

## **NEED FOR IMPROVED PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN PRESCHOOLERS' EDUCATION AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AUTHORITY OF ENUGU STATE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the need for improved parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. The study was carried out in rural schools in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu state, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population was 51 comprising 29 preschoolers' parents and 22 heads of schools in rural schools in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State. The entire population was studied since it was manageable for the researcher to work with. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire design by the researcher through an extensive literature review. The instrument was titled Need for Improved Parental Engagement in Preschoolers Education Questionnaire(NIPEPEQ) The questionnaire had 36 items which was structured using likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by three experts in Faculty of education, UNN and the reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a pilot-test by sampling 26 head teachers and parents in Udenu LGA Education Authority of Enugu State which was outside the study area. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the pilot test and 0.72 value was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses. The findings of this study revealed among others that parents can be assisted to renew their interest towards preschoolers' educational activities. There is need for the parents to understand the role they ought to play to promote preschoolers' educational activities. From the findings of the study, recommendations were also proffered and among them include that parents forum should be made compulsory in all the preschools; and parents should be encourage to attend and participate in issues concerning their children's educational progress.

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**Keyword:** Need, improved, parental engagement, preschoolers education, rural dwellers

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### **Introduction**

Parents' thoughts and deeds about their kids' education have positive impact on how often the children go to school and how well they do in school. Positive attitudes about school and education on the part of preschoolers are linked to more involvement of their parents in their present and future schooling (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Preschool education serves as a critical developmental stage that lays the groundwork for future academic success. During these formative years, children acquire essential cognitive, social, and emotional skills that are vital for their overall development. Research has consistently demonstrated that early educational experiences can lead to improved outcomes in later schooling, including higher test scores, better social skills, and decreased dropout. To enhance educational outcome among preschoolers, there is need for parents' engagement.

Parental engagement refers to the active participation of parents in their children's education and development, encompassing a range of activities, attitudes, and behaviours that

contribute to a child's learning experiences at home and school. According to Brown and Green (2022), parental engagement is a multifaceted concept which recognizes that parents play a crucial role in fostering educational success and holistic development. Parental engagement can be seen as a partnership between parents, educators, and children, each contributing to the educational process in meaningful ways. Otani (2020) stated that research in this area has identified various dimensions of parental engagement, including communication with educators, involvement in school activities, supports for homework and learning at home, and advocacy for their children's educational rights and needs. Each of these dimensions plays a significant role in shaping a child's educational journey. For instance, regular communication between parents and teachers can create a supportive environment that nurtures academic success and social-emotional well-being (Hill & Tyson, 2009). One of the critical aspects of parental engagement is its impact on children's academic success.

Academic success involves developing a set goal and achieving it at the end. Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between parental involvement and students' academic success. For example, Johnson (2018), conducted a meta-analysis of more than 50 studies and found that parental engagement, particularly in the form of participation at school and at home, is linked to higher grades, standardized test scores, and improved behaviour in children. This suggests that when parents take an active role in their children's education, it not only enhances motivation and attitudes toward learning, but also translates into tangible academic success. Moreover, parental engagement is not a one-size-fits-all concept; it varies across cultural contexts and family structures. Research indicates that different cultural backgrounds may influence how parents engage with their children's education (Okunde 2023). For instance, some cultures emphasize collectivist values that prioritize communal involvement, while others may focus on individual achievements and responsibilities (Raza & Iqbal 2020). Understanding these cultural nuances can help educators develop strategies that effectively involve diverse parent populations. Another vital aspect of parental engagement is the support it provides for children's social-emotional development. Engaged parents often model positive behaviours, such as effective communication, problem-solving, and resilience, which are essential skills for navigating both academic and personal challenges.

