

## **Caregivers Characteristics and Nursery School Children's Social Development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State**

**Jude Uche Onwuhanze (PhD.)**

Ifedeinterio1979@gmail.com; 08037467776;

**Adiewere Alex Ngozi**

alexadiewere@gmail.com; 08064114948

**Douglas Peter**

ogo\_pd@yahoo.com; 08064426671

Department of Educational Management

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike

### ***Abstract***

This study determined the relationship between caregivers' characteristics and nursery school children's social skills development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The ex post facto design research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1184 nursery school caregivers. The sample size for the study was 120 caregivers drawn from the population. A researcher developed instrument titled "Caregivers Characteristics and Social Skill Development Questionnaire" (CCSSDQ) was used to gather data for the study. The instrument was face and content validated by three experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Sociology and Early Childhood Education. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument using 25 nursery school caregivers outside the study area. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between caregivers' attitudes, instructional strategies and motivations and nursery school children's social skills development in Uyo Metropolis. Hence it was concluded that caregivers' characteristic variables measured in this study remarkably relates with social skills development of nursery school children. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made, among others that caregivers should be supported and motivated through financial incentives as a way of encouraging them to display positive attitudes toward the children's improvement in social skill developmental age-appropriate tasks.

**Keywords:** nursery school children, social skills development, caregivers' attitudes, instructional strategies and motivations.

## Introduction

Kindergarten School known as Pre-Primary or Nursery is a place where learning is incorporated early into the children between three to four years old by a trained adult. This section of schooling is also known as Pre-school which takes care of early childhood needs of the children. It is on record that some schools admit young ones as young as 18 months to two years. Nursery or pre-nursery is not the same as day care. Because the aim and objective of nursery is on learning and development, rather than on enabling parents to work (ZIV, 2013). The nursery school activities are designed to provide early childhood cognitive and social stimulations (Umo, 2016). The purpose of pre-primary education is to provide good educational foundation that will enhance educational development of the child and balanced cognitive domain development. This development and learning will lead to all round growth (Olteanu, 2023). Pre-primary education builds the foundation for all educational achievement which a child will acquire in life. It holds the key to a favourable educational trajectory (Okonduagba, 2020).

Early childhood care and education (ECCDE), was defined by FRN (2018) as the learning and care made available to children from 0-4 years in a nursery known as creche. The aim and objective of early childhood education are to make it easy for the child to transit from home environment to school environment, to make the school favourable to the child, to provide good care and good supervision similar to what parents provide at home, to teach the children moral values and to help the child develop explorative spirit, creativity and spirit of enquiry through play. From this perspective, it could be said that early childhood development including social skill development is important to the country as it is to the parents.

Social skills are healthy ways of relating to others that promote positive interactions. It includes words, gestures and body languages that are used during social interactions. Social skills help build better relationship through more efficient communication. Social skill involves understanding what is socially acceptable and appropriate at what times. In Dewar (2020) preschool social skills include a knowledge of basic etiquette like when to say “please” and “thank you”. To nurture these skills in nursery children, the services of caregiver cannot be over emphasized. (Maleki, et al., 2019).

A caregiver is a person who looks after the young pupils in nursery school. Children’s development and learning are fostered through their interactions with caring human beings in a secured, nurturing and stimulating environment. A caregiver in some school settings have a

responsibility to help pre-schoolers learn socializing behaviours which foster effective transition. This requires that the caregivers themselves know how to create the right kind of classroom context to facilitate this learning (Okondugba et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown caregivers characteristics play an important role in children's development. Li et al. (2022) found a positive impact of caregivers' characteristics on children's early literacy, academic growth, and future life happiness. Caregivers characteristics refer to factors that are unique to the individuals who are responsible for the teaching and learning processes of the children in the preschool or Nursery classes within a school setting. It includes factors that make an individual stands out in delivery of childcare services.

