

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT ON REIMAGINING EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY AMONG PRESCHOOLERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the reimagining education in the 21st century via active community and parental engagement among preschoolers. The general purpose of the study is to determine how community and parents foster education in the 21st century among preschoolers. The study was carried out in Nsukka educational Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population was 49 comprising 27 community heads and 22 heads of schools public in Nsukka Local Government Area of State. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled: "reimagining education in the 21st century via active community and parental engagement among preschoolers (RECPEAP)" containing 23 items. The research 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 20 head teachers and community heads in Igbo Eze South LGA of Enugu State which was outside the study area. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistence of the pilot test and 0.76 values were obtained showing the consistence and reliability of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings of this study revealed among that knowledge on the certain things that parents and community members ought to do to foster preschooler quest for new knowledge are lacking. From the findings of the study, recommendations were also proffered and among them include that Enugu State Government in collaboration with the Enugu State Universal Basic Education (ENSUBEB) should incorporate community heads into educational policy making to increase their awareness of the need for innovative kinds of education that inspire the interest of their children

Keywords: Reimagining, Education, community, parents, preschoolers.

INTRODUCTION

Reconceptualizing preschool education places strong emphasis on the meaningful involvement of families and surrounding communities, particularly at the early childhood level (Okoro, 2024). Early childhood represents a sensitive developmental period during which core competencies related to learning, social interaction, and emotional regulation are established, forming the basis for later development (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Contemporary evidence increasingly points to the crucial role that parents and communities play in supporting preschool children's academic growth, social competence, and emotional well-being (Anoke et al., 2023; Hameed, 2023). In the context of twenty-first-century education, preschooling is widely regarded as a decisive phase that significantly influences children's intellectual, emotional, and social pathways. Longitudinal findings reported by Haleem et al. (2022) indicate that access to high-quality early childhood education is associated with sustained benefits, including improved academic achievement, enhanced employability, and more positive social outcomes in later life. Despite these recognized advantages, preschool education remains characterized by uneven access, varying quality standards, and inconsistent outcomes across different contexts. Strengthening parental involvement has been identified as a key strategy for enabling preschoolers to effectively engage with innovative and learner-centered educational approaches (Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

Among the various factors influencing early learning outcomes, parental engagement stands out as a central determinant of educational success during the preschool years. Parental engagement refers to the intentional and continuous involvement of parents or caregivers in their children's educational activities and learning experiences (Madina et al., 2020). This involvement encompasses diverse practices aimed at promoting children's academic progress and holistic development. A growing body of research confirms that strong parental engagement is consistently associated with improved learning outcomes and more effective school functioning (Ugwu, 2022). Otani (2020) describes parental engagement as a broad set of behaviors through which parents support their children's education both at home and within the school environment. Such behaviors may include monitoring learning activities, participating in school meetings, contributing to school programs, and advocating for policies that enhance educational quality. These practices reinforce the understanding that education is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities, and they contribute significantly to the creation of supportive learning contexts (Alinsunurin, 2020; Okunde et al., 2023). Evidence provided by Anoke et al. (2023) further demonstrates that children whose parents are actively engaged tend to achieve higher academic results, develop stronger interpersonal skills, and show increased enthusiasm toward learning.

Research by Akindote et al. (2023) suggests that sustained parental participation yields positive effects across multiple dimensions of child development. From an academic perspective, parental engagement nurtures a home environment that prioritizes learning and reinforces essential academic skills. When parents read with their children, introduce educational play, and provide learning opportunities beyond the classroom, they help establish strong foundations in literacy and numeracy (Bryan et al., 2020). In addition, parental involvement promotes alignment between home-based and school-based learning experiences, ensuring that educational content and expectations are consistently reinforced across both settings (Raza & Iqbal, 2023).

Parental engagement also plays a critical role in supporting children's social and emotional development. Children who benefit from consistent parental encouragement, emotional responsiveness, and guidance are more likely to demonstrate effective self-regulation, higher self-esteem, and well-developed social skills (Udokwu et al., 2023). Findings from Barlow et al. (2018) indicate that children whose parents actively participate in their education exhibit greater empathy, stronger problem-solving abilities, and enhanced emotional resilience. Moreover, parental involvement facilitates stronger connections between home and school, enabling teachers to gain deeper insights into children's individual backgrounds, needs, and cultural contexts. Such collaboration between parents and educators is essential for designing learning experiences that are responsive, inclusive, and culturally relevant (Warren, 2020).

While parental engagement operates primarily within the family sphere, community engagement introduces a wider structural dimension to early childhood education. Community engagement refers to the collective participation of community members, institutions, and organizations in supporting and enriching children's educational experiences (Anoke et al., 2023). This approach emphasizes partnerships among schools, families, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, all working collaboratively to enhance learning outcomes. By recognizing that education extends beyond school boundaries, community engagement draws on the diverse resources, expertise, and social capital present within local contexts to support preschool development (Borup et al., 2020; Udokwu et al., 2023).

