

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (A Case Study of Students in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State)

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of parental involvement in early childhood education on the academic performance of secondary school students in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. It examined how early parental support and participation influence students' performance at the secondary school level. Specifically, the study determined the extent to which parental involvement in areas such as home learning support, monitoring of academic progress, provision of learning materials, and participation in school-related activities contribute to students' academic achievement. The study adopted a survey research design. A structured questionnaire titled Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Academic Performance Questionnaire (PIECEAPQ) was used to collect data from a sample of secondary school students across selected schools in Jalingo LGA. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools to test the research hypotheses. The findings revealed that parental involvement during early childhood has a significant and positive impact on the academic performance of students at the senior secondary school level. It was further discovered that students whose parents were actively engaged in their early education performed better academically compared to their counterparts who experienced limited parental support. The study concluded that sustained parental participation in a child's educational foundation greatly enhances academic success at higher levels of learning. It recommended that parents should be more intentional in supporting their children's education from the early years, while schools and policymakers should strengthen initiatives that encourage home and school collaboration.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Early Childhood Education, Academic Performance, Secondary School Students.

1.1. Background to the study

Education is a vital instrument for individual and societal development. Early Childhood Education (ECE) lays the foundation for lifelong learning and cognitive development. It is widely recognized as a foundational stage in a child's educational journey, shaping his future academic success and life outcomes. In Nigeria, only about one third of children access any form of pre-primary education, despite federal government policy mandating universal basic education to include early childhood programs (UNICEF, 2021 & FRN, 2013). In practice, many Nigerian children, particularly those in rural and under-resourced states such as Taraba begin formal schooling without adequate early cognitive stimulation (UNESCO, 2019).

Existing researches in Nigeria and other developing countries show that children who benefit from rich early learning environments and active parental support tend to perform

better academically in later schooling (Ambi et al, 2024; UNICEF, 2021 and Kulloma and Kolo, 2023). For example, Amedu (2015) found that early childhood education provides a solid platform for a better performance in other levels of academic attainment. Similarly, studies have noted that parental involvement in children's early education such as attending school functions, providing a rich home learning environment and engaging in parent teacher communication fosters cognitive development, early literacy and positive attitudes toward school (Ejuchegani, 2024; Shoaga and Rasheed, 2019 and Angwaomaodoko, 2023). In fact, a study by Amedu (2015) concluded that parental involvement in early childhood education is highly significant for a child's academic success.

In many parts of Nigeria, Taraba State inclusive, parental involvement during the early educational years is believed to play a crucial role in shaping academic outcomes later in life (Yusuf, 2018). Increasingly, researchers have emphasized that the nature and quality of parental engagement during early education directly affect academic performance of students as they progress to senior secondary school (Smith, 2021). Parents who are actively involved in their children's early learning through reading, provision of educational materials, emotional support and establishing routines tend to raise children who perform better academically later in life.

In the context of Nigeria's educational system, the implications are stark. Many pupils enter primary and secondary schools without a firm foundation. Reports from national examination bodies like West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) routinely highlight dismal pass rates and widespread examination malpractice at the secondary school level. Analysts attribute part of this under-performance to weak preparation in the early years.

In many Nigerian communities, extended family norms and work demand may affect the time parents spend on schooling issues. For instance, Itedjere, (2025) noted that in rural areas, parents who actively assist with schoolwork and emphasize education are more likely to raise children with stronger academic motivation. Conversely, systemic poverty means that many low income families simply cannot afford preschool fees or learning materials. Research shows that families with higher socio-economic status often provide more educational resources such as books, private lessons, enrichment activities, leading to better student outcomes. Cultural beliefs can also shape involvement. In some traditional communities, mothers or fathers may be less present in school life due to gender roles or work (Danjuma & Uwah, 2021). For these reasons, the level of parental involvement in early childhood education (ECE) varies widely across households. Yet few studies (Iroegbu, 2021; Itedjere, 2025) in Nigeria have quantitatively examined how early parental engagement relates to later secondary school performance, especially at the local level in states like Taraba. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on Jalingo Local Government Area (LGA), one of the urban centres of Taraba State. Although Jalingo is the state capital, it reflects many of Taraba's educational challenges: growing enrollment in public schools, overburdened infrastructure, and a large rural hinterland. Drawing on theories of child development and social capital, the study posits that active parental engagement in early childhood education builds children's confidence, enhance language skills and improve study habits, which in turn manifest as higher achievement at the secondary level. Examining this impact empirically, the research aims to inform local education policy and community programs which is aimed at boosting student success.