This study focused on the caregiver's attitudes, instructional strategies and motivation and nursery school children's social skill development in Uyo Urban Metropolis Akwa Ibom State. The study is hoped to be of immense benefit to children's caregivers, parents, government, educational stakeholders and the general public. The findings will also contribute to existing body of knowledge in determining the caregivers' factors and social skill development of pre-schoolers.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Lev Vygotsky theory, Cherry (2022), shared light on social nature of learning, when he said that, "Learning is crucially social in nature as oppose to an independent learning and discovery". He expands on this by stating that a child's learning benefitted greatly from being guided by a more knowledgeable adult or member of the community such as a parent or teacher. The process of learning would occur when the child understood the information, absorbed and assimilate and then used it to guide their own performance. This explains the role of caregivers' motivation and communication strategies on preschooler social skills development. Caregivers need to be more knowledgeable to be able to guide the preschoolers using appropriate strategies unique for the children's stage of development to help them acquire social skills.

Wentzel, Jablansky, & Scalise, (2021) noted that Social skills acquired during early childhood are often the foundation for success later in life.

Social skills include a range of individuals' competencies, including emotion regulation, the ability to construct and maintain relationship, arithmetic ability, writing ability, effortful

control, and executive functioning which begins to appear in the second year of children's lives (Ho & Funk 2018).

According to Okondugba, et al. (2020), social skills include behaviour which promotes positive interaction with others and the environment and includes empathy, involvement in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, interactions, negotiation and problem-solving. The social skills which children learn have been categorized into two major aspects, namely: socially competent behaviour such as sharing and helping and a lack of negative behaviour such as conflict and aggression.

Teachers who work as caregivers, according to Banko-Bal, and Guler-Yildiz (2021) should assist these children to accomplish their stage developmental task by enabling security and confidence for children's physical, emotional, and social need, and by meeting children's needs for affection, attention and care. Correia et al. in Banko-Bal and Guler -Yildiz (2021) opined that teachers' pedagogically sensitive attitudes characterized by respect, love, attention, and trust in children's capacities and abilities are important to promote participation.

Motivations are divided into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations are reinforcement that are internal in nature. One example of intrinsic motivation is having altruistic motivation. Altruistic motivation is having a voluntary mindset intended to help and increase others welfare because of the attitude of being concerned for other. The feeling of empathy triggers an individual to act or behave in a certain way because of strong emotions. It evokes mostly individuals who are easily affected by people who manifest emotional behaviour (Ho et al 2018). Hosokawa and Katsura, (2017) stated that caregivers need to be supported financially and morally as a way of motivating them to concentrate in their job. Thus, with good social support the caregiving job becomes less challenging and burdensome because it is known as a coping resource used by care givers. In a study carried out by Manyara and Murrungi (2018) to find out the influence of preschool teachers' level of motivation on use of play as a medium of instruction in nursery school children's learning. The study found that there are a number of motivations that can increase the teachers' motivation such as good salary, parental appreciation, good management and personal convenience. Well motivated preschool teachers are likely to use the right instructional medium and participate fully in children's play activities (Brown and Brown 2014). Whereas the above studies sought to establish the influence of teacher motivational factors on quality provision of early childhood education in Ghana; this

study investigated caregivers characteristics and nursery schools children's social development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State.

### **Statement of Problem**

The importance of social skills development in the lives of preschool children cannot be over emphasized. Children need to develop skills that will enable them to interact with their environment and manifest socially acceptable characters. However, it had been observed by this researcher that many children in nursery classes are lacking in these important skills that are needed to thrive and achieve success in the family and the society in general. There is need therefore to investigate if caregiver characteristics have any influence on nursery children social skill development. Very few studies, especially studies on caregivers' factors, have been investigated as possible relational variables to nursery school children social skill development. Also, a research of this nature has not been carried out in this researcher's area of study. This study hoped to feel these gaps. Therefore the problem of this study is to determine whether there is any possible relationship that exist between caregiver characteristics and nursery school social skills development in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is carried out to determine the relationship that exist between caregivers' characteristics and the nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State. The study seek to specifically investigate the following:

