

Strategies for Enhancing Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education for Improved Cognitive and Social Development in Enugu State

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Abstract

This study focused on strategies for enhancing parental involvement in early childhood education in Enugu State. Specifically, it determined strategies for: promoting parents' involvement in activities that promote cognitive and social development of preschool-aged children; and ways early childhood educators with caregivers could collaborate with parents to improve home-school involvement practices. Three hypotheses (H₀s) were tested at 0.05. Survey research design was adopted. Population comprised parents, early childhood education teachers, and school administrators across 147 approved early childhood centres in the state. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Mean, standard deviation and ANOVA were used to analyze data. Findings reveal: 11 strategies for promoting parents' involvement in children's cognitive development, including encouraging parents to read regularly with their children ($\bar{X}$ = 3.58), amongst others; 10 strategies for promoting social development including cultural storytelling to foster empathy ($\bar{X}$ = 3.44) and so on; as well as 12 effective home-school collaboration strategies including regular parent-teacher meetings ($\bar{X}$ = 3.57) and text messaging and mobile applications for communication ($\bar{X}$ = 3.46), amongst others. ANOVA results show no significant differences among the mean responses of parents, teachers, and administrators on all identified strategies, at 0.05 level of significance.

Keywords: Parental, involvement, cognitive, development, learning, childhood.

Introduction

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a key factor in children's cognitive and social development. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020), the early years are critical for shaping future learning, behaviour, and health. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2022) further emphasizes that supportive home environments and school engagement significantly influence children's brain development and

readiness to learn. Similarly, Nwakile et al. (2024) noted that parental participation enhances academic achievement, emotional regulation, empathy, and cooperation among children. These outcomes are particularly important in developing countries such as Nigeria, where schools alone may not adequately support holistic child development.

Nwachukwu et al. (2020) observed that active parental engagement strengthens children's resilience and coping abilities. Likewise, Bierman et al

(2023) found that parental involvement in activities such as reading, attending school meetings, and assisting with learning improves attention, motivation, and academic self-concept. However, parental participation remains inconsistent across Sub-Saharan Africa due to poverty, educational background, and cultural perceptions of parenting roles (Martínez-Yarza et al, 2024). In Enugu State, many parents still perceive education primarily as the responsibility of teachers and caregivers.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the interdependence of family, school, and community in child development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2015). Within these systems, parental support plays a significant role in shaping developmental outcomes. McLean et al. (2023) reported that sustained parental engagement promotes language, literacy, and numeracy development, whereas weak involvement may result in learning delays and poor social competence (Obijiofor et al., 2020). Consequently, parental involvement has become a developmental necessity rather than an option.

Although the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 promotes quality early childhood development, families are expected to play active roles in supporting children's learning (UNESCO, 2023). Wildmon et al (2024) argued that schools should create structures that encourage meaningful family engagement. However, parents in Enugu State often face barriers such as low literacy levels, demanding work schedules, and limited awareness of their developmental roles (Pilarz et al, 2024). These challenges underscore the need for

context-specific strategies that encourage active parental participation.

Research has consistently shown that parental involvement improves children's self-esteem, communication skills, and school readiness (Mao, 2022; Obijiofor et al., 2020). Muminova (2025) further reported that structured parental involvement programmes enhance empathy, conflict resolution, and classroom cooperation. Similar findings from Nigeria indicate that parental engagement reduces anti-social behaviour and improves adaptation to formal schooling (Okonkwo & Obi, 2023). Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to practical ways of empowering parents in Enugu State to contribute effectively to early childhood education outcomes.

Family-school collaboration has become a global educational priority. Dardanou and Brito (2024) reported that inclusive family involvement policies improve student engagement and community belonging. Likewise, Williams-Johnson and Gonzalez-DeHass (2022) noted that regular parent-teacher communication strengthens children's attitudes towards school and behaviour. However, effective collaboration must consider socio-cultural, educational, and economic realities (Nwakile et al., 2022). In Nigeria, communication gaps between homes and schools often weaken learning continuity (Otero-Mayer et al, 2025).

Evidence shows that strategies such as parenting workshops, home-learning kits, and culturally relevant engagement models can improve parental involvement (Kaya, 2025; UNESCO, 2023). Parent-teacher home visits have also been associated with improved attendance and academic progress (Smythe et al, 2022).

