

*Full Length Research*

# Perception of Parents about the Consequences of Over-Schooling on the Cognitive and Psychosocial Development of the Nigerian Child at the Private Pre-Primary Schools

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This paper examined the " Perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive and psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary schools." The paper was a descriptive survey that elicited information from a sample of the population that was made up of parents that had their children or wards in private pre-primary schools in Ankpa, Kogi State. The five primary schools used for the study out of the thirty five (35) duly registered private primary schools in Ankpa township were sampled using simple random sampling procedure while a sample of two hundred (200) respondents was composed using accidental sampling procedure. The instrument was an eighteen (18) item questionnaire designed by the researchers and was face-validated by two experts in the department of Educational foundations, University of Jos. The instrument was divided into three sections-A, B and C. Section A, introduced the questionnaire while B and C fielded eighteen (18) questions on the consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive and psychosocial development of children. The instrument was on a four-point responses rates of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The data collected were analyzed using tables, mean and standard deviation statistical tools. The findings of the study were that parents perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on both the cognitive and the psychosocial developments of pupils at the pre-primary schools. Based on these findings, recommendations were put forward to include the establishment and enforcement of rules that will enable pre-primary pupils close earlier from school and that parents and teachers should have realistic expectations of pupils at this level of training to reduce the pressure they are subjected to.

**Keywords:** Over-schooling, cognitive, psychosocial, development, pupils, private, pre-primary school

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## INTRODUCTION

Over-schooling is a multi-faceted concept that its meaning is best understood from the context of its usage. For instance, it is sometimes used to refer to a situation where one possesses higher degrees in excess of that which is required for the job (Dolton and Vignoles in Nkang and Uwah, 2013). It's a condition where people occupy job positions which are not optimal for their qualifications (Etuk, et al, 2012). A typical illustration could be when a degree holder gets employed as a security, messenger or cleaner in an establishment. The individual is made to do the job that is far rated below his or her level of training or the skill he or she acquired. Over-schooling is perceived to be the difference between a worker's attained or completed level of school and the level of schooling required for the job the worker holds (Leuven and Oosterbeak, 2011). In economic terms, the employee is said to be underemployed because he/she is made to carry out a task below his or her level of training. And this situation puts the employer, the employee and the establishment at disadvantages as the employee's zeal, enthusiasms or interest for the job may be low.

Another dimension to this concept of over-schooling is when a child, pupil or student is made to undergo, and undertake, the act or process of being trained, drilled, instructed, taught or educated far above or in excess of what is provided in the curriculum (Okonkwo, 2014). This is where pre-primary education in Nigeria could fit in. The curricular of the Nigeria educational system are always drawn at increasing levels of difficulties taking into considerations the mental age (and which in most cases goes with the biological or physical age) of the learner (Omede and Odiba, 2000). What this means according to Omede and Odiba is that, the work of class two builds upon the work in class one while that of class three builds on class two and so on, in the various subject disciplines. This makes the curricular progressive and overtly realistic and achievable.

But what seems to be the practice in many private schools is a negation or violation of the provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE) for this level (Okonkwo, 2014) resulting in noticeable incidences of over-burdening or over-loading the pupils whose physical and mental ages could not withstand the pressure or stress. At the private Nursery and or Pre-primary schools, two major things that are seemingly not in consonance with the developmental age of the children characterize their operations. One is that pupils are kept in school for long hours in the name of extramural lessons organized by the school for all the classes not excluding the Pre-primary pupils. This extra class begins immediately the school officially closes at 1.00pm or 2.00pm, and the pupils will be held down until 4.00pm or 5.00pm before they are picked by their parents at the end of their business or office hours. The extra lesson hours is official

and made "optionally compulsory". That is, the class teacher seemingly gives more attention to pupils during this section so as to endear the attention of parents to release their wards because the extra money for the lesson goes to the class teacher. Again the class teacher complains more about the relative low or poor academic performance of a child that fails to enroll for the lessons and they do this simply to woo the complicity of parents whose children were yet to enroll for the extra lesson. The Second thing that characterize education at this level of training is that at the close of the school hours-4-00pm or 5.00pm-most times, pupils come home with volumes of academic tasks to be worked overnight and submitted the following day in the class. This puts parents and their children on their toes not so much to promote learning but to save the child from classroom or teacher's embarrassment the next day.

