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Article

Caregiver Variables on Preschoolers' Classroom Participation in Public Early Childhood Centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State

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Abstract: The study looked into how carer characteristics affected preschoolers' involvement in class at public early development facilities in Rivers State's East Senatorial District. The research design used in the study was a descriptive survey. Six research questions and six hypotheses that were assessed at the.05 alpha levels of significance served as the study's compass. 717 carers made up the study's population. 287 carers made up the study's sample. Both basic random sampling and stratified sampling were used to choose the sample. The researcher's validated "Carers' Variables and Classroom Participation of Preschoolers Questionnaire (CVCPPQ)" served as the data gathering tool. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.68. The study's results, which were obtained using the statistical tool Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), indicate that the qualifications of carers have a significant impact on the classroom participation of preschoolers in public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State; the teaching experience of carers has a significant impact on the classroom participation of preschoolers in public early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State; and the gender of carers has a significant impact on the classroom participation of preschoolers in public early childhood centres in Rivers State.

Keywords: Caregivers' Variables, Caregivers' Qualification, Caregivers' Teaching Experience, Caregivers' Gender, Classroom Participation.

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1. Introduction

Children's first impressions of school might be influenced by both their caregiver and the class they attend. Children's perceptions of school and their academic and behavioral results are shaped by their interactions with their caregiver, their peers, and the classroom setting from the very first days they are enrolled. It has been demonstrated that a child's academic career is impacted in a cumulative and long-lasting way by their ability to adapt to school and succeed there. Ensuring that every child participates in preschool activities and feels included in the group is the aim of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

Over the course of the school year, a child's classroom experience might change how well they acclimate to school. Every year, children also go to new classrooms where they encounter new peers, new caregivers, and new academic challenges. As a result, as children re-adjust to the classroom setting, their school-related knowledge, attitudes, and actions may change every year. The demographics of the caregivers in the classroom are

interconnected and together impact the child's academic trajectory, both in the short and long term.

Classroom activities that foster participatory spaces for knowledge sharing and establish a community of learners can be summed up as active learning. Since learning is seen as a team effort, many teaching methods can be used to get learners interested in what they are learning. Active learning requires learner interaction in the classroom [1]. Children are more engaged in the learning process when they actively participate in class. It also encourages creativity and problem-solving.

Children are recognized by caregivers who promote active classroom involvement as real participants in the teaching and learning process rather than only as passive recipients of information. It has been discovered that children actively participate in learning through a variety of methods, such as joining study groups, finishing homework and reading assignments, and attending class. Therefore, active learning through classroom participation can help children strengthen their learning and problem-solving skills.

The degree of education, training, and certification that a caregiver has is referred to as their qualification. Preschoolers' quality of care and education can be improved to increase their participation in the classroom, and higher qualifications are generally associated with a deeper grasp of child development and successful teaching techniques. Higher qualified caregivers might be more knowledgeable about how to design stimulating and developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. Children are more likely to be engaged and motivated to study as a result, which may lead to greater involvement. According to the researchers' definition, a caregiver's formal education, degrees, certifications, and credentials are usually referred to as their qualifications. These credentials show how well-versed in early childhood education and child development the caregivers are. Furthermore, training and retraining are ongoing processes that caregivers go through throughout their careers to enhance their methods and deliver high-quality care and education to children, whereas qualifications are frequently thought of as a one-time accomplishment. Preschoolers' educational outcomes are greatly impacted by the training and qualifications of caregivers, making them essential. This is demonstrated by the fact that some preschoolers drop out of school or do poorly academically. This problem has posed a serious obstacle for the educational system.

Preschoolers' involvement in class might also be influenced by the caregivers' prior teaching experience. The amount of time spent teaching in a classroom is referred to as teaching experience. It includes curriculum development, classroom management, active student engagement, and other teaching-related knowledge, abilities, and insights. In the context of early childhood education, teaching experience is essential because it enables early childhood educators to improve their instructional strategies, better understand the developmental needs of their students, and establish effective communication with both students and parents. Experienced teachers often possess a deep understanding of pedagogy, child pedagogy, and the curriculum, enabling them to create enriching learning environments that cater for preschoolers' participation in the classroom. Children struggle to participate in the classroom, and some of these issues may arise from caregivers' inexperience and lack of knowledge in assisting the children in their care to do so. As a result, the child's future and academic performance suffer, which has an effect on society as a whole. The incapacity of caregivers to support their children's classroom participation in fundamental skills like hands-on activities, drawing, painting, coloring, and recognizing numbers and letters—all of which are part of preschool reading, which serves as the foundation for education—also contributes to many problems in the educational sector, especially those related to poor quality. As a result, children may face academic challenges later in life, which can result in timidity, a lack of confidence in their ability to express themselves, and a refusal to take on tasks they could otherwise handle

with ease. On the other hand, seasoned caregivers successfully prepare preschoolers to engage with the classroom and society later on.