Furthermore, digital tools offer cost-effective means of engaging parents who face time and distance constraints (UNESCO, 2023). Given the increasing use of smartphones in Enugu State, such approaches may strengthen cognitive and social learning at home.

Parental involvement is also shaped by family beliefs and values. Williams-Johnson and Gonzalez-DeHass (2022) observed that parents who value early education are more likely to support their children's learning. However, traditional gender roles often place childcare responsibilities mainly on mothers, limiting paternal participation (Eadie et al, 2024). This reduces the breadth of support available to children and highlights the need for inclusive strategies that engage both parents.

Despite growing awareness of the importance of parental involvement, participation among many parents in Enugu State remains inadequate. Although early childhood education centres have expanded across the state, factors such as demanding work schedules, low educational attainment, poor awareness, and weak home-school communication continue to hinder involvement. While previous studies have examined parental involvement in relation to children's academic achievement, school readiness, and developmental outcomes (Bierman et al, 2023; Mao, 2022; Okonkwo & Obi, 2023), limited attention has been given to strategies for enhancing parental involvement in cognitive development, social learning, and home-school collaboration within the context of Enugu State. This gap necessitates empirical evidence to guide stakeholders in

strengthening parental engagement, which this study seeks to provide.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to evolve strategies for enhancing parental involvement in early childhood education in Enugu State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. strategies for promoting parents' involvement in activities that promote cognitive development of preschool-aged children
2. strategies for promoting parent's involvement in social development of preschool-aged children.
3. ways early childhood educators and caregivers can collaborate with parents to improve home-school involvement practices for better developmental outcomes.

Hypotheses (HOs)

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. There is no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, early childhood education teachers, and school administrators on:

HO₁: strategies for promoting parents' involvement in activities that promote cognitive development among preschool-aged children in Enugu State.

HO₂: strategies for promoting parents' involvement in the social development of preschool-aged children in Enugu State.

HO₃: ways early childhood educators and caregivers can collaborate with parents to improve home-school involvement practices for better developmental outcomes in Enugu State.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The study adopted a survey research design.

Area of the Study: The study was conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria, located in the South-East geopolitical zone. According to records from the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board {(ENSUBEB), 2024}, there are 147 government-approved early childhood education centres across the state. These centres serve children of preschool age and are distributed across urban and rural communities with diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Population for the Study: The population for this study comprised 10,611 respondents from 147 government-approved early childhood education centres in Enugu State. The population consisted of 1,248 early childhood education teachers, 147 school administrators, and 9,216 parents of preschool-aged children (ENSUBEB, 2024). The respondents comprised both male and female adults with varying educational qualifications, years of teaching or parenting experience, and socio-economic backgrounds. The teachers are responsible for classroom instruction and related activities, administrators supervise management issues while parents are primary caregivers responsible for supporting children's learning and development at home.

Sample for the Study: A sample of 240 respondents was selected for the study using a multistage sampling technique. Three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively selected one from each of the three senatorial zones of Enugu State to ensure proper geographical

representation. In the second stage, four public and four private early childhood centres were randomly selected from each LGA, making up 24 centres. Seven parents were purposively selected from 20 centres and 10 from four based on the population of the various centres, to give a total of 180 parents. Also two early childhood educators, and one school administrator were purposively chosen based on their availability and involvement in early childhood programmes. This yielded 240 participants of 180 parents, 48 teachers, and 12 administrators.

Instrument for Data Collection: The Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed based on the specific purposes and extensive review of literature. It consisted of two parts: Part A collected demographic data from respondents while part B was organized into three sections based on the specific purposes of the study. Each item was measured using a 4-point rating scale: Very Important Strategy (VIS) – 4; Important Strategy (IS) – 3; Less Important Strategy (LIS) – 2; Not Important Strategy (NIS) – 1. The instrument was validated by five university experts, in Early Childhood Education and Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established through a trial test involving 30 respondents from a neighbouring LGA in Ebonyi State. Data were analyzed using a Cronbach Alpha coefficient technique and yielded coefficient of 0.81, which confirmed the instrument's reliability.