Through community participation, additional learning resources such as books, digital tools, funding, and physical facilities can be mobilized to improve educational environments and expand opportunities for preschool learners (Onunka et al., 2023). Community members may also serve as mentors and role models, offering guidance that supports skill development, exposure to future career possibilities, and the ability to cope with social challenges. Furthermore, community-based activities such as educational excursions, service-learning projects, and experiential programs provide opportunities for children to connect classroom instruction with real-world contexts, thereby deepening understanding and engagement (Rock, 2022; Raji et al., 2023).

Active community involvement enhances preschoolers' motivation by helping them perceive the relevance of their learning to everyday life and societal challenges (Akindote et al., 2023). Access to diverse community perspectives and cultural experiences broadens children's learning horizons and contributes to more inclusive and enriched educational experiences. Community support for early childhood education may take multiple forms, including partnerships with local organizations, support from businesses, and collaboration with community leaders to strengthen learning environments. Stanley et al. (2020) note that one of the most significant contributions of community engagement lies in the provision of supplementary resources and support networks. Institutions such as libraries, museums, and cultural centers often offer enrichment programs that complement formal curricula, while community organizations may provide parenting education, early intervention services, and mental health support that enhance children's overall development (Rock, 2022).

Empirical evidence consistently indicates that strong school-community partnerships are associated with improved educational outcomes for young children. Bryan et al. (2020)

reported that preschoolers in communities characterized by active school–community collaboration demonstrated notable gains in both cognitive and socio-emotional development. In addition, community engagement fosters children’s sense of belonging and early civic awareness. Participation in community-based initiatives, such as environmental or service projects, helps preschoolers develop cooperation, empathy, and an understanding of social responsibility. Miller et al. (2021) emphasize that such experiences promote collaborative skills and highlight the interconnected nature of social systems. Despite extensive evidence supporting the value of parental and community involvement in education, significant gaps remain regarding how these collaborative efforts can be systematically leveraged to promote functional and sustainable preschool education, thereby underscoring the justification for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

One of the central challenges in reimagining 21st-century education lies in the limited integration of active parental and community engagement within preschool learning environments. Although extensive research has documented the positive effects of family and community participation on children’s early cognitive, social, and emotional development, many preschools continue to struggle with fostering meaningful and sustained partnerships with parents and local communities.

Several factors contribute to this gap, including inadequate financial and material resources, cultural differences that affect communication and expectations, and insufficient mechanisms for regular collaboration between schools and families. These barriers often prevent educators from fully leveraging the potential benefits of parental and community involvement, leaving preschoolers without access to the supportive and enriched learning environments necessary for holistic development. As a result, children may experience missed opportunities to develop critical early literacy and numeracy skills, strengthen social-emotional competencies, and cultivate a positive attitude toward learning. The lack of active engagement also limits the ability of educators to understand and address the unique needs, backgrounds, and cultural contexts of their students, which is essential for tailoring instruction and creating inclusive classrooms.

Addressing these challenges requires innovative and strategic approaches that actively involve both families and communities in the educational process. By creating stronger connections between homes, schools, and local stakeholders, it is possible to provide all children regardless of socio-economic status, cultural background, or geographical location with learning experiences that are not only academically enriching but also socially and emotionally supportive. Such an approach ensures that preschool education becomes truly holistic, laying a strong foundation for future academic success, personal growth, and lifelong learning.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to examine the perceived influence of community and parental engagement on reimagining education in 21st century among preschoolers

. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. Influence of parental engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education
2. The role of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education

3. To Explore the Barriers and Enablers of Effective Parental and Community Engagement in Preschool Education

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the influence of parental engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education
2. What are the role of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education
3. What are the **barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education**

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of head teachers and preschoolers teachers on the influence of parental engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of head teachers and preschoolers teachers on e role of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of head teachers and preschoolers teachers on the **barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education**

Methodology

The research adopted empirical survey design, which was deemed appropriate because of the views of a representative sample of the population were obtained using questionnaire and the findings were generalized upon the entire population. The study was carried out in Nsukka educational Zone, Enugu state, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. The population was 49 comprising 27 community heads and 22 heads of schools public in Nsukka Local Government Area of State. The entire population was considered because of the manageable population size. Instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled: “reimagining education in the 21st century via active community and parental engagement among preschoolers (RECPEAP)” containing 23 items. The research instrument was validated by three experts, two from Department of Educational Foundations (Childhood Education Unit) and one from Department of Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation Unit), all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a pilot-test by sampling 20 head teachers and community heads in Igbo Eze South LGA of Enugu State which was outside the study area. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to measure the internal consistence of the pilot test and 0.76 values were obtained showing the consistence and reliability of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions

Result

The result of the study was obtained from the research questions answered and hypotheses tested through data collected and analyzed.

