

## Parental Pressure: Rethinking Over schooling in Nigeria Early Childhood Education

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### Abstract

*Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a critical role in shaping the young children's development and preparing them for future success. Overschooling in Nigeria's childhood education has sparked serious issues and concerns among stakeholders in education that require urgent attention. In this work, the relevant aspects that contribute to overschooling in early childhood education discussed are concept of overschooling in childhood education, parental involvement, supportive versus stifling, the lost value of play, the emotional cost of overschooling, policy contradiction, play-based curriculum versus parental pressure. The pertinent factors responsible for overschooling in childhood education are parental aspiration and pressure, the influence of private schools, an exam-oriented education system, policy practice gap, teacher and school practices and peer and community influence. Consequently, the effects of overschooling in childhood education in Nigeria are a creativity deficit, curriculum distortion, fatigue from long hours of study and homework, denial of play and leisure, limited peer interaction, anxiety, and stress and reduced curiosity. The paper concluded that overschooling in early childhood education in Nigeria has affected the children's learning patterns and derailed from the National Policy of Education. Recommendations offered in this article include Nigerian parents need to support their children's education and champion a holistic milestone play-rest, schools should be monitored to tune down the level of workload they give to children that results overschooling, policy makers and other stakeholders in early childhood education should help enforce the ECCDE guidelines adequately while parents should learn to appreciate the efforts their children initiate as they learn at different pace*

**Keywords:** parental pressure, over schooling, rethinking, early childhood education, education.

## Introduction

The whole concept of Education is to change lifestyle, and sharpen people's life, it entails re Education also involves acquiring new skills or knowledge about what one has no idea of; when an individual learns how to speak new language, acquires a certain skill or idea that can help him or her becomes a better person in society or a functional individual, such a fellow has been educated. Education makes an individual to be a problem solver, such person has become a think -tank in society where he or she can contribute meaningful ideas to better the country.

Education is the ability to read, write and perform some skills for one to become morally acceptable to the society (Luo, 2024). Education is the tool used for building a united, independent and a healthy, egalitarian society that is capable of maintaining its own values. Education, hence, is seen as the originator of manpower needed for the socioeconomic and political developments of the nation. However, complete education does not only take place in the classroom hence, both parents and other stakeholders in the early childhood education are involved to make the process a successful one thus " Education from cradle to grave" or " Education from dawn to dusk"

Also highlights the effects, parental pressure exert on the children's mental health, academic achievement, their overall developmental growth in the society. It also help the stakeholders in the education sector to encourage more realistic and support approaches to their children's education thereby focusing on their emotional and psychological needs and aspirations. Ultimately, it supports and contributes to ongoing discussions on creating a healthier and more developmentally appropriate childhood education system in Nigeria. Current research warns that early childhood education offers significant advantages, an excessive focus on formal academic achievement can heighten stress, suppress creativity, and place emotional strain on young learners (Burke & Hroncich, 2024; Omede & Jimba, 2019). For instance, some large-scale early childhood programmes have struggled to replicate the positive outcomes associated with smaller, high-quality interventions, raising concerns about whether rapid expansion may compromise developmental appropriateness. Rolnick and Grunewald (2003) contend that long-term gains are achieved not through the sheer quantity of educational exposure but through its quality.

The prevalence of over schooling is on the rise. The U.S. Department of Education (2021) reported that more than 70% of children aged three to five now attend structured learning environments, while the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) noted that many early childhood programmes increasingly emphasize academic outcomes at the expense of holistic growth. The situation is equally visible in Nigeria, where children as young as three or four remain in school until late afternoon and are required to completing daily homework, even on weekends (Healthline, 2019). United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2023) confirms that parental anxiety and societal expectations often drive schools to prioritize academic milestones prematurely, creating a culture of early academic competition.

In extreme cases, media reports from Western contexts indicate that overburdened children, overwhelmed by sustained academic pressure, have voiced protest and frustration sometimes symbolically calling for school closures or substantial reforms (Times, 2024). Such accounts resonate with growing parental anxieties, particularly among mothers, who increasingly question the expanding culture of overschooling and its intrusion into children's emotional well-being, rest, and family life (Source: The Guardian, 2016). The tension between academic aspiration and child-centred development has therefore become more pronounced, prompting calls for a more balanced educational approach that safeguards the holistic needs of learners

### **Types of Education in Nigeria**

The National Policy of Education (FGN) in Ogunode, Attah, and Ebute (2024) has successfully stated the difference form of education Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Basic Education, Senior Secondary Education, Vocational and Technical Education, University or Tertiary Education, Special Needs Education, Open and Distance Learning Education, however, the focus is on parental pressure in early childhood education .

