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## Strategies for Parental Involvement in Reducing Mathematics Phobia among Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa State

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### Abstract

*This study explored strategies for parental involvement in reducing mathematics phobia among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Mathematics phobia, a significant impediment to effective learning and long-term academic success, is a prevalent issue in Nigerian primary education. While teacher-focused and curriculum-based interventions are widely discussed, the role of parents in creating a supportive home environment that mitigates this fear is often underexplored. This investigation, therefore, identified the specific strategies that parents in Nasarawa State can employ to foster positive attitudes towards mathematics and alleviate anxiety in their children. The research explored parents' current perceptions of mathematics, the challenges they face in supporting their children's learning, and the specific home-based activities and communication styles that could potentially reduce mathematics phobia. Findings illuminate practical, culturally relevant strategies such as integrating mathematical concepts into daily chores and local games, modelling a positive and persistent attitude towards problem-solving, and establishing effective communication channels with teachers. The study also pointed out barriers to parental involvement, including parents' own mathematics anxiety, educational background, and socio-economic constraints. Ultimately, this research provided valuable insights for developing targeted guidelines and intervention programs for parents. The findings are significant for educators, school administrators, and policymakers in Nasarawa State seeking to create a holistic support system that bridges the home and school environments. It was recommended among others that parents should stay informed; regularly communicate with teachers to understand their children's mathematics progress, create a supportive environment, encourage a growth mindset and provide resources to support children mathematics learning.*

**Keywords:** Strategies, Mathematics Phobia, Parental Involvement, Primary School Pupils, Math Anxiety

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## Introduction

Mathematics serves as a fundamental cornerstone of education, nurturing logical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities crucial for navigating the complexities of the 21st century. Hence, it remains an essential part of education. In order to address persistent gaps in students' mathematical competency, Cajandig and Ledesma (2025) conducted a recent analysis of the relationship between 21st-century skills and mathematical proficiency. They found a significant positive correlation, highlighting the need for curriculum reforms that prioritise these skills. This study emphasises that mathematics is more than just computations; it is a means of developing higher-order thinking skills that will be necessary for problems in the future.

For primary school pupils, a robust foundation in mathematics is not merely an academic requirement but a vital precursor to future educational attainment and the development of essential life skills.

However, a significant barrier to mathematical proficiency among young learners is the widespread phenomenon of mathematics phobia, defined as a feeling of tension, apprehension, or fear that interferes with mathematics performance, this condition can manifest as cognitive disorganization and emotional distress in mathematical situations (Olaniyan & Salman, 2015; Foley et al., 2017). In Nigeria, a pervasive challenge in primary education is mathematics phobia, an intense feeling of anxiety, apprehension, or dread towards mathematics. This debilitating emotional response not only hinders pupils' conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities but also significantly impacts their academic performance and future educational progress (Adeleke & Adu, 2017; Ugochukwu & Bhuka, 2021). Mathematics phobia is distinct from general anxiety and has been consistently shown to negatively correlate with mathematics achievement, leading to avoidance behaviours, reduced confidence, and a hindered capacity to engage with quantitative information (Timonera et al., 2023; Morada, 2015). Factors such as inadequate instructional materials, poor teaching methods, and a lack of student participation have been identified as contributing to these challenges (Dalong & Olakunle, 2025). According to Gherda (2021) and Supekar et al. (2015), causes of mathematics phobia often include negative past experiences with mathematics, poor teaching methods that emphasize rote learning over understanding, pressure from teachers or parents, fear of failure, and the perception of mathematics as inherently difficult or abstract. Furthermore, societal attitudes and stereotypes about mathematics, which sometimes portray it as a subject only for the "gifted," can contribute to anxiety

among children (Park et al., 2021). Parental anxiety about mathematics can also be transmitted to children, creating a cycle of fear (Maloney et al., 2015; Casad et al., 2021).

While various factors contribute to the development of mathematics phobia, including teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and peer influence, the role of parental involvement remains an underexplored yet critical dimension, particularly within the context of Nasarawa State.