1. The influence of caregivers' attitudes on nursery school children social skill development
2. The influence of caregivers' instructional strategies and nursery school children social skill development
3. The influence caregivers' motivations and nursery school children social skill development

### **Research Question**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. What is the mean scores of the relationship between care-givers attitudes and their perspectives of nursery school children's social skill development?
2. What is the mean scores of relationships between caregiver's instructional strategies and their perspectives of nursery schoolchildren social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State?
3. What is the mean scores relationship between caregivers' motivations and their perspectives of nursery school children's social skill development?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no signification relationship between care-givers' attitude and their perspectives of nursery school children's social skill development
2. There is no significant relationship between care-givers' instructional strategies and their perspectives of nursery school children's social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State.
3. There is no significant relationship between caregivers' motivations and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development

### **Methodology**

The research was carried out in Uyo Urban, Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted ex post facto design. Ex post facto design is most suitable because the aim is to observe the effects of what has already occurred (Onwiodukit, 2013). The population of the study comprised of all the caregivers in nursery classes of the private nursery schools, comprising of about 1184 caregivers in 151 approved private nursery and primary school in Uyo Metropolis (Wefinder, 2022). The simple random sampling technique was used to draw the sample for the study. Forty schools were randomly selected. Three caregivers were selected from each of the schools so selected. This gives highest probability of choosing a sample so that every school and every caregiver had a positive chance of being selected. In all a total of 120 samples were used for the study. A researcher-developed instrument known as Caregivers Characteristics and Social Skills Development Questionnaire (CCSSDQ) was used to collect data. The instrument, a 32-item questionnaire, sought to gather data on variables of the study. The respondents were asked to rate their responses on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument, CCSSDQ, was face and content validated by two experts in test and Measurements; while the internal consistency reliability of the CCSSDQ was examined using

Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. Twenty-five (25) copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved from the respondents who were not part of the sample. The reliability coefficient of 0.84 obtained was considered high enough to justify the reliability of the instrument. A total of one hundred and fifty copies of the instrument were administered and One Hundred and Twenty retrieved; and that were used as data for the study. To answer the research questions, mean and standard deviation were used while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson product moment correlation. **Decision:** if the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, reject the hypotheses, but otherwise, not reject the null hypotheses.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What is the mean scores of the relationship between care-givers attitude and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1:** Mean scores of the relationship between caregiver's attitudes and Social skill development of nursery school children

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	The caregivers attitude of being patience with children helps them learn to resolve conflicts with peers without much adult assistance.	3.33	0.91	Accepted
2	Not being bias against any child helps them participate in cooperative play by following agree-upon rules such as no hitting	3.50	0.71	Accepted
3	Children communicate with adults using polite words because I usually insist that they do so	3.31	0.87	Accepted
4	Tolerating each child even when they display negative behaviours help them learn positive behaviours	3.62	0.65	Accepted
5	Regardless of each child's weakness, I am always concerned about how they behave towards learning activities so they participate happily in class even when being reprimanded	3.26	0.95	Accepted
6	I do help children understand why they should obey rules with less punishment, so they usually obey simple rules like 'don't touch' without being forced	3.52	0.88	Accepted
7	Not being harsh with the children make them express their feelings without fear of being punished	3.12	0.83	Accepted
8	It is always fun being a caregiver in nursery school classes as the children always express joy of being in school.	3.40	0.77	Accepted
	<b>Grand mean</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.82</b>	

From the mean rating above, the 8 items met the required point for acceptance (above 2.5) so they were all accepted. This proves that there is a relationship between caregivers' attitudes and nursery school children social skills development

**Research Question 2:** What is the mean scores relationship between caregivers' instructional strategies and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development in Uyo metropolis Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 2:** Mean scores and Standard Deviation of the relationship between caregivers instructional strategies and Social skill development of nursery school children