Early Childhood Education is the aspect of education that is saddled with the sole responsibility of seeing the holistic development of the quality of human resource in the future when the child grows up. During this stage, the preschoolers experience crucial periods in the formation of character, basic skills, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development which are the basis for future learning (Ataish. et al. 2023). The formation of good attitudes by the preschoolers such as empathy, disciplinary

reading/writing, honesty, amongst others can go way in shaping the children's mindset throughout their milestone (Judrah. et al., 2024)

It has become a normal to see preschoolers within the ages 3 – 8 years hanging oversized school bags filled with homework back from school to home in Part Harcourt, Abuja, Lagos. These bags filled with books alongside their lunch boxes exert too many weight on their children, giving them backache or neck-pain almost on daily basis as they walk up to their schools. However, a given percentage of our parents see these unhealthy activities as sign of ambitions and huge success.

Overschooling is the of pushing academic demands above the level of preschoolers reach . In as much as parental involvement in childhood education is widely advocated for effective academic achievement, it can still result into undue pressure, overschooling plays creativity in the child, and damage the emotional well-being of the preschoolers. This impression places the argument, it is very true that parental involvement is critical to a child's learning, even so, overschooling in the childhood education is harmful, and Nigerian parents must adjust their expectations. In the early years when the formal education was introduced by the missionaries, preschoolers were admitted or enrolled in school when they have reached the ages of 5 or 6 when they were considered to have mature to be independent as to take care of themselves and be able to walk up to school, to cope with the hurdles associated with academic achievement

Preschoolers at this age were expected to go to school and return without their parents accompanying them, hence, reducing the stress on both the parents and their teachers. In these present days, such practice barely exists, children begin school at a very small age of two or less, especially for mothers who are doing white collar jobs. The above has made them study things that may be inappropriate and are set for long time of the day without play or recreational activities in many cases or instances. This act whereby preschoolers are given what is beyond their age or made to stay in school beyond the period they are supposed to be dismissed and go home , rest their brains but given huge homework after daily classroom activities is what is considered as overschooling

According to Basah, Ugwude and Dike (2023), state that overschooling is when a child, pupil is made to undergo, and undertake, the act or process of being trained, drilled, instructed, target or educated far above or in excess of what is provided in the curriculum. According to Meer (2000), over schooling is

the period of depressions when jobs shrink in the labour market and people just avail themselves of what kind of jobs are available. It is also seen as the extent to which an individual possesses level of education in excess of which is required for their particular job (McGuinness, 2006). Over schooling is the process of educational mismatch, that is, when the attained educational level exceeds the required level. Overschooling means the act of being taught more than usual or too much at school. (Brooks 2011, Ibiam & Aleke, 2012).

In Nigeria, over schooling can be seen in different dimension where children use the platform to read, write and complete tests before they reach the age of four, this age is inspired by fear where parents do not want their children to be left behind, thus many private schools in our society use or capitalize on it to market their schools even the ones below the minimum standard adopted by the ministry of education. Parents engage in comparisons with other parents where they brag about how they want their children to begin to read before they enter kindergarten, in a bid to involve themselves to help their children in academic practices turn out to become pressure, watering down the essence of childhood. Although provable studies in Nigeria directly perusing overschooling remain slim, the trend is very obvious, visible in classroom and parents' circles.

In recent years, parenting practices in many societies have increasingly been shaped by academic competition and social comparison among parents. Parents often compare their children's learning achievements such as reading ability or numeracy skills with those of other children, leading to pressure for children to achieve academic milestones earlier than developmentally expected. This situation has contributed to what scholars describe as over-parenting and overschooling, where parents intensify their involvement in children's academic activities in order to secure early academic advantage. Research shows that excessive academic expectations and parental control can negatively affect children's motivation, social development, and emotional well-being (Ruiz-Ortiz et al., 2024; Leonard, 2025)

Similarly, studies on early childhood education indicate that when young children are exposed to excessive academic routines and limited play opportunities, their creativity, attention span, and social interactions may be compromised (Ikenyiri, 2025). Developmental research also suggests that although parental expectations may enhance academic performance, high parental pressure can reduce children's

socio-emotional skills, which are critical for healthy development and long-term learning (Appiah et al., 2024).