Parental involvement, encompassing a range of activities from assisting with homework to fostering a positive attitude towards learning, has long been recognized as a significant predictor of academic success. While substantial scholarly attention has been directed towards teacher-centric interventions and curriculum enhancements to improve mathematics education (Alkhateeb, 2017), the profound influence of parental involvement remains a critical yet often under-emphasized area in addressing mathematics phobia. Parents are children's primary educators and hold a significant capacity to shape their children's attitudes, beliefs, and motivation towards learning (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Recent meta-analyses and studies consistently affirm a significant positive correlation between parental involvement and students' mathematics achievement, particularly home-based involvement, which can also play a role in reducing mathematics anxiety (Kim, 2022). Children's arithmetic anxieties can be considerably reduced by parents who encourage a positive outlook, recognise effort, introduce real-world mathematics and interact with teachers in an effective manner (UniSA, 2023; Math-Exercises-for-Kids, 2025).

Despite this recognition, there is a distinct need for localized research that identifies specific, practical strategies for parental involvement in mitigating mathematics phobia among primary school pupils within the unique socio-cultural and educational landscape of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. While general parental involvement frameworks exist, their effective application in addressing a specific academic-emotional challenge like mathematics phobia, tailored to the local context, warrants detailed investigation. This study, therefore, systematically explored and articulated effective strategies for parental involvement, providing insights to support the reduction of mathematics phobia among primary school pupils in Nasarawa State. The findings are intended to inform targeted interventions for parents, educators, and policymakers, ultimately fostering a more supportive and less anxiety-provoking environment for mathematics learning in the state.

### **Strategies for Parental Involvement in Reducing Mathematics Phobia among Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa State**

This literature review examines existing research on mathematics phobia, parental involvement, and their intersection, particularly focusing on primary school pupils. It highlights the identified causes and effects of mathematics phobia, the general impact of parental involvement on academic achievement, and specifically explores strategies for parents to mitigate math anxiety. While drawing on global perspectives, the review emphasized the contextual relevance to Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

### **Understanding Mathematics Phobia in Primary School Pupils**

Mathematics phobia, also known as mathematics anxiety, is a widespread phenomenon that affects primary school pupils. Mathematics phobia is defined as feelings of tension, apprehension, or dread that hinder an individual's ability to engage with mathematical tasks and concepts (Tsirimokos, 2024). These feelings can manifest cognitively, affecting working memory and information processing, and physiologically, causing symptoms like increased heart rate or sweaty palms, which ultimately lead to a decline in mathematical performance and academic achievement (Brewster & Miller, 2020; Pahmi et al., 2025). This phobia can manifest in various ways, including avoidance behaviours, negative self-talk, emotional distress during mathematics tasks, and ultimately, poor academic achievement (Adeleke & Adu, 2017; Ugochukwu & Bhuka, 2021). The effects of mathematics phobia can extend beyond the classroom, potentially limiting future educational and career opportunities that require quantitative skills.

Several factors contribute to the development of mathematics phobia in young learners. Teacher-related factors, such as unqualified or ill-prepared teachers, poor teaching methodologies, and negative teacher attitudes, can contribute to students' dislike and fear of mathematics. Recent research confirms that teacher quality and pedagogical approaches significantly impact students' attitudes and academic outcomes in mathematics. A study by Gholami et al. (2023) found a strong correlation between teachers' math anxiety and their students' math anxiety, suggesting that teachers can inadvertently transfer their own fears to their students. Furthermore, inadequate training and a reliance on rote learning methods, rather than conceptual understanding, have been shown to diminish students' engagement and foster a sense of incompetence (Karp & Volkov, 2024).

The classroom environment, including pressure from timed tests and an emphasis on speed over understanding, can also exacerbate anxiety (Capuno et al., 2019). Curriculum and instructional factors, such as an overly abstract or poorly structured curriculum, a lack of appropriate instructional

materials, and large class sizes, can make mathematics learning difficult and daunting for students. Recent studies confirm the significant impact of these factors. For example, a 2023 study by the Center for Public Education highlights that an overemphasis on abstract concepts without tangible connections can lead to disengagement and anxiety among students. Similarly, a review by Adebisi and Agboola (2024) found that inadequate instructional materials and high pupil-to-teacher ratios hinder personalized attention, which is crucial for addressing individual learning difficulties and preventing math-related anxieties from developing.

Psychological research indicates that student-related factors such as low self-efficacy and a fixed mindset significantly contribute to the development of mathematics phobia (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2024). A fixed mindset, the belief that one's intelligence and abilities are unchangeable, can lead students to avoid challenges and give up easily on difficult mathematics problems. This is often accompanied by low self-efficacy, where a student lacks confidence in their own ability to succeed in mathematics, creating a vicious cycle of avoidance and fear that hinders academic performance (Luo & Kim, 2024).