Method of Data Collection: The researcher, with the assistance of three research assistants, administered 240 copies of the questionnaire by hand to the respondents, comprising 180 parents, 48 early childhood education teachers, and 12 school administrators. Of these, 170

copies were retrieved from parents, 45 copies from early childhood education teachers, and 11 copies from school administrators. This gave a total of 226 correctly complete questionnaires, representing a 94.2% response rate.

Method of Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. For decision-making, any item with a mean score of 2.50 or above was interpreted as an Important Strategy (IS),

while items with a mean score below 2.50 were interpreted as Not Important Strategy (NIS). Null hypotheses were tested using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05 and retained where the p-value was equal to or greater than 0.05.

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses, Standard Deviation and F-Values of Respondents on Strategies for Promoting Parental Involvement in Cognitive Development of Children in Early Childhood Centres

S/N	Strategies for Promoting Cognitive Support	$\bar{X}_1$	SD ₁	$\bar{X}_2$	SD ₂	$\bar{X}_3$	SD ₃	$\bar{X}_g$	F	R
1	Organizing parenting workshops on literacy and numeracy	3.42	0.52	3.38	0.51	3.50	0.54	3.43	0.84	IS*
2	Providing take-home learning activities and guides	3.38	0.53	3.40	0.55	3.46	0.56	3.41	0.67	IS*
3	Encouraging parents to read books regularly with children	3.60	0.49	3.56	0.50	3.58	0.52	3.58	0.29	IS*
4	Involving parents in classroom-based academic games	3.22	0.55	3.18	0.57	3.30	0.58	3.23	1.12	IS*
5	Providing structured homework that requires parent-child interaction	3.36	0.51	3.30	0.53	3.38	0.52	3.35	0.73	IS*
6	Sharing children's progress reports regularly with parents	3.48	0.50	3.44	0.51	3.52	0.53	3.48	0.58	IS*
7	Offering training on how to support cognitive milestones at home	3.20	0.57	3.16	0.58	3.24	0.56	3.20	0.49	IS*
8	Developing and distributing cognitive activity kits for home use	3.34	0.54	3.36	0.56	3.30	0.55	3.33	0.64	IS*
9	Using text reminders to prompt home learning support	3.26	0.58	3.30	0.57	3.34	0.56	3.30	0.81	IS*
10	Conducting awareness campaigns on brain development in early years	3.35	0.54	3.30	0.56	3.28	0.55	3.31	0.95	IS*
11	Setting learning goals jointly with parents	3.40	0.50	3.44	0.52	3.42	0.53	3.42	0.41	IS*

N_1 (Number of Parents) = 170; N_2 (Number of Teachers) = 45; N_3 (Number of Administrators) = 11; $\bar{X}_1$ = Mean score of parents; SD_1 = Standard deviation of parents; $\bar{X}_2$ = Mean score of early childhood education teachers; SD_2 = Standard deviation of early childhood education teachers; $\bar{X}_3$ = Mean score of school administrators; SD_3 = Standard deviation of school administrators; $\bar{X}_g$ = Grand mean; Remark = Decision based on the mean score; IS = Important Strategy (mean score ≥ 2.50); NIS = Not Important Strategy (mean score < 2.50); * = Not Significant; F = ANOVA F-value; R = Remark; $df = 2, 237$; $p = 0.05$

Table 1 reveals that all eleven items had grand mean values ranging from 3.20 to 3.58, which are above the cut-off point of

2.50. This indicates that all the listed strategies were regarded as important in promoting parental involvement in

cognitive development among children in early childhood education in Enugu State. ANOVA results yielded F-values ranging from 0.29 to 1.12 and were not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, early childhood education

teachers, and school administrators on the strategies for promoting parents' involvement in activities that support cognitive development among preschool-aged children. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 2: Mean Responses, Standard Deviation and F-Values of Respondents on Strategies for Promoting Parental Involvement in Social Development of Children in Early Childhood Centres