Recent suggestions state that at least two factors should be considered when assessing classroom participation: (a) involvement, or the experience of being present, and (b) attendance, or being present [2]. Attendance is influenced by the frequency and duration of preschool attendance. The involvement dimension includes elements of engagement that relate with the individual's focus or effort while present [3]. Attending an event is not the only way to participate. Children also need to be involved in the activities, which means they need to be active and focused. The bioecological theory states that proximal processes that propel growth can be identified in children's reported engagement [4]; [5]. Participation and engagement in ECE classroom activities has been found to predict achievement [6], act as a mediator in the relationship between teacher-child relationship status and child achievement [7], and be associated with children's well-being [8]. Participation in preschool classes has also been shown to influence teachers' attentiveness [9], suggesting that it could influence the quality of the preschool's operations. Encouraging students to participate in class is crucial in ECE.

The success of education and the future personal growth of children were significantly influenced by active classroom engagement. Actively participating children expressed greater levels of enjoyment and persistence [10]. Participation in the classroom can take many various forms, such as learners asking straightforward questions and providing explanations. Participation duration also varies from person to person; it may take a few minutes or a lengthy time. This improves the skills, dispositions, and knowledge they need to solve problems on their own. According to the findings of Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt [11], the traits of the caregiver and the learners have an impact on the degree of involvement in class. Children were more likely to participate in class and respond when their teachers were approachable, understanding, supporting, and encouraging.

According to Armstrong and Boud [12], classroom participation is an active engagement process that can be constructed using five steps: presence, communication skills, collaboration, planning, and participation in class activities. As children participate more, their memorization skills decline and their ability to think critically, including comprehending and solving problems, increases. Increased classroom involvement is influenced by appropriate and pertinent questions, lessons that are relatable to their everyday life, a supportive classroom environment, and a positive response participation grade [13].

It is essential to listen to the children and give their opinions the weight they deserve in order to promote classroom participation [14]. According to Clark et al. [15], participation is linked to the ethics and listening culture of youngsters. Children's opinions and decision-making procedures are part of the participation process. Additionally, participation is linked to how caregivers respond to children's thoughts and how they solicit those perspectives [16]. Children can improve their social and academic skills through participation [17]. Classroom participation is a method, experience, and learning process [18]. According to UNICEF (2009), classroom participation has the following characteristics of the learning process: voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, inclusive, safe, risk-sensitive, accountable, transparent and informative, and supported by the significant other.

In order to increase children's participation in the classroom, it is essential to make sure that child-centered learning transforms schools into democratic hubs, creates avenues for children to learn, and involves children in decision-making regarding classroom regulations [19]. Children's classroom participation at school is influenced by the caregivers' perceptions of their involvement as well as their actions in this situation

[20]; [19]. The manner that caregivers assist children's learning and classroom participation is linked to their professional tasks [21].

It is crucial for caregivers to establish a safe and supportive learning environment in the preschool classroom in order to increase the child's participation. Additionally, it's critical that caregivers provide their children the chance to participate fully in class activities. When a child completes an exercise or responds verbally in class, caregivers should also give them praise and encouragement. It is important for caregivers to provide an example by modeling skills and activities in a range of contexts. The fundamental elements of the early childhood learning environment are reflected in the dynamics of the classroom, including proximal-level interactions and transactions between caregivers, children, and resources. Children's participation in the classroom is crucial since these elements are linked to favorable social and academic results for young children. Preschoolers' total level of classroom participation is influenced by caregiver attributes like education, prior teaching experience, and gender.

One of the determinable characteristics and important factors that can forecast children's participation in ECEC classroom is caregiver qualification [22]. Children typically exhibit higher levels of social engagement and competency when their caregivers have more educational backgrounds. Higher accomplishment test scores, classroom cooperation, and children's levels of compliance and cooperation are all associated with caregiver education or training in the ECEC setting[23]. Improved intellectual, social, and emotional results as well as classroom engagement and collaboration are supported by more qualified caregivers.

The qualifications of the caregivers are reflected in the interactions between the caregiver and preschoolers in the classroom, which emphasize the behaviors of the caregivers that support the development and performance of skills by the children. Additionally, Mashburn et al. [23] found that interactions with children during classroom activities can predict children's academic, language, and social skills. Positive child participation in early childhood education activities is positively connected with the training, expertise, and practical use of developmentally appropriate practices by caregivers [24].

Experienced carers who engage with children in ways that encourage thinking and communication and who are attentive to their needs also help to create an atmosphere of respect, encouragement, and passion for learning. Collaboration, shared goals, constructive engagement and involvement, interdependence and commitment to one another, discussions that foster individual and collective understanding, mutual respect and responsiveness, appreciation of the differences among the learners, and interest in the children's well-being are all increased when an experienced carer encourages classroom participation, according to Littleton, Miell, and Faulkner [25]. Through collaborative learning, children have many opportunities to broaden their knowledge and develop the good social skills that are believed to be essential in their daily lives.