Parental engagement is one of the most powerful determinants of a child's educational success, especially during the formative preschool years. Parental engagement in education refers to the active participation of parents or guardians in their children's learning and educational experiences (Medina, Cosby, & Grim, (2020). It encompasses a range of activities and behaviours aimed at supporting and enhancing a child's academic and personal development. The significance of parental engagement cannot be overstated, as it has been consistently linked to positive outcomes for students and schools alike (Ugwu, 2022). Parental engagement encompasses actions taken by parents to support their children's learning and educational success (Otani, 2020). This engagement can occur both within and outside the classroom, and it may include activities such as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school events, and advocating for educational policies that benefit all preschoolers\children. Parental engagement is significant because it reinforces the idea that education is a collaborative effort between schools, families, and communities, and it plays a crucial role in fostering a supportive learning environment for pupils (Alinsunurin, 2020; Okunde 2023). According to Akindote, Egieya, Ewuga, Omotosho & Adegbite (2023), children whose parents actively participate in their education tend to perform better academically, have stronger social skills, and exhibit greater

enthusiasm for learning. Akindote et al (2023), stated that active parental engagement promotes positive outcomes across several domains. First, it enhances academic development by fostering a home environment that values learning and supports academic skills. Parents who are educated engage in educational games, and expose them to various forms of learning outside the classroom set the foundation for strong literacy and numeracy skills (Bryan, Williams, & Griffin 2020). Furthermore, the involvement of parents in educational activities ensures that children's learning experiences are consistent and reinforced both at home and at school (Raza & Iqbal 2023).

Beyond academic skills, parental engagement is essential for fostering social-emotional development. Children whose parents provide consistent emotional support, guidance, and encouragement demonstrate better self-regulation, higher self-esteem, and stronger interpersonal skills (Udokwuet, Oshioste, Okoye, Nwankwo, Azubuike & Uzougbo 2023). For example, a study by Bowen, & Kisida, (2023) found that when parents were actively involved in their children's education, they exhibited more empathy, better problem-solving skills, and greater emotional resilience. Importantly, parental engagement also helps bridge the gap between home and school environments, ensuring that educators understand the unique needs and backgrounds of each child. This relationship between parents and teachers is vital for creating personalized learning experiences that reflect the child's cultural context and family background (Warren, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Nigeria, the foundation of a child's educational journey is laid during the preschool years, a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional development. However, in rural areas like Nsukka Local Government education authority of Enugu State, preschool education often faces several challenges, primarily the lack of effective parental engagement. Research indicates that active participation of parents in their children's education significantly improves academic outcomes and holistic development. Yet, many rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government education authority struggle with the concept and execution of this engagement, leading to gaps that hinder preschoolers' educational experiences. One of the primary issues is the limited understanding of the role parents play in early childhood education. Many rural parents, particularly those with low educational backgrounds, may not fully grasp the importance of their involvement in their children's learning processes. This lack of understanding can stem from cultural beliefs, socioeconomic factors, and the absence of robust community programs that promote parental education. As a result, parents may default to a passive role, failing to support their children's educational needs at home or engage with educators and curricula. This disengagement not only impedes the academic readiness of preschoolers, but also deprives them of the emotional support crucial for their overall development. Preschool education, the first formal learning experience for children, plays a critical role in laying the foundation for lifelong learning. However, the success of these programs often depends not only on the quality of the schools and teachers but also on the engagement of parents. Parental involvement ranges from attending school meetings and monitoring homework to creating a conducive home environment for learning. In rural areas, where these factors are often overlooked or neglected, there is a pressing need to explore and promote improved parental involvement in the educational journey of preschoolers. In addition, limited access to educational resources, such as books and learning materials, further complicates the situation, restricting opportunities for parents to engage in meaningful educational activities at home, thus parents are often inactive towards their preschoolers education activities and it is based on this backdrop that this study aimed to ascertain the need

for improved parental engagement in preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Education Authority of Enugu State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general aim of the study was to examine need for improved parental engagement in preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. Role of parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government education authority of Enugu State.
2. ways of engaging preschoolers parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government education authority of Enugu State and
3. constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the role of parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State?
2. What are the ways of engaging preschoolers' parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State?
3. What are the constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of head teachers and preschoolers parents on the role of parental engagement in preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the head teachers and preschoolers parents on the ways of engaging preschoolers parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the head teachers and preschoolers parents on the constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State

