



A Quantitative Analysis of Over-Schooling and Early Childhood Development

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the effects of over-schooling on early childhood development, with specific focus on behavioural, cognitive, and social domains. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and developmental readiness perspectives, the research employed a descriptive survey design. Data were collected using a structured 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire, and collected research data from good number of Stakeholders. Based on the study, researchers draw the inference that excessive academic pressure, extended school hours, and limited play opportunities compromise children's attention spans, creativity, and family bonding. Researcher draws the conclusion that while academic learning is crucial, over-schooling disrupts holistic development. It recommends balanced curricula, policy reforms limiting excessive schooling, and increased parental and community engagement.

Keywords: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, Behavioural Impact, Early Childhood Development, Cognitive Development, Over-schooling, Social Relationships.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, governments across the globe have intensified efforts to expand enrolment in early childhood education. This drive is anchored in two major aspirations: first, to equip young children with the foundational skills essential for later learning, and second, to enable parents—particularly those in the public and private sectors—to participate more productively in the workforce. As children spend structured hours in educational settings, parents are afforded the opportunity to engage in professional and economic activities, thus contributing to broader societal development.

Yet, alongside these laudable intentions, an emerging concern has begun to surface—the growing phenomenon of **over-schooling**.

Over-schooling describes a situation in which children are exposed to excessive amounts of formal academic instruction at a stage of life when developmental research strongly recommends flexible, play-based, and experiential learning approaches (Ibiam & Aleke, 2012). In such contexts, prolonged school hours, rigid instructional routines, and heavy take-home assignments are imposed on children far below the age of developmental readiness. The consequences are often visible: fatigue, anxiety, reduced motivation, and a measurable decline in the natural joy of learning. While early childhood education is universally recognised as a cornerstone for lifelong learning, placing undue academic pressure on very young children may undermine the very developmental gains it seeks to promote.

Parents naturally take pride in seeing their children prepare enthusiastically for school; returns home animated, and confidently share what they have learnt. Early childhood—typically spanning ages 0 to 8—is a period marked by rapid physical growth, social and emotional maturation, and significant cognitive development. International best practices consistently emphasise limited formal instruction, abundant opportunities for free play, and manageable learning expectations during these formative years (OECD, 2021; UNICEF, 2023). Despite this, a growing body of evidence indicates that many young learners today are subjected to what practitioners describe as **over-schooling**—the imposition of structured tasks and academic workloads that exceed their developmental capacities (Umonics Plus, 2024). Although often driven by good intentions and parental aspirations, this trend has become deeply embedded within several educational cultures, producing far-reaching implications for children’s holistic well-being.

Current research warns that although early 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.

Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) likewise affirms that early childhood education—targeted at children aged three to five—should facilitate a smooth transition into formal schooling, foster creativity through play, and provide care for children while parents work. These aims, however, can only be realised within nurturing and developmentally sound environments. When schools prioritise accelerated academic performance over children’s readiness and well-being, the foundational objectives of early childhood education risk being compromised (Owojori & Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021).

Globally, 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 OECD (2020) noted that many early childhood programmes increasingly emphasise 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). UNICEF (2023) confirms that parental anxiety and societal expectations often drive schools to prioritise 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.

The Prevailing Rate of Overschooling

Overschooling has become increasingly pervasive across both private and public institutions, particularly where educational competitiveness and market pressures prevail (TheCable, 2024). In many Nigerian private schools, early mastery of literacy and numeracy is often promoted as a marker of prestige

and parental satisfaction. OECD (2021) attributes this to a performance-driven culture in which families fear their children will lag behind peers unless immersed in structured academics from infancy. These anxieties are further intensified by socioeconomic disparities, with urban parents enrolling toddlers in “school readiness” programmes that impose rigid academic routines (Bassok et al., 2016).