According to Tharp and Gallimore [26], the caregiver's role could be described as that of a perceptive coach who promotes involvement in class activities and lets them share their wealth of knowledge. It is expected that carers will offer the right scaffolding, monitor and model reasoning processes, encourage group accountability, and support children according to their individual needs, interests, and ideas in order to encourage classroom involvement. It is the caregiver's duty to assist youngsters in negotiating, explaining, initiating dialogue, and cooperating. During group conversations, special attention is paid to each learner's unique experiences, interests, and authority in the learning process.

Boys may experience behavioral issues in the classroom if there is no positive male role model to demonstrate to them that education is a place for both sexes. This demonstrates unequivocally the general significance of gender in classroom engagement.

According to certain authors, boys are frequently described as being harder to manage in the classroom than girls[19]. In kindergarten classrooms with a female instructor and male pupils, there is also a greater reported degree of conflict. The relationship between the caregiver and their preschoolers may suffer as a result of these conflict levels. This may also have an impact on the children's participation in class. Nonetheless, studies reveal that male early childhood caregivers view aggressive play more favourably than their female counterparts in social and intellectual contexts. Due to the fact that the majority of early childhood caregivers are female, there is a gender imbalance in early childhood classes that favours girls. Preschoolers' participation in class may suffer as a result of the teacher-learner relationships being viewed as uneven.

In order to promote participatory learning, guarantee academic success, and promote holistic development, classroom participation—a measure of the quality of the learning process—is crucial. Children's participation is influenced by caregiver support and the interactions between caregivers and preschoolers. In the classroom, democratic processes are supported when children's participation is encouraged [19]. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the influence of caregiver variables and preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Statement of the problem

Caregivers prepare the preschoolers and guide them to ensure that learning and overall development is experienced and enhanced. The learning of the preschoolers cannot be achieved in a vacuum, rather through the efforts of the classroom caregivers. The learning of the preschoolers in the classroom depends on the way and manner in which the classroom caregiver conducts and manages the class. It is obvious that there must be orderliness in the classroom in order to enable the preschoolers learn and pay attention during delivery of instruction. The classroom caregivers have to play major roles in these contexts. It is however unfortunate that some of these preschoolers still exhibit poor classroom participation, such as active involvement, attendance, paying attention, response among others. Could this own to caregivers' inability to ensure proper and effective classroom participation of the preschoolers emanating from caregivers' inexperience, gender, qualifications among others. This is the problem of this study.

Again, caregivers' ineffective communication skills which may be due to their qualification mar preschoolers' effective classroom participation. In another development, the inability of caregivers to effectively encourage classroom participation of preschoolers due to their inexperience during teaching and learning poses a major threat to preschoolers' classroom participation and learning. Some caregivers lack the ability to ensure classroom participation of preschoolers and do not showcase capacity for effective instructional delivery by encouraging active participation of preschoolers in the classroom activities. The inability of preschoolers to actively participate in the learning process in the classroom impedes their learning which might affect their cognitive performance and advancement in school. But this study will want to determine if there is any relationship between caregivers' variables and preschoolers' classroom participation in early childhood centers in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to determine the influence of caregiver variables on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. In specific terms, the study sought to:

1. Examine the influence of caregivers' qualification on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
2. Determine the influence of caregivers' teaching experience on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

3. Evaluate the influence of caregivers' gender on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant influence of caregivers' qualification on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
2. Significant influence does not exist between caregivers' teaching experience on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.
3. Caregivers' gender does not significantly influence preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

2. Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey design was used in this investigation. The study's population consisted of 6,401 respondents, including 5,684 preschoolers and 717 carers from 246 public early childhood care centres in Rivers State's Rivers East Senatorial District. Using stratified random sampling and basic random sampling procedures, 2,559 respondents—2,272 preschoolers and 287 caregivers—made up the study's sample, which accounts for roughly 40% of the total population. The researcher-designed 30-item "Carers' Variables and Classroom Participation of Preschoolers Questionnaire (CVCPPQ)" served as the data collection tool. Two specialists from the Department of Early Childhood/Primary Education, Measurement, and Evaluation at the Department of Educational Psychology Guidance and Counselling assessed the instrument's face and content validity. Prior to the instrument's final copy being created, their input was utilised to make corrections. The instrument's dependability index was 0.68. After obtaining consent from the head teachers of the schools included in the sample, the researcher enlisted the help of research assistants to distribute the instrument's copies. 2,556 of the 2,559 copies of the instrument that the researcher gave to the respondents were recovered and utilised to analyse the data. One week was the duration of the entire exercise. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the data at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of caregivers' qualification on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Table 1. Analysis of variance of difference in caregivers' qualification and preschoolers' classroom participation.