1.2. **Statement of the problem**

Despite policy efforts promoting universal basic education, academic performance of Nigerian secondary schools remains low, with Taraba State recording both frequent examination malpractice and high failure rate in Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE). Early childhood education (ECE) participation is limited, with less than 36% of children nationwide attending pre-primary programs, especially among rural and low-income communities (UNICEF, 2021). In Jalingo Local Government Area, many students enter primary school lacking preschool experience and parental support for early learning, resulting in poor literacy, numeracy, and social development, which affect later academic achievement.

Although, Ejuchegahi, (2024); Shoaga & Rasheed, (2019); Angwaomaodoko, (2023) and Osaro-Martins et al. (2024) emphasize parental involvement as vital for children's cognitive development and school success, there is little empirical evidence in Nigeria particularly in Jalingo Local Government Area on how early parental engagement influences secondary school outcomes. Existing studies largely focus on parental socio-economic background or general academic trends Miftahu & Melaiye, (2021), while the specific link between early parental involvement and later academic performance remains under-researched in this context. Consequently, parents often underestimate the long-term impact of early educational support, and policymakers lack localized data to design effective interventions Okoro, (2020); Okoro & Ibrahim, (2018).

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the relationship between parental involvement in early childhood education and secondary school students' academic performance in Jalingo Local Government Area, providing evidence for targeted strategies to improve educational outcomes.

1.3. **Research objectives**

The general objective of this study is to investigate the impact of parental involvement in early childhood education on the academic performance of secondary school students in Jalingo LGA. Specifically, the study:

1. Examined the nature of parental involvement in early childhood education programs within the study area.
2. Identified cultural and community factors that influence parental involvement in early childhood education in Jalingo LGA.
3. Examined how early parental engagement influences learning outcomes of secondary school students.
4. Provided recommendations for policymakers and educators to enhance parental involvement strategies.

1.4. **Research questions**

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of parental involvement in early childhood education program in Jalingo Local Government Area?
2. What cultural or community factors in Jalingo Local Government Area affect parental involvement in early childhood education?
3. How does parental engagement in early childhood education influence academic outcomes in later schooling?
4. What policy measures can be taken to enhance parental involvement in early childhood education?

1.5. Literature review**Theoretical framework**

This paper is underpinned by the following theories: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

This theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and propose that human development is shaped by the interaction between an individual and his environment. It posits that five distinct interacting systems – microsystem, meosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem – influence development right from the immediate and intimate settings to broad cultural contexts, with bidirectional influences between the individual and their environment. In other words, a child's development is influenced by various environmental systems with the family being the most immediate and impactful. This theory states that parental involvement in early education plays an integral role in directing a child's academic trajectory.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

It is postulated by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky in the 1930s and emphasized the importance of social interactions and cultural tools in cognitive development. Parents act as primary agents in introducing their children to cultural norms and educational practices, thereby influencing their academic development (Shoaga & Rasheed, 2019). Vygotsky emphasized that learning is a socially mediated process. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) implies that children learn best with the guidance of more knowledgeable others, often parents at early stages, it is the range between what a child can do unaided and what they can achieve with guidance. In early childhood, parents typically act as those knowledgeable guides. Through everyday interactions like talking, play, and shared tasks, parents introduce cultural tools like language, counting, problem-solving strategies that children internalize. Empirical studies support this: naturally occurring parent-child teaching situations for example, when a parent explains the meaning of a new word or guides a child through a puzzle, it enhances the child's development by providing just the right level of challenge within the child's ZPD. Vygotsky's theory therefore predicts that when parents actively engage in their child's learning by scaffolding tasks, asking questions, and encouraging effort, the child's cognitive and language skills grow more rapidly. In turn, these strengthened foundations manifest in better readiness and performance when formal schooling begins. Vygotsky's framework implies that parental involvement is not merely supportive but actually constructs the child's early understanding of learning itself. When parents provide support, structure, and encouragement, it fosters cognitive growth, which in turn boosts academic performance.