Worst of all is that, most of these homework tasks are beyond the developmental age or level of the pupils. Several of such assignments put both the parents and the child at serious pressure or tension with the parent ending up solving the homework for the child thereby, abusing the essence for the homework. The way over-schooling at the pre-primary level in Nigeria manifests was better captured by Okonwo (2014) when he referred to it as the overburdening, over tasking or over tutoring of children with school related activities which will give them no opportunity to adequately interact with their environment, especially through play. The consequence is obvious as pupils experience a lot of pressure and stress.

There are studies that have decried the pressure that pupils pass through in schools particularly, pressures that come from voluminous amount of homework as well as keeping them in school from morning till evening and how they impact on learning negatively. One of such was the assertion of Levy (2017) that from kindergarten to the final years of high school, recent research suggests that some students are getting excessive amounts of homework and that when students are pushed to handle workload that is out of sync with their development level, it can lead to significant stress for children and their parents. Homework, no doubt, is an important part of being successful inside and outside of the classroom, but too much of it can have the opposite effect (Oxford Learning, 2016). As noted by Oxford Learning, homework can affect students' health, social life and grades and as such, students will not be able to meet other needs, like being physically and socially active.

Too much homework for students particularly, the underage, is a great source of stress. 56 percent of students considered homework a primary source of stress (Stanford University in Oxford Learning, 2016). Identifying some possible consequences of excessive or

too much homework on the learner, Oxford Learning (2016) mentioned lack of sleep, headaches, exhaustion and weight loss, as well as poor eating habits, and having less time to spend with families and friends among others.

Keeping friendship with families and friends has the capacity to enrich the cognitive and psychosocial development of the learner as well as ensuring the balance growth of the individual. There are research evidences according to Villines (2012) that keeping friendship with families, engaging in extracurricular activities and periodic relaxation promote children's intellectual and emotional development. Villines noted that human brains are programmed to learn things that are interesting and relevant to it and that children in particular, learn things that help them function better in their environment. However, homework according to Villenes does not pass this test as most homework assignments force children to sit down and memorize facts rather than experiencing their world. With much homework, children miss lots of learning that could come from the fun of play as they tinker and porter with the environment.

Therefore, effective and realistic learning for children at this level of schooling should emphasize play. The theory of cognitive development of a child propounded by Jean Piaget in Omede and Odiba (2000) revealed that the preoperational child is characterized with symbolic play, imitations, overgeneralization, irreversibility and trasnductive reasoning. This is why children at this stage are to be guided through play as they explore their environment; learn through recitations and songs under relaxed and harmonious classroom atmosphere.

But reverse seemed to be the case for children at this level of education especially those of private schools that care less about adopting or adapting the curricular of public schools for use. They develop their own curricular that seems deficient professionally. They include contents that are higher than the mental age of the learner probably to show that they are more superior academically. The children are driven more than they could cope because of high expectations from teachers as well as parents. Some teachers and parents worry that some pre-primary pupils are not able to identify, recite alphabets chronologically and write letters of alphabets effectively. Is it not funny and ridiculous for parents and or teachers to conclude that a pupil in a pre-primary class is not intelligent? The pre-primary level is most often misinterpreted to be a stage for actual schooling where children are expected to learn difficult tasks (Okonkwo, 2014). The children at this stage are taught things that are beyond their intellectual development (Ibiam and Aleke, 2012) while the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) recommends that Early Childhood Education (0-5 years) should inculcate in the child, the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the

environment, art, music and the use of toys and that the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, should be taught through play. But what seems to obtain in most private pre-primary schools is real academic works devoid of meaningful play.

In addition, children are kept in school from morning till evening and made to return home with excessive homework and tasks that are difficult for their level. The hour logged in class and the hours logged on schoolwork can lead to students feeling overwhelmed and unmotivated (Oxford Learning, 2016). Homework can negatively impact health and stress (McConnell, n.d.). And when stress hormones are triggered chronologically especially in children's developing brains when they are sustained or intense, they can lead to cognitive deficits, learning difficulties, low self-esteem, memory gaps, heightened emotional sensitivity and repetitive outer child behaviors (Anderson, 2018). The impact of stress is much that Gross (2013) affirmed that anyone experiencing stress, cannot operate at the peak performance, including academic performance and that retention, comprehension, and the potential to learn are all undermined by stress and anxiety. This is irrespective of age but the incidence could be heavier on a child that is undergoing physical and mental development.

