and awareness programs are needed to enhance caregivers' capacity in fostering language development.



**Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Measures to Strengthen Caregiver Involvement in Early Childhood Language Development**

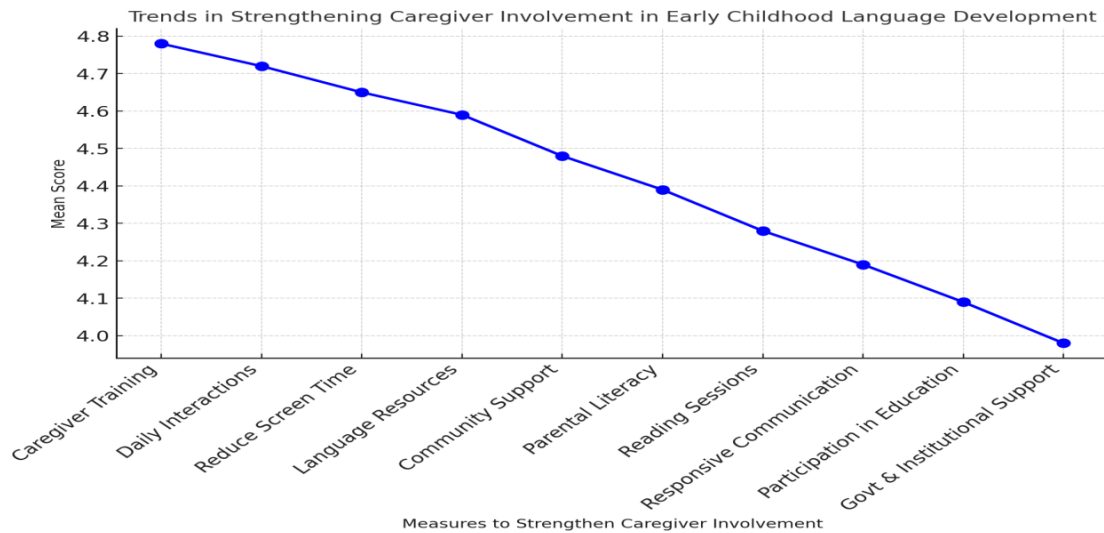
S/N	Item Statement	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	Organizing caregiver training programs on language development strategies.	4.78	0.42	1	A
2	Encouraging daily verbal and non-verbal interactions with children.	4.72	0.44	2	A
3	Reducing screen time and promoting interactive learning activities.	4.65	0.47	3	A
4	Providing accessible language learning resources for caregivers.	4.59	0.50	4	A
5	Promoting community support groups for shared learning experiences.	4.48	0.53	5	A
6	Enhancing parental literacy to support effective communication.	4.39	0.57	6	A
7	Establishing caregiver-child interactive reading sessions.	4.28	0.60	7	A
8	Encouraging responsive communication to strengthen language acquisition.	4.19	0.63	8	A
9	Integrating caregiver participation in early childhood education programs.	4.09	0.67	9	A
10	Providing government and institutional support for caregiver education.	3.98	0.69	10	A
<b>Aggregate Score</b>		<b>4.42</b>	<b>0.55</b>		

Data in Table 5 reveal that several measures can strengthen caregiver involvement in early childhood language development, with an overall mean of 4.42 and SD of 0.55. The highest-rated measure ( $\bar{X} = 4.78$ ) is organizing caregiver training programs to enhance their understanding of language development strategies. Encouraging daily verbal and non-verbal interactions ( $\bar{X} = 4.72$ ) and reducing screen time in favor of interactive learning ( $\bar{X} = 4.65$ ) are also crucial. These findings suggest that structured interventions, accessible resources, and policy support can significantly enhance caregiver participation in language development efforts.



The chart above illustrates the effectiveness of various measures in strengthening caregiver involvement in early childhood language development. The highest-rated measure is caregiver training programs (mean = 4.78), followed closely by daily verbal/non-verbal interactions

(mean = 4.72) and reducing screen time (mean = 4.65). The lowest-rated measure, though still accepted, is government/institutional support (mean = 3.98). The standard deviations indicate relatively low variability, suggesting consensus among respondents. These findings highlight the need for structured caregiver interventions, accessible resources, and policy support to enhance language development in early learners



The line graph illustrates trends in measures to strengthen caregiver involvement in early childhood language development. The highest-rated measure is organizing caregiver training programs (Mean = 4.78), followed by encouraging daily interactions (Mean = 4.72) and reducing screen time in favor of interactive learning (Mean = 4.65). A gradual decline in mean scores is observed for other measures, with the lowest-rated being government and institutional support (Mean = 3.98). The trend suggests that direct caregiver engagement strategies receive stronger support than broader institutional interventions.

## Discussions

The findings of the study revealed that verbal and non-verbal communication play a crucial role in enhancing language development among early learners. Caregivers who frequently engage children in meaningful conversations, storytelling, and interactive dialogue contribute significantly to their vocabulary growth and sentence formation. Non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact further reinforce comprehension and communication skills. The findings are in consonance with the study of Gilkerson, Richards, and Topping (2022), who posited that caregiver speech, including verbal interactions and non-verbal cues, is essential in fostering early language skills. Similarly, Rowe (2021) emphasized that the quantity and quality of caregiver input determine language acquisition and linguistic competence in children. The findings of the study revealed that caregivers employ various strategies such as reading aloud, asking open-ended questions, engaging in role-play, and using repetitive phrases to facilitate language acquisition. These methods encourage children to participate actively in conversations, enhancing their linguistic competence. The findings align with the study of Tamis-LeMonda, Kuchirko, and Song (2023), who affirmed that caregiver-child conversations significantly contribute to vocabulary development and overall language growth. Additionally, Shneidman and Goldin-Meadow (2023) asserted that interactive engagement, particularly through responsive speech and gestural communication, plays a crucial role in helping early learners acquire language more effectively.