### **Methods**

The study was carried out in rural schools in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu state, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population was 51 comprising 29 preschoolers' parents and 22 heads of schools in rural schools in Nsukka Local Government Education authority of Enugu State. The entire population was studied since it was manageable for the researcher to work with. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire design by the researcher through an extensive literature review. The instrument was titled Need for Improved Parental Engagement in Preschoolers Education Questionnaire (NIPEPEQ) The questionnaire had 36 items which was structured using likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree,

Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by three experts in Faculty of education, UNN and the reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a pilot-test by sampling 26 head teachers and parents in Udenu LGA Education Authority of Enugu State which was outside the study area. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the pilot test and 0.72 values were obtained. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses.

## Result

**Research Question 1:** What are the influence of parental engagement in preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Education Authority of Enugu State?

**Table 1:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of preschoolers' parents and head teachers on the influence of parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority of Enugu State

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	t-cal	Remark
1	Parents enhanced academic achievement of preschoolers	2.88	1.72	0.51	RQ, NS
2	They improved social-emotional development	2.65	1.52	0.53	RQ, NS
3	There are stronger parent-teacher partnerships	3.45	1.61	0.52	RQ, NS
4	They lead to increased motivation and engagement in learning	2.65	1.60	0.50	RQ, NS
5	There is greater academic self-efficacy	3.55	1.72	0.61	RQ, NS
6	There is support for special educational needs	2.75	1.63	0.53	RQ, NS
7	There is creation of a positive learning environment	3.85	1.51	0.53	RQ, NS
8	They improved school readiness	2.95	1.52	0.56	RQ, NS
9	They encourage active participation in learning	2.55	1.62	0.58	RQ, NS
10	Parent fulfils academic obligation of their children	3.65	1.41	0.57	RQ, NS
11	They show interest in matters relating to their academic excellence	2.85	0.53	0.59	RQ, NS

Key: X=mean, SD=Standard deviation, Cal=t-calculated, Required, NS= Not significant

Data presented in Table one revealed that the mean of the 11-items ranged from 2.55 to 3.65. This shows that each and all of the items had a mean value above the cutoff point of 2.50 which indicated that all the 11 items are influence of parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority of Enugu State. The table also revealed that each and all the items had their standard deviation ranging from 0.51 to 1.72; this shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses. The result of the test of hypothesis in Table 1 indicated that each of the items had its calculated t-value lower than table value of 1.96. This shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of head teachers and preschooler's parents on the influence of parental engagement in preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority of Enugu State. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 11 items.

**Research Question 2:** What are the ways of engaging preschoolers' parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority of Enugu State?

**Table 2:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of preschooler parents and head teachers on the ways of engaging preschoolers' parents in their children

education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State.

S/N	Item Statement	x	SD	t-cal	Remark
1	Regularly participate in meetings to discuss their child's progress and strategies for support.	3.28	1.12	0.54	RQ, NS
2	Attend family nights, open houses, and holiday celebrations to connect with the school community.	3.15	1.82	0.56	RQ, NS
3	Engage with simple, age-appropriate activities at home that reinforce what children learn in preschool	3.25	1.64	0.54	RQ, NS
4	Bring unique cultural experiences to the classroom through storytelling, crafts, or food that reflects your family's background.	2.75	1.46	0.57	RQ, NS
5	Establish a regular reading routine at home, discussing the stories and asking questions about them.	2.66	1.76	0.58	RQ, NS
6	Designate a space for learning with books, educational games, and creative materials accessible to the child	3.32	1.90	0.54	RQ, NS
7	Explore digital resources and apps that reinforce skills learned in preschool.	3.15	1.81	0.56	RQ, NS
8	Encourage activities like counting, sorting, and categorizing objects during playtime to enhance math and reasoning skills.	3.16	1.52	0.54	RQ, NS
9	Exchange ideas and strategies with other parents in your community or through parent networks	2.56	1.73	0.57	RQ, NS
10	Foster a curious environment by encouraging children to ask questions and explore concepts they're interested in	3.18	0.91	0.91	RQ, NS