Conceptual framework**Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education**

Parental involvement encompasses the active participation of parents in their children's educational processes, styles of parenting that influence student motivation (Onongha et al, 2016). This includes activities such as reading to children, assisting with homework, and attending school events. Such involvement during early childhood has been linked to improved academic outcomes in later years (Ejuchegahi, 2024). Parents' income and occupation significantly influence academic outcomes because low-income households often face resource limitations that constrain their children's educational progress Miftahu & Melaiye (2021).

Research in Nigeria has demonstrated a positive correlation between parental involvement and students' academic performance. Ejuchegahi (2024) found that students whose parents were actively engaged in their education performed better academically. Similarly, Shoaga and Rasheed (2019) reported that parental involvement positively influenced pupils' academic outcomes.

Parental involvement manifests in multiple forms such as home-based involvement which covers activities parents do at home to support learning. This includes providing a stable, supportive home environment with intellectual stimulation and educational resources; school-based involvement involving participation in school sponsored activities such as attending PTA meetings, volunteering in class. Miftahu and Melaiye (2021) enumerate examples: contact with schools to share information, participation in school events, involvement in school work, and participation in governance. These activities foster direct home school communication; Socio-emotional/affective involvement: Providing emotional support and motivation. Angwaomaodoko (2023) refers to affective involvement as parents' encouragement and valuing of education, nurturing children's interest and self-concept in learning. This type often operates alongside instructional support.

Each type of involvement may differentially impact learning. For example, Iroegbu (2021) found that home involvement (help with reading) was strongly linked to better reading skills among primary pupils, whereas parents' formal education level was not significant. This suggests that active engagement in learning tasks matters more than just parents' socio-economic background or knowledge.

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

ECE refers to the formal and informal education provided to children from birth to approximately eight years old. This period is critical for cognitive, emotional, and social development. Studies have shown that quality ECE, supported by active parental involvement, lays a strong foundation for future academic success (Shoaga & Rasheed, 2019). This stage is vital because it lays the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health. It focuses on holistic development, learning through play and parental involvement so much so that active participation of parents enhances the effectiveness of early education.

Academic Performance

Academic performance is typically measured by students' grades, test scores, and overall achievement in school. Factors influencing academic performance include the quality of instruction, student motivation, and parental involvement. Research indicates that students with supportive and involved parents tend to perform better academically (Audi, Yakubu, & Tahir, 2024). Academic performance refers to the outcome of education. The extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals. It is commonly assessed using grades obtained from tests, class participation, assignments, and standardized examinations. In the context of senior secondary school students, especially in Jalingo LGA of Taraba State, academic performance is often evaluated through continuous assessments, term results, and external examination scores like WAEC and NECO.

1.6. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was employed for this study. According to Nworgu (2015), a descriptive survey design is suitable for studies that aim to collect data from a large group of people to describe existing conditions or relationships. The population of the study

comprises all secondary school students (JSS1 to SSS3) within Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State. According to the Taraba State Ministry of Education (2024), there are approximately 11,200 students enrolled in public secondary schools in the area.

A sample of 370 students was selected from the target population using a stratified random sampling technique. The stratification was based on class levels (JSS1 to SSS3) to ensure proportional representation across different academic levels. After stratification, a simple random sampling technique was employed within each stratum to select respondents. This approach reduces bias and ensures that every student has equal chances of being selected for the study.

The researcher adopted a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Academic Performance Questionnaire" (PIECEAPQ). The questionnaire is divided into six sections ranging from demographic information of respondents, including age, gender, class level, and parental background. Also, items related to parental involvement in early childhood education, such as monitoring homework, attending school meetings, providing learning materials, and their relationship to academic performance down to the suggestion of policy measures. The questionnaire made use of a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," Strongly Agree (SA)=4, Agree (A)=3, Disagree (D)=2, Strongly Disagree (SD)=1 allowing for standardized responses.

In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, the research questionnaire was subjected to expert review. The questionnaire was given to the researcher's supervisor for face and content validity of the instrument. Three experts from Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Administration were consulted to enhance the instrument's accuracy in measuring parental involvement and academic performance.

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted in a secondary school outside the main study area but with similar characteristics. The test-retest method was applied, where the questionnaire was administered twice to the same group of 30 students at a two-week interval. The data obtained was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the reliability index. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for the study, as recommended by Nwankwo (2016).