S/N	Strategies for Supporting Social Development	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_3$	SD_3	$\bar{X}_g$	F	R
1	Organizing family play days and interactive sessions	3.40	0.51	3.36	0.53	3.44	0.54	3.40	0.62	IS*
2	Teaching parents how to model prosocial behavior	3.26	0.57	3.30	0.58	3.22	0.56	3.26	0.74	IS*
3	Involving parents in group storytelling and drama sessions	3.10	0.59	3.12	0.61	3.14	0.58	3.12	0.41	IS*
4	Creating parent-led social clubs for preschoolers	3.08	0.60	3.00	0.62	3.10	0.61	3.06	1.08	IS*
5	Encouraging parents to supervise cooperative games	3.22	0.55	3.20	0.57	3.28	0.56	3.23	0.53	IS*
6	Providing behavior observation checklists for home use	3.36	0.52	3.40	0.54	3.42	0.53	3.39	0.37	IS*
7	Holding seminars on emotional intelligence for parents	3.30	0.50	3.32	0.52	3.34	0.53	3.32	0.29	IS*
8	Introducing collaborative parent-child social projects	3.28	0.54	3.30	0.55	3.26	0.56	3.28	0.58	IS*
9	Organizing school-based community service with parents	3.18	0.56	3.22	0.58	3.20	0.57	3.20	0.66	IS*
10	Encouraging storytelling of cultural values to foster empathy	3.44	0.48	3.42	0.50	3.46	0.49	3.44	0.32	IS*

N_1 (Number of Parents) = 170; N_2 (Number of Teachers) = 45; N_3 (Number of Administrators) = 11; $\bar{X}_1$ = Mean score of parents; SD_1 = Standard deviation of parents; $\bar{X}_2$ = Mean score of early childhood education teachers; SD_2 = Standard deviation of early childhood education teachers; $\bar{X}_3$ = Mean score of school administrators; SD_3 = Standard deviation of school administrators; $\bar{X}_g$ = Grand mean; Remark = Decision based on the mean score; IS = Important Strategy (mean score ≥ 2.50); NIS = Not Important Strategy (mean score < 2.50); * = Not Significant; F = ANOVA F-value; R = Remark; $df = 2, 237$; $p = 0.05$

Table 2 reveals that all ten items had grand mean values ranging from 3.06 to 3.44, which are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that all the strategies were considered important for encouraging parental support of social learning and interaction among preschool-aged

children in Enugu State. ANOVA results yielded F-values ranging from 0.29 to 1.08 and were not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, early childhood education teachers, and school administrators on the strategies for

promoting parental involvement in the social development of preschool-aged children. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3: Mean Responses, Standard Deviation and F-Values of Respondents on Home-School Collaboration Strategies for Better Developmental Outcomes

S/N	Strategies for Home-School Collaboration	$\bar{X}_1$	SD_1	$\bar{X}_2$	SD_2	$\bar{X}_3$	SD_3	$\bar{X}_g$	F	R
1	Organizing regular parent-teacher meetings	3.58	0.48	3.54	0.49	3.60	0.50	3.57	0.45	IS*
2	Using text messaging and apps for communication	3.44	0.52	3.46	0.54	3.48	0.51	3.46	0.38	IS*
3	Co-creating learning goals with parents	3.28	0.55	3.32	0.56	3.30	0.57	3.30	0.56	IS*
4	Assigning home activities that match classroom topics	3.42	0.51	3.38	0.52	3.40	0.53	3.40	0.49	IS*
5	Encouraging parent volunteering during school events	3.10	0.58	3.12	0.59	3.08	0.60	3.10	0.82	IS*
6	Creating school policies that promote parental engagement	3.36	0.50	3.34	0.52	3.38	0.51	3.36	0.31	IS*
7	Sending monthly newsletters to update parents	3.32	0.53	3.34	0.55	3.30	0.54	3.32	0.44	IS*
8	Organizing joint school projects involving parents	3.26	0.54	3.28	0.56	3.30	0.55	3.28	0.52	IS*
9	Holding parent training on home learning strategies	3.40	0.51	3.44	0.52	3.42	0.53	3.42	0.63	IS*
10	Establishing parent committees on academic support	3.22	0.56	3.24	0.57	3.26	0.55	3.24	0.71	IS*
11	Providing flexible meeting schedules for working parents	3.46	0.49	3.48	0.50	3.44	0.52	3.46	0.47	IS*
12	Offering home visits for hard-to-reach families	3.36	0.50	3.38	0.51	3.40	0.52	3.38	0.35	IS*