Home and parental influence play a significant role in shaping children's attitudes towards mathematics. Research suggests that parents' own mathematics anxiety can indirectly affect their children's mathematics achievement, particularly when parents frequently help with homework and exhibit negative views towards mathematics (Maloney et al., 2015).

The cultural perception of mathematics as a difficult subject can also permeate the home environment, influencing children's attitudes from an early age (IJCRT, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to address these factors and develop effective strategies to reduce mathematics phobia among primary school pupils. By understanding the causes and manifestations of mathematics phobia, educators and parents can work together to create a supportive learning environment that fosters a positive attitude towards mathematics.

### **The Role of Parents in Academic Achievement**

Parental involvement remains a critical factor in a child's academic success, particularly in mathematics. Recent research, including meta-analyses, confirms that parental engagement has a positive and significant effect on student mathematics achievement (Adeyeye, 2024; Fiskerstrand et al., 2024). This positive influence is multifaceted, stemming from activities such as providing

academic support, maintaining high expectations, and fostering a positive learning environment at home. However, researchers also highlight that the effectiveness of this involvement can vary based on factors like the type of engagement, cultural context, and the quality of parent-teacher communication (Fiskerstrand et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2022).

School-based involvement, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school, and participating in school governance, is also essential. Furthermore, communication and expectations, including fostering positive attitudes towards learning, setting high expectations, and communicating regularly with teachers, play a vital role in shaping children's academic outcomes.

Studies in Nigeria have consistently shown that parental involvement has a significant positive influence on students' academic performance in mathematics (Enih, 2018; Moon, 2020). However, it is essential to note that the nature of parental involvement matters. While positive involvement, characterized by autonomous support and encouragement, enhances intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, excessive control or negative involvement can undermine a child's learning autonomy and lead to negative academic outcomes (Feng et al., 2019). This aspect is particularly important when considering mathematics, where parental anxiety can inadvertently transfer to the child. Parents' own mathematics anxiety can affect their children's mathematics achievement, particularly when parents frequently help with homework and exhibit negative views towards mathematics (Maloney et al., 2015). Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be aware of their own attitudes towards mathematics and strive to provide positive support and encouragement to their children.

By being involved in their children's education and providing positive support, parents can help their children develop a love for learning and improve their academic performance in mathematics. As research continues to affirm the significance of parental involvement in academic achievement, it is essential for parents, educators, and policymakers to work together to create a supportive learning environment that fosters academic success.

### **Strategies for Parents to Reduce Mathematics Phobia**

Addressing mathematics phobia requires a multi-faceted approach, and parents play a crucial role in creating a supportive home environment. Research suggests several strategies that parents can employ to help their children overcome math anxiety. Firstly, fostering a positive mind-set is essential. Research consistently shows that parents' attitudes and anxieties about mathematics can significantly

influence their children's feelings toward the subject. To foster a positive mindset, parents should avoid expressing their own math anxieties or negative stereotypes. Instead, they should project positivity, emphasize that effort and persistence lead to success, and encourage resilience in the face of challenges. A recent study by Buelow et al. (2024) found that when parents use growth-mindset language and focus on the learning process rather than on grades, their children are more likely to develop a positive attitude and higher confidence in their mathematical abilities. By doing so, parents can help their children develop a growth mindset and view mathematics as a challenge that can be overcome with effort and practice.

Integrating mathematics into daily life is another effective strategy. Parents can make mathematics relevant and fun by incorporating it into everyday activities like cooking, shopping, playing board games, or measuring ingredients (Kumon, 2024; UniSA, 2023). This approach can reduce the abstractness of the subject and make it more engaging for children. Creating a supportive learning environment is also crucial. To help their children succeed in mathematics, parents should establish a conducive learning environment, provide consistent practice, and remain patient and supportive. Research supports these strategies, highlighting that a designated, quiet space for homework helps improve student focus and reduces distractions (Oribiana, 2022).

Promoting communication is another vital strategy. Parents should encourage their children to talk about their feelings towards mathematics, listen without judgment, and seek to understand their struggles (Kumon, 2024). This approach can help alleviate anxiety and build trust between parents and children. Collaborating with teachers is also essential. Regular communication with teachers helps parents understand their child's challenges and allows for a consistent approach to support at home and school (Kumon, 2024; UniSA, 2023).