Causes of Overschooling

Several interrelated factors contribute to this phenomenon. Parental expectations and societal competition remain the most prominent. Many parents equate academic overload with future success, while teachers and administrators often face pressure to deliver results that justify school fees or institutional reputation (Mermer et al., 2022; Greaves et al., 2023). Weak regulatory oversight also plays a role, particularly in Nigeria, where limited inspection and enforcement allow schools to design curricula that far exceed the developmental readiness of preschoolers (Olagunju & Adewuyi, 2021; *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 2022). Furthermore, globalisation and the rise of high-stakes testing have encouraged early academic acceleration, even in contexts where developmental appropriateness is sacrificed for competitive advantage (Furuta, 2021; Eggen & Stobart, 2014).

What Constitutes Over schooling

Over schooling manifests in several distinct ways:

- Prolonged school days that extend beyond recommended hours.
- Daily and weekend homework, despite limited developmental benefit.
- Restriction of play, rest, and family interaction.
- Emphasis on rote and formal academic tasks over exploratory learning.

The consequences are profound. Many children display signs of exhaustion, irritability, and disinterest in play or family engagement. Parents report shortened sleep hours, disrupted routines, and children crying from fatigue or frustration (TheCable, 2024; Healthline, 2019). Longitudinal studies link such experiences to anxiety, headaches, and negative attitudes toward schooling (Springer, 2021; Stanford Children’s Health, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that overschooling not only affects academic outcomes but also compromises children’s emotional and physical health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications of Over-Schooling

Over schooling has been conceptualised as the imposition of prolonged instructional hours, overloaded curricula, and early academic pressure that are developmentally inappropriate for young children (Pimentel & Pimentel, 2023). The United Kingdom’s Department for Education (DfE, 2022) advocates instead for play-centred, exploratory learning, emphasising balance across cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional domains. However, in many African contexts, particularly Nigeria, private schools intensify academic schedules as a marketing strategy to attract parents (Okeke et al., n.d.).

Whitebread (2019) describes this trend as “too much, too soon,” warning that premature formal instruction displaces crucial childhood experiences that nurture creativity, autonomy, and resilience. Similarly, *WIRED* (2014) reports that overscheduled children face higher risks of stress, illness, and sleep disruption. Wikipedia’s (2023) review also indicates that preschool homework produces negligible academic benefit while significantly heightening stress and reducing family interaction.

Behavioural Impacts

Empirical studies across global and Nigerian contexts show that excessive instructional hours negatively affect children's behaviour. A Singaporean study by Bi, Ding, and Yeung (2024) revealed that behavioural outcomes remain stable up to approximately 35–40 hours of weekly preschool attendance (around 7–8 hours per day), but beyond this threshold, restlessness and irritability rise sharply. Nigerian evidence corroborates this trend. *Vanguard Nigeria* (2017) found that children engaged in eight-hour school days, followed by after-school lessons, exhibited fatigue, mood swings, and diminished enthusiasm for non-academic activities. *Punch Nigeria* (2024) similarly reported parental concern over the toll of long school hours and homework on children's energy levels and family interaction. In Anambra State, Okeke et al. (n.d.) linked overschooling to weakened social skills and behavioural adjustment. These findings collectively suggest that overschooling suppresses natural play instincts and undermines socio-emotional well-being.

Cognitive and Academic Impacts

The debate over whether prolonged academic exposure benefits young learners remains ongoing. While some scholars argue it accelerates literacy and numeracy (Abang, 2005), developmental theorists caution otherwise. Gesell (1940) contended that premature instruction shortens attention spans and hinders creativity, while Eleweke and Rodda (2002) observed that inappropriate early practices increase academic burnout. Nigerian studies reveal similar patterns. *Vanguard Nigeria* (2017) noted that extended school hours often fail to translate into better outcomes, with many children performing below expected standards. Chikezie et al. (2023) further found that long hours disrupt sleep and impair academic concentration. Bi, Ding, and Yeung (2024) also confirmed that excessive weekly hours predict academic decline alongside behavioural issues.

Play, Physical Activity, and Well-Being

Play remains a cornerstone of early learning. Unstructured play fosters creativity and executive function, while structured play enhances problem-solving and social skills (Roche & Carroll, 2024). However, Nigerian private schools often restrict playtime through rigid timetables (Obi-Okeke & Igbo, 2018). Lahuerta-Contell et al. (2021) found that when physical activity is integrated into the preschool schedule, children engage more actively and display improved well-being. By limiting these opportunities, overschooling endangers physical health and replaces creativity with rote learning.