The findings of the study revealed that frequent and meaningful caregiver-child interactions contribute to vocabulary expansion and sentence formation. Children exposed to

language-rich environments tend to develop a broader vocabulary and construct grammatically correct sentences at an early age. The findings correspond with the work of Hoff (2022), who noted that children develop language skills more effectively when caregivers provide consistent and varied linguistic input. Similarly, Rowe (2021) maintained that caregivers who frequently engage children in conversational turn-taking create opportunities for enhanced vocabulary learning and sentence structuring. The findings of the study revealed that caregivers face several challenges in fostering language skills among early learners, including lack of training, time constraints, and socio-economic limitations. Some caregivers struggle with limited knowledge of effective communication techniques, while others lack the time to engage children in language-rich interactions due to work demands. The findings align with the study of Uchendu (2023), which highlighted that socio-economic factors significantly impact the level of linguistic stimulation children receive from caregivers. Furthermore, Odo and Eze (2023) observed that parental communication barriers, including literacy levels and availability of time, influence the effectiveness of early language acquisition among children.

The findings of the study revealed that increased caregiver training, availability of early childhood learning resources, and community support programs can enhance caregiver involvement in language development. Educating caregivers on effective communication techniques and encouraging interactive learning activities at home and in school settings were identified as essential measures. These findings align with the study of Shneidman and Goldin-Meadow (2023), who emphasized that structured caregiver training, improves the quality of language interactions between caregivers and children. Additionally, Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2023) asserted that providing caregivers with access to language development resources, such as books and interactive materials, fosters better language outcomes in early learners.

### **Educational Implication of the Study**

The findings of this study have significant implications for early childhood education, caregivers, parents, educational institutions, and policymakers. Teachers and caregivers play a crucial role in fostering language development through verbal and non-verbal communication. Therefore, they should integrate interactive teaching strategies such as storytelling, role-playing, and guided conversations to enhance early learners' linguistic abilities. Parents also have a fundamental responsibility in this process. They should be encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations with their children at home, reinforcing language acquisition through daily interactions. Early childhood education centers should adopt a structured approach to caregiver-child interaction by implementing language-rich curricula, training caregivers on effective communication techniques, and providing interactive learning materials that support language development. Additionally, universities and teacher training institutions should incorporate caregiver-child interaction models into teacher education programs to equip future educators with the necessary skills for enhancing language acquisition in early learners. Furthermore, policymakers should formulate policies that prioritize early language development programs. Government agencies should develop initiatives that support caregiver training, create awareness on the significance of early language exposure, and provide resources for early childhood education centers. These implications underscore the necessity of collaborative efforts in ensuring a strong foundation for language development among early learners.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on early childhood language development by providing empirical evidence on the role of caregiver-child interaction in enhancing language acquisition among early learners. It extends existing research by emphasizing both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that caregivers can employ to support vocabulary development, sentence formation, and overall linguistic competence. The study also adds to the theoretical discourse by aligning its findings with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, reinforcing the argument that social interactions

and cognitive maturation are fundamental to language growth. Furthermore, it offers insights specific to the Nsukka Education Authority, bridging the gap in literature concerning caregiver-child interaction in early learning within this context. Through highlighting practical strategies for caregivers, teachers, and policymakers, the study provides a foundation for developing structured caregiver training programs and curriculum adjustments in early childhood education. Additionally, it contributes to policy formulation by advocating for the integration of caregiver-child interaction techniques into early learning frameworks, thereby enhancing language development outcomes on a broader scale.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that verbal and non-verbal communication plays a vital role in language development among early learners. Caregivers who engage children in meaningful conversations, storytelling, and interactive dialogue significantly contribute to their vocabulary growth and sentence formation. Additionally, non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions reinforce comprehension and communication skills, further enhancing linguistic competence. The study also highlighted the various strategies caregivers use to promote language acquisition, including reading aloud, role-playing, and interactive questioning. These methods create a language-rich environment that supports early learners in developing strong communication skills. However, caregivers often face challenges such as lack of training, limited time, and socio-economic constraints, which can hinder their ability to provide optimal language support. To strengthen caregiver involvement in language development, the study emphasized the need for structured training programs, access to language development resources, and community support initiatives. Providing caregivers with the necessary knowledge and tools will enhance their ability to foster effective communication, ultimately improving early learners' linguistic and cognitive development. The findings underscore the importance of caregiver-child interactions in shaping early language skills. Therefore, policymakers, educators, and caregivers must work collaboratively to create supportive environments that nurture language acquisition in early learners, ensuring their overall educational and developmental success.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations should be considered to enhance caregiver-child interaction for improved language development among early learners:

1. Caregivers should be trained on effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to enhance language acquisition in early learners. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, and continuous professional development programs.
2. Early childhood education centers should incorporate structured caregiver-child interaction activities, such as storytelling, reading sessions, and interactive play, to create a language-rich learning environment.
3. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to engage children in daily conversations, using both verbal and non-verbal cues, to promote language development outside the classroom setting.
4. Government and educational policymakers should develop and implement policies that support early language development programs, ensuring caregivers have access to the necessary resources and training.
5. Universities and research institutions should conduct further studies on caregiver-child interactions to provide deeper insights into effective strategies for enhancing language skills in early learners.

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