For effective learning and retention to take place, it will require a relaxed atmosphere. But schooling at the level of pre-primary seemed to have become burdensome for both the parents and the learners. Many children are stretched to unhealthy breaking points because of the erroneous believe that education or certificate is an end in itself. Many parents believe that subjecting children to these tortuous and odious routes will ensure quality education (Villenes, 2012, & Abeles in Walker, 2016). But the truth is that there's little evidence that excessive homework helps children learn (Villenes, 2012). It is in the light of this realization that both the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) suggested a standard of "10 minutes of homework per grade level per night" and setting a general limit on after-school studying (Levy, 2017, & McConnell, n.d.). What this means according to Levy and McConnell was for children in first grade to spend 10 minutes on homework, second graders 20 minutes and so on. But this seemed not to be observed as a study on this issue found that kids in early elementary school received about three times the amount of recommended homework (Levy, 2017). And according to Villines (2012), evidence is rapidly amassing that overworking children interfere with their ability to learn.

Children in private pre-primary schools are overworked as they are kept in school from morning till evening, bombarded with barrages of homework which most often are beyond their developmental age. And these are not without negative consequences on the learners particularly, the ones who are just starting their

educational career at the pre-primary level. But since the society is obsessed with money making and thinks that money is the true source of happiness (Catholic Stand, 2018), will parents really know the negative consequences that over-schooling would have on the cognitive, and psychosocial development of children at the pre-primary level of education? This was why this study that was on the "Perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive and psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level" was conceived and executed.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level of schooling.

Specifically, the study examined:

1. The perception of parents on the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the cognitive development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level
2. The perception of parents on the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The following questions were answered in this study:

1. What is the perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the cognitive development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level?
2. What is the perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. It collected and analyzed data from a sample of respondents considered as the true representatives of

the entire subjects. The population was made up of parents who have their pupils in private primary schools in Ankpa, Kogi state, Nigeria. A total of 35 private primary schools are duly registered in Ankpa, township. Out of these number of schools, five (5) were sampled for the study using the simple random sampling techniques. The five schools sampled were Kingdom Heritage Model School (KHMS), Saint Andrew Nursery and Primary school (SANAPS), Ufedoojo Nursery and Primary school, Redeemer Nursery and Primary School and Precious International Primary school. From each of the five primary schools, 20 parents, making a total of 200 were sampled for the study using accidental sampling procedure. As parents came to drop their wards in school, they were giving the instrument. Names of their wards and their classes were written down by the researcher for easy retrieval or collection of the instrument the next day from either the parents or their wards.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The instrument had three sections-A, B and C. The question items were eighteen (18). Section A introduced the instrument to the respondents and instructed them on what they were required to do. In section B, 10 items were fielded on the consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive development of the Nigerian child at the pre-primary level of schooling. The third section, C, had 8 items on the consequences of over-schooling on the psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the pre-primary level of schooling. The instrument was on a four-point rating of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was face-validated by two experts at the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Jos. The instrument was trial-tested on 50 equivalent respondents that is, pupils in other private primary and nursery schools within the area and a reliability index of  $r = 0.88$  was obtained using split-half method.

The administration of the instrument was done by one of the researchers. The instrument was administered in two weeks. The instrument was giving to respondents as they came to drop their wards in school in the morning and was collected back the following morning from parents who came with theirs or sent them through their wards. When this was done in one school, the researcher moved to another school and repeated the same administrative procedure until the five schools were covered in two weeks. The return rate was 100 percent.