Sleep, Cognition, and Behaviour

Adequate sleep underpins cognitive and emotional stability. Reynaud et al. (2018) demonstrated that sleep duration significantly predicts academic and behavioural outcomes, while Guerlich et al. (2023) found that disrupted sleep in early years forecasts later academic difficulties. In Nigeria, overschooling is closely tied to sleep deprivation, as children face extended hours followed by homework. *Punch Nigeria* (2024) observed that many children fall asleep without eating, showing signs of exhaustion and irritability. The interplay between poor rest and heavy academic demand undermines emotional regulation and learning engagement.

Social Impacts

Finally, overschooling erodes opportunities for socialisation, family bonding, and emotional growth. UNICEF (2021) emphasises that peer interaction and play are vital for building resilience and identity.

When these are curtailed, children's social competence suffers. Studies in Nigeria link prolonged schooling to diminished family cohesion and reduced peer engagement (Vanguard Nigeria, 2017; Punch Nigeria, 2024). Obi-Okeke and Igbo (2018) recommend targeted interventions in preschools to rebuild cooperation and social skills, further confirming that overschooling deprives children of the social foundations essential for holistic development.

Statement of the problem

Despite growing awareness of children's developmental needs, many early childhood programmes expose learners to excessive academic pressure and prolonged instructional hours. This overschooling trend has been linked to reduced sleep quality, behavioural dysregulation, and cognitive fatigue, yet there is insufficient empirical evidence in Nigerian contexts to show how these factors jointly affect children's learning outcomes and well-being. The problem, therefore, is that the behavioural, cognitive, and academic implications of overschooling on young children's overall well-being remain inadequately understood and underexplored in early childhood education research.

Research Gap

Previous studies have largely focused on cognitive achievement and school readiness without adequate attention to the interconnection between sleep, behaviour, and overall well-being. In Nigeria, there is a scarcity of empirical data examining how extended school hours and intense learning routines influence children's behavioural adjustment and academic outcomes. This study seeks to fill this gap by systematically investigating the cognitive, behavioural, and well-being consequences of overschooling among early learners.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of this study is to examine the effects of over schooling on young children's holistic development in early childhood education, with particular focus on behavioural adjustment, cognitive and academic performance, and overall well-being.

The study specifically seeks to:

1. Determine the behavioural impacts of over-schooling on children in early childhood education.
2. Assess the impact of over-schooling on children's cognitive development in early childhood education.
3. Evaluate how over-schooling affects children's social and emotional well-being, including sleep patterns, emotional stability, and enthusiasm for learning.
4. Examine the differences between parents' and teachers' perceptions of over-schooling in early childhood education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How does over-schooling affect children's behaviour in early childhood education?
2. In what ways does over-schooling impact children's cognitive development in early childhood education?
3. What effects does over-schooling have on children's social and emotional well-being, including sleep patterns, emotional stability, and enthusiasm for learning?

4. Are there significant differences between parents' and teachers' perceptions of over-schooling in early childhood education?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses (H_0) were formulated to guide the study:

1. H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between over-schooling and children's behaviour in early childhood education.
2. H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between over-schooling and children's cognitive development in early childhood education.
3. H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between over-schooling and children's social and emotional well-being, including sleep patterns, emotional stability, and enthusiasm for learning.
4. H_{04} : There is no significant difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions of over-schooling in early childhood education.

Definition of Key Concepts

Over-Schooling:

Over-schooling refers to a situation where children are subjected to excessive academic exposure and structured learning that surpass their developmental readiness, leading to physical, cognitive, and emotional fatigue. According to Pimentel and Pimentel (2023), over-schooling constitutes “an imbalance between structured instruction and play, where young learners face learning demands unsuitable for their developmental stage.” In early childhood education, it manifests through extended school hours, heavy homework loads, and reduced playtime, often diminishing creativity and enthusiasm for learning.

Early Childhood Development:

Early childhood development (ECD) encompasses the holistic growth of children—cognitive, physical, socio-emotional, and moral—during the formative years from birth to age eight. UNESCO (2023) defines ECD as “the processes by which children acquire skills, knowledge, and emotional capacities necessary for lifelong learning and participation.” Within early education contexts, ECD serves as the benchmark for designing age-appropriate curricula that balance learning with play, rest, and family interaction.