N_1 (Number of Parents) = 170; N_2 (Number of Teachers) = 45; N_3 (Number of Administrators) = 11; $\bar{X}_1$ = Mean score of parents; SD_1 = Standard deviation of parents; $\bar{X}_2$ = Mean score of early childhood education teachers; SD_2 = Standard deviation of early childhood education teachers; $\bar{X}_3$ = Mean score of school administrators; SD_3 = Standard deviation of school administrators; $\bar{X}_g$ = Grand mean; Remark = Decision based on the mean score; IS = Important Strategy (mean score ≥ 2.50); NIS = Not Important Strategy (mean score < 2.50); * = Not Significant; F = ANOVA F-value; R = Remark; $df = 2, 237$; $p = 0.05$

Table 3 reveals that all twelve items had grand mean values ranging from 3.10 to 3.57, which are above the drop-off point of 2.50. This shows that the strategies were seen as *important* ways early childhood educators and caregivers can collaborate with parents to enhance home-school involvement for improved developmental outcomes in Enugu State. ANOVA results

yielded F-values ranging from 0.31 to 0.82 and were not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, early childhood education teachers, and school administrators on the strategies for strengthening home-school collaboration for improved developmental outcomes.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings reveal that strategies for promoting parental involvement in children's cognitive development were considered important by parents, early childhood teachers, and school administrators. Highly rated strategies included encouraging parents to read regularly with their children, organizing literacy workshops, providing take-home activity kits, and setting joint learning goals. The findings agree with Martínez-Yarza et al (2024), who reported the contribution of parental participation in literacy and numeracy activities to school readiness and academic success. Similarly, Bierman et al (2023), Kaya (2025), and Okonkwo and Obi (2023) reported that active parental involvement enhances children's learning outcomes and acquisition of foundational skills. The ANOVA results further show no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, teachers, and administrators, indicating a shared understanding of the importance of parental involvement in supporting children's cognitive development. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

The study also found that strategies for promoting parental support of children's social learning, such as family play sessions, cooperative games, behavioural support tools, and cultural storytelling, were regarded as important. This finding supports Mao (2022) who found that parental reinforcement of prosocial behaviours promotes emotional intelligence and social adaptability. It also agrees with Williams-Johnson and

Gonzalez-DeHass (2022), Muminova (2025), and Eadie et al (2024), who emphasized the importance of parental involvement in developing children's interpersonal skills, confidence, and social responsibility. The ANOVA results indicate no significant difference among the mean ratings of the three respondent groups. This similarity may be attributed to their common experiences and interactions with preschool children, which provide a shared perspective on the importance of parental support for social development. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

The findings further reveal that strategies for strengthening collaboration between parents and early childhood educators, including regular parent-teacher meetings, joint goal setting, mobile communication, flexible meeting schedules, and home visits, were considered important. These findings are consistent with Dardanou and Brito (2024), who reported that effective school-family partnerships improve children's academic and behavioural outcomes. They also support Wildmon et al (2024), Williams-Johnson and Gonzalez-DeHass (2022), Otero-Mayer et al (2025), and Pilarz et al (2024), who highlighted the value of effective communication and shared decision-making in promoting children's development. The ANOVA results showed no significant difference among the mean ratings of parents, teachers, and administrators. This may be because all three groups recognize the benefits of effective home-school collaboration and the need for sustained communication in supporting children's development. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Conclusion

The study concludes that effective parental involvement is indispensable to achieving improved cognitive and social development among preschool-aged children in Enugu State. The findings demonstrate that sustained collaboration between parents, early childhood educators, and school administrators provides a supportive learning environment that enhances children's holistic development. The consensus among the three groups of respondents further indicates a shared recognition of the importance of home-school partnerships in promoting children's learning and developmental outcomes. Therefore, strengthening parental engagement through practical, inclusive, and context-sensitive strategies is essential for improving the quality and effectiveness of early childhood education in Enugu State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Education policymakers should develop and implement guidelines that mandate regular parental engagement programmes in all early childhood education centres, based on the findings of the study.
2. School administrators should create flexible communication systems, such as mobile apps, newsletters, and home visits, to bridge the gap between school and home and ensure that parents are kept informed of their children's learning progress.
3. Teachers and caregivers should actively involve parents in classroom-related activities and assign cognitively enriching tasks that encourage home-

based participation in children's literacy and numeracy development.

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