Although empirical studies directly addressing overschooling in Nigeria remain limited, the phenomenon is increasingly visible in parental social circles and early childhood classrooms, where some parents boast about their children's ability to read before entering kindergarten. Such practices reflect a broader culture of competitive parenting that may inadvertently replace the developmental essence of childhood play, exploration, and social interaction with premature academic demands. Consequently, scholars in early childhood education emphasize the need to balance parental involvement with developmentally appropriate learning experiences that preserve children's natural curiosity and holistic growth.

At the preschool level of education mostly, the private sector, preschool children are kept beyond Federal Government's 12 noon approved time of closure. These children are drilled in different ways by giving them one classroom activity after another in a bid to keep them busy and for the teacher to exhaust all the curriculum contents that should be taught in a month. This act goes to stress the brain of the children making them feel exhausted and losing emotions and feeling sad. Overschooling is also been enforced at home where parents force their children to do the huge assignment they were given by their teachers. Some parents also organize summer lesson after school vacation, the time children should engage in creative play, parents tend to forget that children can also learn during their normal play time because no child is reared devoid of play or in isolation observed, creativity is not created in a vacation as such, children should have time to play and use their imaginations.

### **Parent Involvement: Supportive versus Stifling**

Parent Involvement as refined by Selolo (2018) is the active participation and engagement of parents or guardians in their child's education and school activities. Furthermore, Roy, & Giraldo-Garcia (2018), see parental involvement as those behaviours shown by parents, both in home and school settings, meant to support the education of their children. Parent's support in academic attainment and upbringing of children, cannot be overlooked or discarded. Parents do everything humanely possible from going to work, markets, workshops, to raise their children well. Yet, several researchers highlight how engaged parenting links to improved early academic performance, for example a study of parents

in Zaria-Kaduna State found that higher parental Involvement correlates with better academic results, especially when parents are more educated (Asiya, 2024). Again, in Jigawa State, children whose parents were part of their schooling scored higher marks than their counterpart whose parents were less involved in their children's academic programmes (Muhammad and Ibrahim, 2025).

### **The Lost Value of Play**

The recognition of play as a fundamental component of childhood development has important implications for the ongoing debate on parental pressure and overschooling in Nigeria's early childhood education sector. While many parents increasingly prioritize early academic achievement, often expecting children to read, write, and perform structured academic tasks before entering formal schooling, such expectations may inadvertently limit children's opportunities for play-based learning. Developmental scholars argue that when academic demands overshadow play, children may experience stress and reduced opportunities for creativity, exploration, and social interaction experiences that are essential for holistic growth. Thus, rethinking overschooling requires a balanced approach that acknowledges the developmental value of play in early childhood. Educational stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and policymakers, must therefore promote learning environments where structured instruction is complemented by meaningful play experiences. Such an approach ensures that children not only acquire early academic skills but also develop the cognitive, social, and emotional competencies necessary for lifelong learning and well-being. Several studies have been carried out about the importance, and attributes associated with nature-based playground on the quality of young children's play (Kuh, Ponte, & Chau, 2013; Luchs & Fikus 2013, Fjortoft 2004)

Similar studies on the role of play-based learner shows that it accelerates language acquisition, problem-solving, social and emotional skills more effectively than taking note drills, In the South East of Nigeria, children engaged in play-based curricula exhibited stronger social skills like cooperation and empathy (Obijifor, Ugwela, & Onyenwe, 2024). In contrast, parental pressure for early academics has water down the role of play in early years. This contrast sharply with global standard practices – countries like Finland delay formal education and still encourage highly successful learners. UNICEF and UBEC have partnered on a play-based Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCDE) programme, promoting imaginative, culturally relevant early learning in some states like Adamawa and Ebonyi

States, yet, uptakes remains minimal (UNESCO, 2015). Cultural perceptions also play a role in many communities, play is dismissed as non-educational integrating traditional games like “Ajo” and storytelling can bridge the vacuum (Discipline in Nigeria, 2025, Wikipedia).

### **Emotional Cost of Overschooling**

Emotions are foundational to children’s early learning and development, influencing how they engage with academic tasks and construct attitudes toward school. According to Reinhard Pekrun (2014), emotions play a powerful role in shaping learning processes and academic outcomes, affecting motivation, attention, and persistence. Young children’s growing ability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions is closely tied to their emotional competence, which in turn predicts their adjustment and success in the school environment (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2011). Recent research also shows that parental education anxiety and pressure can significantly affect children’s emotional wellbeing and learning experiences. For example, studies have found that higher levels of parental education anxiety are positively associated with children’s learning anxiety, and that parenting styles characterized by overprotection or rejection tend to exacerbate this anxiety, whereas emotionally warm parenting mitigates it, underscoring the emotional cost of excessive achievement expectations on children’s engagement and wellbeing.