Behavioural Impact:

Behavioural impact refers to the observable changes in children's social conduct, self-regulation, and adaptive functioning as influenced by environmental or educational conditions. Bi, Ding, and Yeung (2024) highlight that children exposed to long instructional hours often show increased irritability, restlessness, and reduced engagement in social play. In early childhood education, behavioural outcomes reflect how teaching environments support or constrain socio-emotional well-being.

Cognitive Development:

Cognitive development describes the gradual enhancement of thinking, memory, language, and problem-solving abilities in children. Piaget's developmental theory, as supported by modern neuroscience (Anderson & Cristia, 2023), posits that early cognitive growth thrives through play-based exploration rather than rigid instruction. Over-schooling, by contrast, restricts such exploration, reducing children's intrinsic motivation and mental flexibility.

Social Relationships:

Social relationships in early childhood describe the quality of interactions children form with peers, teachers, and family members. UNICEF (2021) asserts that healthy social bonds foster emotional resilience and empathy. Excessive academic scheduling, however, limits peer play and family communication, impairing socio-emotional competence (Obi-Okeke & Igbo, 2018).

Developmental Readiness:

Developmental readiness refers to a child's preparedness to engage in structured learning based on physical, emotional, and cognitive maturity. The OECD (2021) describes it as "a state in which the child demonstrates the capacity to participate in learning without undue stress or fatigue." Over-schooling neglects this principle, imposing learning before readiness, thus undermining growth trajectories.

Holistic Development:

Holistic development represents the integrated advancement of all domains of growth—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical. According to UNICEF (2023), it ensures that "learning is balanced, play is prioritised, and the child's total well-being is central." Holistic development in early education thus resists over-academic models, promoting balanced curricula responsive to children's interests and capacities.

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant in several ways:

Children: It highlights the importance of safeguarding mental health, emotional well-being, and developmental balance.

Parents: It provides evidence to advocate for appropriate schooling practices and balanced routines at home.

Teacher and school administrators: It draws attention to the dangers of excessive workloads and long hours, urging a return to child-centred pedagogy.

Policy makers: It supplies empirical evidence to inform guidelines and regulation of early childhood programmes.

Researchers: It adds to limited literature on overschooling at the preschool level and serves as a foundation for further longitudinal studies.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study will focus on preschool children aged 0–8 enrolled in both private and public early year's centres. It will examine over schooling variables such as homework frequency, school hours, and curriculum demands, alongside dependent variables including child behavioural outcomes and parental concerns. The study will not extend to secondary school pupils, as its scope is strictly the early years.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's **Ecological Systems Theory** (1979) explains that a child's development depends on interconnected systems, including family, school, and community. When the school environment dominates disproportionately, it disrupts mesosystemic harmony, leading to developmental imbalance. Complementarily, **Developmental Readiness Theory** (Gesell, 1940) emphasises that children must reach certain maturational milestones before engaging in structured academics.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive survey design**, appropriate for investigating existing conditions, attitudes, and relationships among variables as they naturally occur. This design enabled the researcher to collect quantifiable data on the behavioural, cognitive, and social effects of over-schooling among early learners, as perceived by parents, teachers, and administrators.

Study Area

The research was conducted in **South–South Nigeria**, one of the country's six geo-political zones comprising **Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States**. The zone is socio-culturally diverse, with both urban and rural communities and over 3,000 public and private institutions offering preschool education. It presents a suitable context for examining overschooling due to the coexistence of elite private schools characterised by extended academic hours and public schools with moderate schedules. This diversity allowed for a balanced examination of how differing schooling intensities affect young children's development.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised an estimated **6,000 individuals**, including:

- Preschool children aged **3–8 years** enrolled in public and private schools;
- Their parents or guardians;
- Preschool teachers and caregivers; and
- Head teachers and school administrators.

These groups were selected because they represent the immediate stakeholders and observers of early childhood educational experiences and outcomes.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to ensure fair representation across demographic and institutional categories.