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F_{cal}	F_{crit}
Between group	4.436	2	2.218	5.448	
Within group	114.395	2253	.407		3.85
Total	118.831	2255			

From the analysis of data in Table 1 in respect of hypothesis 1, given that at 2 and 2253 degree of freedom (df) and at .05 level of significance, with the f-calculated of 5.448 greater than f-critical of 3.85, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This means that there is a significant influence of caregivers' qualification on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: Significant influence does not exist between caregivers' teaching experience on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Table 2. Analysis of variance of difference in caregivers' teaching experience and preschoolers' classroom participation.

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F_{cal}	F_{crit}
Between group	10.181	2	5.090	13.165	
Within group	108.650	2253	.387		3.85
Total	118.831	2255			

From the analysis of data in Table 2 in respect of hypothesis 2, given that at 2 and 2253 degree of freedom (df) and at .05 level of significance, with the f-calculated of 13.165 greater than f-critical of 3.85, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This means that there is a significant influence of caregivers' teaching experience on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three: Caregivers' gender does not significantly influence preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of difference in Caregivers' gender and preschoolers' classroom participation.

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F_{cal}	F_{crit}
Between group	3.407	1	3.407	8.324	
Within group	115.424	2254	.409		3.85
Total	118.831	2255			

From the analysis of data in Table 3 in respect of hypothesis 3, given that at 1 and 2254 degree of freedom (df) and at .05 level of significance, with the f-calculated of 8.324 greater than f-critical of 3.85, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, Caregivers' gender does significantly influence preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State.

4. Discussion

The result in hypothesis one shows that the f-calculated value is 5.448, while the f-table is 3.85 at 0.05 level of significance. The degree of freedom is 2 and 2253. This implies that, there is significant influence of caregivers' qualification on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The finding of the study is in agreement with the finding of Kamwitha, Khatete, Riechi and Muasya [27] who found that there is a positive correlation between teacher professional qualification in ECE and promotion rates of learners. The finding of the study also corroborates the findings of Manasia, Ianos and Chicioreanu [28] who found that high levels of professional engagement result to highly effective self-management and auto-efficacy an indication of high promotion of preschoolers' classroom participation in ECE schools. Again, the finding of the study is in consonance with the findings of [29]who found that caregivers' training program had a significant effect on preschoolers' classroom engagement for transition from kindergarten. Furthermore, the finding of the study supports the finding of Smith and Jones [30] who found that preschoolers tended to exhibit higher level of participation in classrooms where caregivers had higher qualifications.

The finding in table 2 shows that the f-calculated value is 13.165, while the f-table is 3.85 at 0.05 level of significance. The degree of freedom is 2 and 2253. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that, there is a significant influence of caregivers' teaching experience on preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The finding of the study is in agreement with the findings of Metzler and Woesmann (2015) discovered that caregiver's teaching experience and knowledge of the subject exerts a significant and

qualitative influence on preschooler's classroom participation. In corroborating this view, Darlingg-Hammond [31] observed that preschoolers learn more from experience caregivers than they do from less experienced caregivers. Also, the finding of the study agrees with the views of Hanushek and Rivkin [32] who posits that the first few years of experience significantly improve caregivers' effectiveness and this will result in effective teaching of subjects that would help the child participate effectively in child care centers.

The finding in hypothesis three shows that the F-calculated value is 8.324, while the f-table is 3.85 at 0.05 level of significance. The degree of freedom is 1 and 2254. Meaning that the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that, Caregivers' gender does significantly influence preschoolers' classroom participation in public early childhood centres of Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. The finding of the study is in tandem with the finding of Wadsworth-Hendrix [33] who found that there are some salient differences in the relationships between male and female caregivers form with their students. Also, the finding of the study is in agreement with the findings of Xu [34] who found that male teachers positively influence young children through provision of most effective instruction and model masculine, male roles.

5. Conclusion

The preschool child learns as long as he/she is an active participant in the classroom activities. This underscores the importance of making the preschool an active participant of the classroom activities. The caregivers' demography plays an important role in the classroom participation of the preschool child. This implies that the caregivers' qualification, teaching experience, and gender play significant roles in the classroom participation of the preschool child in early childhood education centres.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study and the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should ensure that qualified caregivers are employed to teach in public early child centres as this will deepen the learning of the preschoolers.
2. There should be a proper mix in the employment of caregivers in early childhood education classrooms to ensure that the preschoolers have a balanced taste of both male and female caregiver role modeling to help them in their learning and development.
3. Caregivers with quality years of experience should be allowed to man the early childhood education classroom to proper guide the preschoolers in their learning.

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