In educational settings where parents place intense emphasis on academic success—sometimes through high expectations, control, or constant academic comparison—children may internalize these pressures, which can lead to stress, reduced intrinsic motivation, and negative emotional outcomes that undermine healthy learning engagement. Research on parental pressures indicates that such dynamics can erode self-esteem, stifle exploration, and diminish enjoyment of learning, particularly when achievement is tied to parental approval rather than personal growth.

In contrast, positive and supportive parenting practices, including emotionally responsive engagement, have been shown to foster better emotional regulation, resilience, and academic adaptation. This evidence highlights the need to rethink overachievement cultures in early childhood education by prioritizing emotional support and balanced parental expectations, rather than narrow performance outcomes, to promote both emotional wellbeing and meaningful learning.

Quality Education Is important for the overall development of a nation and proper education of the children is vital for their healthy development. Academic overload produces stress. Stress is a global phenomenon commonly experienced by everyone who has overwork him/herself and the children are not exempted from experiencing stress due to overschooling (New York State Public Employees Federation, 2015, World Health Organization, 2019). Nigerian ecosystem where school readiness is equaled with early learning and reading and test scores, ignores the emotional damage in children caused by overschooling. Emotional distress on early childhood may be the ground work for long term issues such as low self-esteem in children, behavioural problems, disinterest in learning, amongst others.

### **Policy Contradictive: Play-based curriculum versus parental pressure**

Children like play and play often mirrors what is important in their lives (Fleer, 2010). When asked about play, children talk about having fun, making new friends, being with new friends, being creative, being imaginative, selecting activities by the children and setting rules that govern the activities of play (Zevenbergen, 2007). Children play for different purposes some play for the purpose of exploring or learning new things. At different times, they play for the purpose of consolidating already known ideas, practicing skill, building and strengthening relationships or just for fun and enjoyment as they play with other children and adults (Kagan, 2009). Children bring their own interpretation of educations, experiences, and expectations to their play (Tzuo, 2007). Play can be quiet or noisy, messy or orderly, funny or serious, effortless. It can take place inside or outside a building and develop as children grow and change (Longford, 2000)

Nevertheless, when children are overwhelmed by too much developmental expectations, they begin to exhibit anxiety, irritability, withdrawal, or physical symptoms like fatigue or sleep disturbances. Nigeria National Policy on Education and ECCDE guidelines advocates play-based age appropriate learning. Still, in practice, many private schools given by parental pressure and demand, favour accelerated academic attainment. The government's play-based programme has made policy strides, but enforcement and scale remain limited (UNESCO, 2025). Hence, overschooling, stems less from policy vacuum and more from mindset and lack of advocacy. Nigerian parents need orientation, not just about what the policy states, but about what their children truly need

## **Conclusion**

The study examines the issues of parental pressures that have resulted to overschooling that need to be given serious attentions. The implication for overschooling which deny children fun, leisure and the opportunity to develop their interest through interactions with nature are all highlighted. Factors that prompt overschooling such as too much academic expectations, early reading, learning and others from the Nigerian Parents were linked, preschoolers overschooled by too much academic work, demanding assignments and by keeping them longer in school. Overschooling may stem from love, but it risks depriving children of true love, creativity, leisure, making new friends, and self discovery. Parents must tune down academic pressure and remember that real involvement honour child's learning pace, protect children, and plants seed seeking lifelong learning, not racing them prematurely through milestones. It is therefore time for Nigerians to replace pressure with play and ambition with awareness.

## **Recommendations:**

The study therefore suggests the following recommendations to limit parental pressure, discourage over schooling and encourage play in the early childhood education in Nigeria.

- 1: Parents should adopt developmentally appropriate expectations and prioritize play
- 2: Schools should be monitored to tune down the level of workload they give to children that result to overschooling but prioritize balance curricula that respect developmental readiness.
- 3: Policy makers and other stakeholders in Early Childhood Education sector should enforce the ECCDE guidelines adequately, and partner with parents, communities to encourage play-based learning.
- 4: The medias and other NGOs should advocate for lifelong curiosity, resilience and emotional intelligence rather than emphasis on early learning and reading with too much academic expectations.

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