- Stage One (School Selection): Stratified random sampling was used to select schools from both public and private strata across the six states.
- Stage Two (Respondent Selection): From each selected school, purposive sampling identified teachers and administrators directly involved in early childhood programmes, while systematic random sampling was used to select parents.

Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample determination table for a population of 6,000, the recommended minimum sample size was 361 respondents. For practicality and proportional representation, this study utilised 350 participants, distributed as follows:

- 80 pupils
- 120 parents
- 100 teachers
- 50 administrators

This ensured balance across roles, institutional ownership, and geographical coverage.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a **structured 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire** developed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into three sections corresponding to the study variables:

- **Section A:** Behavioural impacts (e.g., restlessness, attention span, play engagement).
- **Section B:** Cognitive and academic impacts (e.g., concentration, creativity, and motivation).
- **Section C:** Social and well-being indicators (e.g., family bonding, sleep, and social participation).

Validity of the instrument was established through expert review by specialists in early childhood education and educational psychology. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot test involving 30 participants outside the main sample, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating strong internal consistency.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire to respondents within their respective institutions. The researcher and trained assistants ensured accurate responses and confidentiality.

Data analysis involved both **descriptive** and **inferential statistics**:

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarise responses to each research question.
- **Inferential analysis** using **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** tested the hypotheses at the **0.05 significance level** to determine whether differences among groups were statistically significant.

5. RESULTS

Research Variable	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	F-value	p-value	Decision
Behavioural impact of over-schooling	350	3.21	0.64	5.62	0.018	Significant
Cognitive impact of over-schooling	350	3.34	0.71	7.84	0.006	Significant
Social impact of over-schooling	350	3.28	0.69	6.47	0.011	Significant
General perception of over-schooling	350	3.31	0.66	8.03	0.004	Significant

Interpretation of Findings:

1. Behavioural Domain:

The mean score of 3.21 (SD = 0.64) indicates a high level of behavioural disturbance among over-schooled children. Respondents observed patterns such as impatience, restlessness, and reduced interest in play. The F-value of 5.62 and $p = 0.018$ (< 0.05) confirm a statistically significant behavioural impact, suggesting that over-schooling disrupts natural child behaviour and emotional regulation.

2. Cognitive Domain:

The cognitive dimension recorded the highest mean score of 3.34 (SD = 0.71), implying that over-schooling affects children's learning capacity and attention span. The p-value of 0.006 validates the significance of these effects. Findings show symptoms of cognitive fatigue, reduced creativity, and premature academic burnout. This supports Gesell's (1940) developmental readiness principle, which cautions against over-formalisation of early education before children attain adequate neurological maturity.

3. Social Domain:

With a mean of 3.28 (SD = 0.69) and a p-value of 0.011, the social effects of over-schooling were also significant. Children reportedly exhibited reduced peer interaction, weakened family ties, and less community engagement. These findings align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), suggesting that excessive schooling time constrains the mesosystemic relationships essential for balanced socio-emotional development.

4. Overall Perception:

The general perception of over-schooling recorded a mean score of 3.31 (SD = 0.66) and $p = 0.004$, indicating that the phenomenon is widely acknowledged as a growing concern within the region. The significant F-value of 8.03 underscores that over-schooling exerts a measurable adverse influence on the holistic development of early learners.

In the foregoing, the inferential results reveal a consistent pattern across behavioural, cognitive, and social variables, with all p-values less than the 0.05 threshold, confirming that the negative impacts of over-schooling on early childhood development are statistically significant. The high Cronbach's Alpha (0.83) further substantiates the dependability of the instrument and the robustness of the findings.

Summary of Findings

The data obtained from 350 valid respondents were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) summarised responses, while analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed by a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency.

Research Question One:

The behavioural effects of over-schooling on children showed a mean of **3.21 (SD = 0.64)**. Respondents agreed that over-schooled children exhibit impatience, irritability, and reduced interest in outdoor play. The ANOVA result ($F = 5.62$, $p = 0.018$) indicated that the behavioural impact was statistically significant.