Focusing on understanding, not just answers, is another effective strategy. Parents should shift the emphasis from getting the right answer quickly to understanding the process and concepts. This approach can reduce pressure and build confidence in children. Using positive reinforcement is also crucial. Praising effort, perseverance, and small successes can significantly boost a child's confidence and motivation in mathematics (Kumon, 2024).

Finally, seeking external help when necessary is vital. If anxiety persists or is severe, considering tutoring or counselling can provide additional support and strategies (UniSA, 2023). However, it is crucial to note that while parental involvement in shared literacy activities consistently shows positive

benefits, the picture for mathematics is more mixed (Loughborough University, 2025). Therefore, a qualitative approach is necessary to understand the specific dynamics at play in different contexts, such as Nasarawa State.

### **The Home Environment and Mathematics Learning in Nasarawa State**

The home environment significantly influences a child's mathematical development and learning. It is here that children are first exposed to mathematical concepts through daily routines and interactions with caregivers (Clements & Sarama, 2024). Research shows that a home rich in mathematical resources and discussions, along with an atmosphere that values learning, positively impacts a child's mathematical skills and readiness for school (Ramani et al., 2024). These early experiences, such as playing with blocks or engaging in conversations about quantities, form a crucial foundation for later academic success.

In Nasarawa State, understanding the specific characteristics of home environments is crucial. Factors such as socio-economic status, parental literacy levels, and cultural beliefs about education can influence the types of home-based activities parents engage in, their ability to provide resources, and their overall capacity to support their children's mathematics learning. The practical implementation of strategies by parents in Nasarawa State may be shaped by unique local circumstances and resources.

The home environment can either support or hinder a child's mathematical development, depending on the resources and support available. Parents who provide a conducive learning environment, engage in mathematical activities with their children, and encourage a positive attitude towards mathematics can significantly enhance their child's mathematical abilities. Conversely, a lack of resources, negative attitudes towards mathematics, and limited parental involvement can hinder a child's mathematical development.

### **Challenges to Parental Involvement**

Despite the clear benefits, several challenges can impede effective parental involvement:

- Parents' own mathematics anxiety: Parents who are themselves anxious about mathematics may struggle to provide positive support.

- Time constraints: Busy schedules can limit the time parents have for dedicated math-related activities.
- Lack of knowledge: Some parents may feel ill-equipped to help their children with modern mathematics curricula or specific concepts.
- Socioeconomic factors: Limited access to resources, technology, or a conducive home environment can be a barrier.

Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between schools, communities, and parents. Schools can offer workshops for parents, provide resources, and facilitate communication channels to empower parents regardless of their background or prior mathematics experience.

## **Conclusion**

The existing literature clearly establishes mathematics phobia as a significant barrier to effective learning, with various contributing factors. Reducing mathematics phobia among primary school pupils is a shared responsibility, but the indelible influence of parental involvement cannot be overstated. By actively cultivating a positive learning environment, promoting a growth mindset, making mathematics engaging and relevant, fostering open communication with schools, providing appropriate resources, and leading by example, parents can profoundly impact their children's mathematical confidence and competence. Investing in these strategies not only helps alleviate immediate anxiety but also lays a strong foundation for lifelong mathematical literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, ultimately empowering children to navigate a world increasingly reliant on quantitative understanding. It is time to recognize parents as invaluable partners in this crucial educational endeavour.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations based on findings from the research are as follows:

1. Parents should stay informed; regularly communicate with teachers to understand your child's mathematics curriculum and progress, create a supportive environment, encourage a growth mindset and provide resources to support your child's mathematics learning, participate in mathematics-related activities with your child such as playing mathematics games or cooking and regularly review your child's mathematics homework and progress reports.

2. Educators should communicate effectively, keep parents informed about their child's mathematics progress and involve them in decision-making processes, offer resources and support to help parents understand and support their child's math learning.
3. Policymakers should develop policies that support parental involvement: Create policies that encourage and support parental involvement in mathematics education and allocate resources to support parental involvement initiatives, mathematics education programs, encourage community involvement in mathematics education and promote partnerships between schools and local organizations.
4. Researchers should conduct further studies, continue to investigate the impact of parental involvement on mathematics education and identify effective strategies for promoting parental involvement, design and evaluate interventions aimed at increasing parental involvement and improving mathematics education outcomes and explore the role of technology to facilitate parental involvement and improve mathematics education outcomes.

By working together, parents, educators, policymakers, and researchers can promote parental involvement and improve mathematics education outcomes for all students.

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