The data collected were analyzed using statistical mean, table and standard deviation. Since the instrument was on a four point rating scale, a mean of 2.5 and above indicated that parents perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on the variables measured. A mean score of less than 2.5 indicated that parents have perceived otherwise, that is, over-schooling has no

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation scores of the consequences of over-schooling on cognitive development of pupils

S/N	Item: I perceive that keeping children in pre-primary school from morning till evening and giving them excessive and difficult homework regularly could affect their cognitive development in these following areas:	- x	SD
1.	Reduction in exploration and creativity that could come from play	3.2	0.75
2.	Reduction in independent learning and discovery outside the school	3.1	0.93
3.	Promotion of mental and physical stress and boredom that could hinder learning	2.9	0.98
4.	Loss of interest in school, schooling and learning	2.8	0.97
5.	Lack of concentration and attention in the classroom	2.9	1.02
6.	Low or poor cognitive functioning due to stress, boredom and anxiety	3.0	0.93
7.	General learning difficulties arising from restlessness	2.9	0.88
8.	Reduced inspiration as children are directed so much through class work than through play, exercises and games	3.0	0.73
9.	Poor comprehension and retention due to loss of interest and reduced attention	2.9	0.77
10.	Reduction in reflective and scientific thoughts that could come from exploring the environment	2.8	0.87
<b>Cluster mean</b>		<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.88</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019, N=200

negative consequences on the cognitive and psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level of schooling in the area studied.

## RESULTS

The results of this study were presented according to the research questions.

### Research question one

What is the perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the cognitive development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level?

The answer to this question is presented on Table 1.

Table 1 provided the data that answered research question one. Ten (10) items were fielded on the instrument as the possible negative consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive development of pupils at the pre-primary level of education. Each of the ten items had mean scores that were above 2.5 which is the criterion mean. What this therefore means is that, parents perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on the cognitive development of pupils at the level of pre-primary education in private schools.

### Research question two

What is the perception of parents about the consequences of over-schooling (long hours in school and excessive homework) on the psychosocial development of the Nigerian child at the private pre-primary level?

Table 2, provided the data that answered this question. The analyzes on Table 2 showed that all the eight (8) items had mean scores that were above the criterion mean of 2.5 signifying that parents perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on the psychosocial development of pupils at the pre-primary levels in private schools.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question 1 sought information on the consequences of over-schooling on the cognitive development of the Nigerian child at the privately owned primary schools. The data analyzed, showed that parents perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on cognitive development of the pupils at this level. This finding agrees with the results of studies conducted by Villines (2012), Gross (2013), Oxford Learning (2016) and Anderson (2018). In fact, according to Villines (2012), there are rapid evidences that overworking children interfere with their ability to learn. There is no doubt that children in pre-primary classes particularly, those in private schools, are being overworked or overburdened. Pupils in some of the private schools studied and who are in Nursery or pre-primary classes offer about sixteen (16) subjects. And for each of these subjects, pupils are made to buy their customized text and exercise books and the subjects are all examinable. Sixteen textbooks and sixteen exercise books are already heavy mental and physical loads for pupils at this level to carry and they can alter their mental and physical growth pattern. In fact, when the government of India examined the consequences that carrying heavy bags could have on the spinal cord of children, it had to ban homework

**Table 2:** Mean and standard deviation scores of the consequences of over-schooling on the psycho-social development of pupils

S/N	Item: I perceive that keeping children in pre-primary school from morning till evening and giving them excessive and difficult homework regularly could affect their psychosocial development in these following areas:	- X	SD
11.	Reduction in time to play and socialize with family members (parents and siblings)	3.3	0.95
12.	Reduction in time to play and socialize with peers outside the school	3.2	0.79
13.	Reduction in time to learn more of family values	3.0	0.98
14.	Cultivation of rebellious attitudes due to over-restriction, monitoring and confinement to school and its extra or co-curricular activities	2.8	0.98
15.	Reduction in time for rest and relaxation	3.3	0.78
16.	Breeding of unhealthy competition and comparison among pupils that could make them feel inferior	2.9	0.89
17.	Negative labeling of pupils by teachers and parents and the unhealthy tension it could create in the learner	2.9	0.78
18.	Unrealistic expectations from teachers and parents and the unhealthy tension it could create in the learner	3.1	0.80
	<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.86</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019, N=200

and heavy school bags to prevent their spinal damage (News.sky.com, 2018).

Although the scope of this study was not extended to the health implication of over-schooling, the items it identified could also have implication on the physical health of the child. Ten (10) items were listed to have possible consequences on the cognitive development of the child. Parents perceived all of these items to have negative consequences on the cognitive development of children. It was perceived that over-schooling could reduce the child's time for personal exploration and creativity that could come from play ( $X=3.2$ ), could reduce the time for independent learning and discovery outside the school ( $X=3.1$ ), and also that it could promote mental and physical stress and boredom that could hinder learning ( $X=2.9$ ). And when stress hormones are triggered chronologically especially in children's developing brain and they are sustained or intense, they could lead to cognitive deficits, learning difficulties, low self-esteem, and memory gaps (Anderson, 2018).