The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the selected schools, with the help of trained research assistants. Prior to administration, permission was obtained from school principals, and the purpose of the study was explained to the students to encourage honest and sincere responses. The completed questionnaires were collected on the same day to minimize loss or damage.

The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores was used to summarize respondents' demographic data and responses to questionnaire items. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and t-test, was employed to test the research hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to ensure accuracy and efficiency in data processing.

1.6 Data presentation and analysis**Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	189	51.1
	Female	181	48.9
Age	10-15	289	61.9
	16-18	111	30
	19 and above	30	8.1
Class level	JSS 1-JSS3	200	54
	SS1-SS3	170	46
Type school	Public school	238	64.3
	Private school	132	35.7
Attended early childhood school	Yes	249	67.3
	No	81	21.9
	Not sure	40	10.8

The demographic distribution shows a near-equal gender representation, with males slightly higher (51.1%). Most students (61.9%) fall between 10 to 15 years, indicating a youthful respondent group still within the traditional schooling age range for junior and senior secondary school in Nigeria. A larger portion of the sample was from public schools (64.3%), showing the dominance of public enrollment in Jalingo Local Government Area. 67.3% of respondents confirmed that they had attended an early childhood education program, such as nursery or pre-primary school, suggesting a significant early exposure to foundational learning. The class levels were well distributed across JSS1 to JSS3 and SS1 to SS3, with JSS1-3 (54.0%) having the highest representation.

Nature of parental involvement in early childhood education**Table 2: Respondents' experiences of parental involvement in early childhood education**

Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Parents attended school meetings and monitored progress	103(27.8%)	88(23.8%)	108(29.2%)	51(13.8%)	20(5.4%)
Parents provided learning materials	118(31.9%)	102(27.6%)	89(24.1%)	41(11.1%)	20(5.4%)
Parents communicated with teachers	83(22.4%)	109(29.5%)	118(31.9%)	40(10.8%)	20(5.4%)
Parents encouraged enjoyment of learning	129(34.9%)	101(27.3%)	82(22.2%)	38(10.3%)	20(5.4%)

The data presented in Table 4.2 reveals that students generally experienced moderate to high levels of parental involvement during their early childhood years. Encouragement to enjoy learning was the most frequent form of involvement, with 62.2% of students indicating their parents “Always” or “Often” motivated them.

Material support was also significant, with 59.5% reporting consistent provision of learning resources. Parental monitoring of school activities occurred often for 51.6% of respondents, though 13.8% experienced it rarely. Notably, communication with teachers scored lower, with only 51.39% affirming that their parents “Always” or “Often” communicated with their teachers, and 22.2% stating it only happened “sometimes.”

Cultural and community factors affecting parental involvement
Table 3: Respondents’ views on cultural and community factors affecting parental involvement

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Cultural beliefs encourage parental involvement in early childhood education	138 (37.3)	111 (30.6)	60 (16.2)	40 (10.8)	21 (5.7)
Religious cultural practices limit parental involvement	102 (27.6)	91 (24.6)	79 (21.4)	58 (15.7)	40 (10.7)
Community programs promote early childhood education	132 (35.7)	98 (26.5)	80 (21.6)	40 (10.8)	20 (5.4)

The data in Table 3 shows that cultural and community factors played both enabling and limiting roles in parental involvement in early childhood education. A total of 67.3% of respondents (Strongly Agree + Agree) acknowledged that cultural beliefs in their community encouraged parental involvement in early childhood education. Similarly, 62.2% agreed that community leaders and programs promoted early education, suggesting that some local initiatives supported family engagement. However, over 52.2% also agreed (Strongly Agree + Agree) that certain cultural or religious practices actually limited parental involvement, possibly due to gender roles, work schedules, or traditional views on education.

Influence of early parental engagement on academic performance
Table 4: Students’ perception of early parental engagement on academic performance

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Early involvement positively affects academic performance	248	67.3%
Neutral	72	19.5%
Negative effect	50	13.5%
Students with parental involvement perform better	278	75.1%
Early parental involvement provided a foundation	261	70.5%

The data clearly demonstrated a strong belief among students that early parental involvement contributed significantly to academic success in secondary school. A total of

67% of the respondents believed that their parents' involvement during early childhood positively affected their current academic performance. 75.1% of the students agreed that those with stronger early parental support perform better academically. Furthermore, 70.5% acknowledged that early childhood education gave them a solid foundation for succeeding in secondary school.