Research Question 1: What are the influences of parental engagement in reimagining preschoolers' education?

Table 1: Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of head teachers and preschooler's teachers on the influence of parental engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education.

S/N	Item Statement	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 influences of parental engagement in reimagining preschoolers' education. 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 teachers on the influence of parental engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 11 items.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education?

Table 2: Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of head teachers and preschooler's teachers on the role of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education.

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	t-cal	Remark
1	Community should enhancing learning opportunities through local resources	3.28	1.12	0.54	RQ, NS
2	They help in fostering social and emotional development	3.15	1.82	0.56	RQ, NS
3	They help in creating supportive networks for families	3.25	1.64	0.54	RQ, NS
4	Community help in promoting culturally relevant education	2.75	1.46	0.57	RQ, NS
5	They encouraging volunteerism and mentorship	2.66	1.76	0.58	RQ, NS

6	They help in building stronger school-community Partnerships	3.32	1.90	0.54	RQ, NS
7	They help in providing extended learning opportunities	3.15	1.81	0.56	RQ, NS
8	They help in supporting early intervention and specialized services	3.16	1.52	0.54	RQ, NS
9	They help in building a lifelong commitment to education	2.56	1.73	0.57	RQ, NS
10	Communities can help identify and address the unique challenges faced by preschoolers and their families	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 roles of community engagement in reimagining of preschooler's education. 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 teachers on the roles of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 10items.

Research Question 3: What are the barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education?

Table 3: Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the responses of head teachers and preschooler's teachers on the role of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education.

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	t-cal	Remark
1	Low-income families may face financial constraints that limit their ability to participate in school activities	3.16	1.90	0.57	RQ, NS
2	Some parents may not be aware of the importance of their involvement in preschool education	2.87	1.80	0.55	RQ, NS
3	parents with lower levels of education may feel less confident in their ability to support their child's learning	3.19	1.70	0.90	RQ, NS
4	Parents who had negative experiences with their own education may feel disconnected from the school system	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	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.	2.57	1.70	0.57	RQ, NS

10	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.	3.08	1.50	0.58	RQ, NS
11	Offering flexible meeting schedules, including evenings and weekends, or virtual meeting options, makes it easier for parents with varying work schedules to attend school events or participate in discussions.	2.56	1.60	0.55	RQ, NS
12	Connecting families with community resources, such as childcare, counseling services, after-school programs, or financial support, can alleviate some barriers and make it easier for parents to engage.	3.19	1.80	0.54	RQ, NS
13	Acknowledging and celebrating the contributions of parents through awards, shout-outs, or thank-you notes helps maintain morale and motivates continued participation.	2.68	1.90	0.55	RQ, NS
14	Offering on-site family support services, such as counseling, language assistance, or parenting support groups, helps remove some of the barriers to engagement and supports parents in their roles.	2.77	1.70	0.50	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 14-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 14 items are **barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education**. 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 head teachers and preschooler's teachers on the **barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education**. Therefore the hypothesis of no significance difference was upheld for all the 14items.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that 11 items influence parental engagement in reimagining preschoolers' education. 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 Anoke et al (2023) who noted that parent engagement in their pupils education activities has a way of inspiring the children to zealous I their academic pursuit. The authors noted that parents plays a vital role by seeing that educational interest if 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 moral booster to their learning.

The result of the study in Table 2 revealed that there are 10 roles of community engagement in reimagining of preschoolers education. Those roles are community should 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 community 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 community 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 community 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 community is the dwelling place of any academic facility and the approval or allocation of land for preschooler education facility is the first step towards community engagement in preschooler educational attainment. The authors further noted that community 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 14- **barriers and enablers of effective parental and community engagement in preschool education. According to the findings, those barriers and enablers are** low-income families 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 problem pointed out by Otani (2020) include lack of proper information, financial commitment among others. The findings of this present study is in line with the present study since problems or challenges identified in this study is also what the present study identified

Conclusion

Reimagining education for the 21st century requires a fundamental shift in how we view and approach early childhood education. Parental and community engagement plays a crucial role in this transformation, providing the foundation for creating inclusive, supportive, and enriching learning environments. As the evidence demonstrates, when parents and communities work together with educators, children benefit from enhanced academic achievement, better social-emotional skills, and a deeper sense of belonging. In order to foster these outcomes, educational systems must prioritize the active involvement of both parents and communities in the educational process of preschoolers.

Recommendations

1. Schools should implement clear and consistent communication strategies to foster better relationships between parents, teachers, and the broader community.
2. Educators and community leaders should work together to ensure that preschool education is culturally responsive and inclusive.
3. Schools should actively collaborate with local community organizations, libraries, museums, and businesses to provide preschoolers with hands-on, real-world learning experiences.
4. To empower parents in supporting their child's learning, schools should offer educational workshops, resources, and training programs..

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