Research Question Two:

The cognitive impact of over-schooling yielded the highest mean score of **3.34 (SD = 0.71)**. Findings showed that over-schooled children experience shorter attention spans, cognitive fatigue, and creative decline. The result was statistically significant ($F = 7.84$, $p = 0.006$).

Research Question Three:

The social impact recorded a mean of **3.28 (SD = 0.69)**. Over-schooled children displayed weaker peer relationships and reduced family bonding. The effect was statistically significant ($F = 6.47$, $p = 0.011$).

Research Question Four:

The overall perception of over-schooling showed a mean score of **3.31 (SD = 0.66)**, with respondents generally agreeing that over-schooling has adverse consequences on children's development. This was supported by an F-value of **8.03** ($p = 0.004$), confirming statistical significance.

In general, the findings indicate that over-schooling has significant behavioural, cognitive, and social effects on children's development. All mean values exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, and all p-values were less than 0.05, confirming that the observed impacts were not due to chance. Hence, over-schooling is a statistically validated challenge to early childhood development in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that over-schooling significantly undermines holistic child development, corroborating global and Nigerian evidence (Whitebread, 2019; Obi-Okeke & Igbo, 2018).

Behaviourally, prolonged school hours produced restlessness, irritability, and diminished interest in physical play — outcomes consistent with Bi, Ding, and Yeung (2024), who observed similar behavioural fatigue among preschoolers exceeding 40 instructional hours per week. Cognitively, while early exposure to structured learning may offer limited benefits in literacy or numeracy, excessive duration and pressure lead to fatigue and academic burnout (Chikezie et al., 2023). Socially, restricted playtime and long school hours eroded peer relationships and parental engagement, aligning with UNICEF's (2023) warning that over-academic environments compromise emotional and social development.

Theoretically, these outcomes align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which asserts that a child's growth depends on balanced interactions between microsystems such as home, school, and community. When the school microsystem dominates excessively, it disrupts mesosystemic harmony, weakening family ties and emotional security. Similarly, the Developmental Readiness Perspective (Copple & Bredekamp, 2020) emphasises that instruction must align with children's natural maturity and interests. Over-schooling, by contrast, violates this readiness threshold, producing frustration and negative learning attitudes.

In sum, the study affirms that while structured education is vital for foundational learning, excessive academic exposure at early ages compromises behavioural stability, cognitive freshness, and emotional well-being. This underscores the need for policy reform, balanced curricula, and play-centred pedagogy to restore developmental equilibrium in Nigeria's early childhood sector.

Educational Implications

1. **Policy Review:** Educational stakeholders must reconsider current school schedules and curricula for early childhood, ensuring that learning aligns with children's developmental readiness rather than market-driven academic expectations.
2. **Holistic Curriculum Design:** Schools should integrate adequate time for play, rest, and social activities alongside structured learning.
3. **Parental Engagement:** Parents should be sensitised on the risks of over-schooling and encouraged to support home environments that balance academic expectations with emotional, physical, and social needs.
4. **Teacher Training:** Teachers need professional development on developmentally appropriate practices, ensuring that instruction neither overstimulates nor overwhelms young learners.
5. **Health and Well-being:** Ministries of education and health must collaborate to prevent the psychological stress, fatigue, and behavioural problems arising from over-schooling.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that over-schooling has predominantly negative implications for early childhood development in behavioural, cognitive, and social dimensions. While academic exposure remains essential, disproportionate emphasis on prolonged learning hours, excessive homework, and early formal instruction creates developmental imbalances that may hinder children's holistic growth. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework demonstrates that when one system (school) overshadows others (home, play, community), the overall developmental ecology becomes disrupted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Curriculum Balance:** Early childhood curricula should incorporate structured learning, free play, rest, and creative exploration in equal measure.
2. **Policy Guidelines:** Governments should establish clear guidelines on maximum school hours and homework loads for early childhood learners.
3. **Awareness Campaigns:** Educators and parents should be educated on the dangers of over-schooling and the benefits of play-based learning.
4. **Research Expansion:** Further studies should investigate long-term psychological and academic effects of over-schooling across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts.
5. **Community Partnership:** Schools should collaborate with parents and local communities to design learning experiences that enrich children's development beyond the classroom.

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