Key: X=mean, SD=Standard deviation, Cal=t-calculated, Required, NS= Not significant

From the data presented in Table two revealed that the mean of the 10-items ranged from 2.56 to 3.28. This shows that each and all of the items had a mean value above the cutoff point of 2.50 which indicated that all the 1 items are the ways of engaging preschoolers' parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State. The table also revealed that each and all the items had their standard deviation ranging from 0.91 to 1.90; this shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses. The result of the test of hypothesis in Table 2 indicated that each of the items had its calculated t-value lower than table value of 1.96. This shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of head teachers and preschooler's parents on the ways of engaging preschoolers parents in their children education among rural dwellers. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 10items.

**Research Question 3:** What are the constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State?

**Table 3:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of preschoolers' parents and head teachers on the constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State

S/N	Item Statement	x	SD	t-cal	Remark
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1	Parents often face busy schedules due to work and other responsibilities, making it difficult to engage fully in their child's education	3.16	1.90	0.57	RQ, NS
2	Some parents may not be fully aware of the importance of their engagement in their children's early education	2.87	1.80	0.55	RQ, NS
3	Different cultural backgrounds may influence parents' perceptions of education and their roles in it, leading to varying levels of engagement.	3.19	1.70	0.90	RQ, NS
4	Non-native speakers may struggle to communicate effectively with teachers or understand educational materials, which can limit their involvement.	2.56	1.60	0.54	RQ, NS
5	Some families may not have access to community support systems, such as parenting workshops, after-school programs	3.07	1.50	0.56	RQ, NS
6	If schools fail to maintain regular, clear, and effective communication with parents it may hinder parental engagement.	2.66	1.80	0.53	RQ, NS
7	Some schools may not have the infrastructure or organizational policies to support and encourage parental and community involvement	3.35	0.90	0.55	RQ, NS
8	Families who live far from the school or in rural areas may have difficulty attending in-person meetings	3.29	1.70	0.56	RQ, NS
9	Parents who feel they lack education or knowledge may feel intimidated or unqualified to engage with their child's learning.	2.57	1.70	0.57	RQ, NS
10	Financial stress can divert attention away from educational activities and limit the resources available for parental involvement, like educational materials or extracurricular activities.	3.08	1.50	0.58	RQ, NS

Key: X=mean, SD=Standard deviation, Cal=t-calculated, Required, NS= Not significant

Data presented in Table three revealed that the mean of the 10-items ranged from 2.55 to 3.39. This shows that each and all of the items had a mean value above the cutoff point of 2.50 which indicated that all the 10 items are constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority of Enugu State. The table also revealed that each and all the items had their standard deviation ranging from 0.90 to 1.90; this shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses. The result of the test of hypothesis in Table 3 indicated that each of the items had its calculated t-value lower than table value of 1.96. This shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of preschoolers parents and head teachers on the constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka education authority. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 14items.

## Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that 11 items influence of parental engagement in preschoolers education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government education authority. Those parental influences are parents enhanced academic achievement of preschoolers, they improved social-emotional development, there are stronger parent-teacher partnerships, they lead to increased motivation and engagement in learning, There is greater academic self-efficacy, there is creation of a positive learning environment, they improved school readiness, they encourage active participation in learning, parent fulfils academic obligation of their children, they show interest in matters relating to their academic excellence. The findings of this study is in agreement with Anokete al (2023) who noted that parent engagement in their pupils education activities has a way of inspiring the children to zealous in their academic pursuit. The authors noted that parents play a vital role by seeing

that educational interests of their children are ignited. Similarly, Akinmdote et al (2023) supported this view pointing out that influence of the parents towards their children education boost their academic interest and achievement. The findings is also in line with Hammed et al (2023) who noted that preschoolers ability to perform very well academically depend on their parents active involvement in their education. The authors noted that while school have their own role to play to foster good learning among children, their parents demonstration of interest in their children always serve as a morale booster to their learning.