Apart from the negative consequences that over-schooling was perceived to have on the child's cognitive development, still in this study, parents also perceived over-schooling to have negative consequences on the psychosocial development of pupils in the private schools and at the pre-primary level. By their perception, over-schooling could reduce the time children have to play and socialize with family members ( $X=3.3$ ), could also reduce the time to play with peers outside the school ( $X=3.2$ ), as well as the time to learn family values ( $X=3.0$ ). It could also encourage negative labeling of children ( $X=2.9$ ) and unhealthy competition and comparison ( $X=2.9$ ). Negative labeling and unhealthy competition and comparison could breed inferiority complex and poor personality formation

and development in the child. Keeping pupils of pre-primary class in school almost for a whole day and sending them home with excessive and higher level tasks can be frustrating, stressful and could only do little to promote learning. There is little evidence according to Villines (2012) that excessive homework helps children learn. McDonald (2018) noted that schooling consumes more of childhood and that it causes increasing harm to them.

Children are children but parents and teachers want to change them by trying to hurry them through life forgetting that "hasty climbers have sudden fall." There are dangers in trying to force them to change. Children haven't changed but our expectations of their behavior have (McDonald, 2018). Enforcing change on them could be frustrating, stressful and discouraging to their effective educability. Trying to force them to change would do more harm than good and the earlier parents, teachers, and government realized this, the better for the child and the society in general.

## CONCLUSION

Over-schooling at the pre-primary level manifests sometimes in these two areas namely; long duration in school (8.00AM - 5.00Pm) and excessive, regular and difficult homework that children spend hours to solve with the aid of their parents and or senior siblings. Either or both of these features of over-schooling could have negative consequences on the learner as perceived by parents in this study. It was perceived that over-schooling could promote stress in pupils, reduce the time available to pupils to explore their environment for creativity, and

also that it could discourage independent learning and discovery, reduce the time available to the child to socialize with peers and family members to learn family values. Much of what the child is expected to learn at this level (pre-primary) should come through play and within realistic durations. Putting them under unbearable pressure is inimical to their healthy all round development. "Children should be allowed to walk before they are made or taught to run."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In nursery or pre-primary classes, the State or Federal Ministry of Education should make and enforce a law that would make children in this category to close from school by 12.00PM or latest, 1.00PM. Supervisors and monitoring team of the Ministry of Education or a special task force they could set up, should enforce this rule and punish defaulters to deter others.
2. Homework is good but not when it has become too frequent, voluminous and above the developmental age of the learner. Most times, home-works for the pupils are done by their parents and or other siblings who supposedly are to guide the child because of the volume and level of difficulty. Therefore, homework should not be everyday of the week but midweek and weekends and should not be voluminous and too difficult. Let it come from what the child was taught in the class to remind him/her of previous learning and to in addition help consolidate what was learned.
3. Proprietors and teachers of private schools should be made to adopt or adapt the curricular of the Ministry of Education to ensure that subjects and contents are uniform. This uniformity will enable that a criterion be established for realistic measurement, standardization of tests and comparison of pupils' achievement during selective or public examinations. The curricular of public schools are known to be drawn by professionals that are knowledgeable about the developmental characteristics of learners and are realistic as they are made to undergo periodic reviews. Private institutions are therefore, encouraged to take advantage of this resourcefulness to adapt or adopt and not to completely ignore usage of public school curricular.
4. Parents and teachers should have realistic expectations of their children. They are not to be driven faster than they can cope. Since every child (learner) is unique, parents and teachers must avoid unhealthy competitions and

comparisons that could lead to unhealthy personality growth and development of the child with long term consequences on the child and the society in general.

5. The numbers of subjects to be taught at the nursery or pre-primary level should be drastically reduced and made realistic. The rudiments of numbers and alphabets along with moral lessons and nature study should be what to emphasize. Exposing them to 16 subjects and examining them on all of these subjects at the end of a term and session is not realistic to this level.

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