Policy measures to enhance parental involvement

Table 5: Suggested policy measures to improve parental involvement

Suggested policy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community awareness programs	277	74.9
Government incentives for parents	238	64.3
Free subsidized early childhood education	298	80.5
Teacher-parents workshop	258	69.7
Support for policies to encourage involvement	321	86.8

64.3% indicated government incentives for parents are a good measure to increase parental involvement in early childhood education. 80.5% of the respondents recommended free or subsidized early childhood education to ensure that low-income families can enroll and support their children from the foundational level. 74.9% supported community awareness programs, showing that a significant number of respondents believe that education about the value of early childhood involvement is needed. 69.7% also favored teacher-parent workshops, suggesting that improved communication and collaboration between schools and families can lead to better outcomes. Notably, 86.8% of the respondents believed that government policies should directly support and promote parental involvement in early childhood education.

These results point to the necessity for a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, school administrators, teachers, and community leaders in formulating and implementing policies aimed at enhancing parental participation in foundational education.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the findings, it is clear that parental involvement in early childhood education is a vital determinant of later academic performance. The research has shown that the formative years of a child's education lay the groundwork for habits, skills, and attitudes that carry into secondary school and beyond.

In Jalingo Local Government Area, while many parents make efforts to provide emotional and material support to their children, socio-economic challenges, cultural expectations, and sometimes a lack of awareness hinder fuller participation. The data confirms that children from homes with consistent parental engagement regardless of whether the support is emotional, financial, or academic perform better in school.

The implication is that schools, communities, and policymakers must work together to create an environment where all parents, regardless of their background, can contribute meaningfully to their children's education from the earliest years. Without addressing socio-economic and cultural barriers, the benefits of early childhood education may remain unevenly distributed.

Based on the conclusion above, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthening parental awareness programs to enable them become aware of the importance of involvement in their children's' early education and [practical ways to

support them. These sessions should not only emphasize the academic benefits of parental involvement but also teach parents simple strategies such as monitoring homework, encouraging reading, and attending school events.

1. Government support for early childhood education: local and state governments should consider introducing free or heavily subsidized nursery education especially in rural and low-income areas. In order to achieve subsidized nursery education, several practical measures can be adopted such as.
2. Improved budgetary allocation: Governments should allocate a percentage of the education budget specifically to early childhood education. This allocation can be used to pay teachers' salaries, provide teaching aids, and maintain facilities in nursery schools.
3. Teacher Training and Recruitment: Governments should invest in the training and hiring of qualified early childhood educators. If more teachers are employed and properly motivated, the cost of nursery education can be reduced for parents.
4. Provision of Learning Materials: Free distribution of textbooks, storybooks, play materials, and uniforms will reduce the hidden costs of early childhood education, making it affordable for families in rural and low-income areas. If these measures are implemented, governments will not only increase enrollment at the nursery level but also improve the quality of teaching and learning. When children receive an early start in school, they are more likely to excel in later years, as confirmed by the findings of this study.
5. Encourage Regular Parent–Teacher Interaction: schools should set up structured parent–teacher fora to encourage more consistent communication about a child's progress and needs. This can be actualized by introducing monthly or termly parent–teacher meetings and open day that go beyond fee discussions to focus on academic progress, behavior, and learning difficulties. Schools may also adopt digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups or SMS updates to keep parents informed in real time. Teachers can be trained to use friendly communication styles that make parents feel welcome, ensuring that these fora become collaborative rather than intimidating.
6. Address Cultural Barriers: Religious and cultural leaders should be engaged in awareness campaigns to challenge practices that limit parental involvement, especially for mothers in certain communities. In bid to achieve this, education authorities can collaborate with imams, pastors, and traditional rulers to serve as advocates of parental engagement in sermons, community gatherings, and cultural festivals. For instance, leaders can openly stress the importance of mothers attending school meetings and supporting their children's education, thereby reducing stigma in communities where such practices are discouraged. Additionally, community dramas or storytelling sessions in local languages can be used to challenge harmful stereotypes and encourage inclusive parental participation.

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