The result of the study in Table 2 revealed that there are 10 ways of engaging preschoolers parents in their children education among rural dwellers in Nsukka Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. Those ways are community enhancing learning opportunities through local resources, they help in fostering social and emotional development, they help in creating supportive networks for families, community help in promoting culturally relevant education, they encouraging volunteerism and mentorship, They help in building stronger school-community partnerships, they help in supporting early intervention and specialized services, they help in building a lifelong commitment to education, communities can help identify and address the unique challenges faced by preschoolers and their families. The findings is in consonance with Babarinde et al (2023) who observed that parents interest of engagement in children education is demonstrated by their readiness to support school product for the interest of their children. The authors noted that parental participation triggers interest among the school children since parents are still part of the community. The findings also agree with Malone (2020) who observed that parents have a lot of responsibility towards fostering educational interest in children through motivating the institution suited in the community. The findings of this study is in consonance with Udochukwu et al (2023) who observed that parent are the owner of the school environment and the approval or allocation of land for preschooler education facility is the first step towards parental engagement in preschooler educational attainment. The authors further noted that parental engagement in preschoolers' education is very vital since it will assist them in increasing their interest towards education.

Result of this study in Table 3 showed that there are 10- constraints to parental engagement in their preschoolers' education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State. According to the findings, those constraints are low-income families who may face financial constraints that limit their ability to participate in school activities, some parents may not be aware of the importance of their involvement in preschool education, parents with lower levels of education may feel less confident in their ability to support their child's learning, parents who had negative experiences with their own education may feel disconnected from the school system, If schools fail to maintain regular, clear, and effective communication with parents it may hinder parental engagement, effective communication strategies, including regular newsletters, phone calls, emails, or text updates, can keep parents informed and engaged in their child's progress and school activities, providing parents with workshops or resources that educate them on how to support their child's learning and development at home can empower them to engage more effectively among others. the study is in line with Datnow et al (2023) noted that a lot of problems may come in between the parental and community engagement, such problems according to the authors are low-income families may face financial constraints that limit their ability to participate in school activities, parents with lower levels of education may feel less confident in their ability to support their child's learning. The findings are also in agreement with Radd (2021) who noted a lot of barriers faces parents and communities in living to their expectation, however, the author noted that with conscious effort, those barriers could be brought into control

through providing parents with workshops or resources that educate them on how to support their child's learning and development at home can empower them to engage more effectively among other. Otani (2020) in his study identified series of challenges which may hinder parental and community engagement towards their children education. Some of the problems pointed out by Otani (2020) include lack of proper information, financial commitment among others. The findings of this study is in line with the present study since problems or challenges identified in this study are also what the present study identified

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the need for improved parental engagement in preschool education among rural dwellers in Nsukka local government education authority of Enugu State is both urgent and critical for the holistic development of preschool children. The role of parents in fostering an environment that supports their children's education cannot be overstated. Despite the challenges faced by rural families such as economic hardship, low literacy levels, and limited access to educational resources, active parental involvement remains one of the most effective ways to enhance early childhood learning and development. There is a pressing need for local government authorities, schools, and communities to collaborate in developing strategies that will increase parental awareness and participation in early childhood education. Providing education on the significance of early learning, organizing workshops for parents, and fostering school-community partnerships can significantly improve parental engagement. Ultimately, improving parental involvement in preschool education in Nsukka local government education authority will contribute to the overall educational and socio-economic development of the region. Empowered parents can create a supportive learning environment at home, which complements the formal education provided by schools, resulting in more successful and well-rounded pupils. By addressing the barriers to engagement and promoting the active participation of parents, Nsukka can ensure that its preschoolers receive the best possible start in their educational journey.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Schools should implement clear and consistent communication strategies to foster better relationships between parents, teachers, and the broader community.
2. Educators and stakeholders should work together to ensure that preschool education is culturally responsive and inclusive.
3. To empower parents in supporting their child's learning, schools should offer educational workshops, resources, and training programs.

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