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	I often teach social skills as a subject directly to the children so most of them engage in behaviours that builds relationship with others	3.61	0.65	Accepted
2	Most of the children usually pay attention during lessons because I always use storytelling to engage the children as a way of teaching them listening skills	3.54	0.67	Accepted
3	Sometimes I pretend to do something wrong and expect the children to tell me the right thing I supposed to do so most them know how to use polite words when interacting with adults	2.89	0.97	Accepted
4	I sometimes allow free play time with variety of toys among the children so most of the children had learned how to share materials with peers during play time.	3.63	0.51	accepted
5	The children learn the act of expressing gratitude such as 'thank you' because during snacks time, I often interact with the children on the act of expressing gratitude.	3.64	0.51	Accepted
6	Most of the children usually interact with adults using polite words because I often use variety of methods to communicate acceptable behaviours to the children	3.85	0.47	Accepted
7	Most children learn cooperation with peers through instructional method of grouping the children in some lessons	3.08	0.84	Accepted
8	Most children had learned turn-taking during play through the use of non-verbal instructional strategies such as gestures I do adopt sometimes.	3.14	0.66	Accepted
	<b>Grand mean</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>0.66</b>	

Data presented in Table 2 shows that the mean scores of the relationship between caregivers instructional strategies and nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis. The respondents accepted all the items as associates of children's social skill development.



**Research Question 3:** What is the mean scores relationship between caregivers' motivations and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 3:** Mean scores and Standard Deviation of the relationship between caregivers motivations and Social skill development of nursery school children.

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	With well improved condition of services, it is my joy to see these children develop good social skills	3.62	0.54	Accepted
2	Poorly motivated nursery school teacher always transfer aggression to the children which makes them withdraw from expressing their feelings to adults.	3.27	0.71	accepted
3	Caregivers who are being appreciated by the parents put in their best in delivering quality services	3.46	0.64	Accepted
4	Most Children under the care of a caregiver that is motivated by passion for helping children develop good interaction abilities, always manifest acceptable social behaviours	3.00	1.01	Accepted
5	Caregivers who are inspired by love for children always have children under their care express sharing of playing materials with peers during play	3.33	0.91	Accepted
6	Most children who are under the care of a caregiver whose driving force as a teacher is desire to see the children make difference express listening abilities when being instructed by an adult.	3.58	0.64	Accepted
7	Children's attitude of hanging around me makes me always wanting to be with them even when I feel like withdrawing my services	3.17	0.63	Accepted
8	If had an alternative job, I would not accept being a nursery school teacher because caring for these ages of children is very difficult.	3.36	0.93	Accepted
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>3.35</b>	<b>0.75</b>	

From the mean rating above in, the 8 items met the required point for acceptance (above 2.5) so they were all accepted. This proves that there is a relationship between caregiver's motivation and nursery school children social skills development.

**Hypothesis one:** There is no signification relationship between care-givers attitudes and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State

**Table 4:** Pearson Product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between caregivers' attitude and nursery school children social skill development

Variables	$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$	$\Sigma xy$	r
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	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma y^2$		
Caregivers attitudes(X)	1981	32963		
Social skill development (Y)	2173	39527	36072	.92*

Significant at 0.05 level, df =118, N= 120; critical r - value=.195

The result of the hypothesis testing in Table 4 indicated that the r-calculated value of .92 is greater than the r-critical value of .195 at 0.05 level of significance and 118 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between caregiver's attitudes and their perspectives of nursery school social skill development was rejected. Hence there is a significant relationship between caregivers' attitudes and nursery school social skill development.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between care-givers instructional strategies and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development

**Table 5:** Pearson Product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between caregivers' instructional strategies and nursery school children social skill development

Variables	$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$	$\Sigma xy$	r
	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma y^2$		
Caregivers instructional strategies(X)	2054	35470		
Social skill development (Y)	2173	39527	37420	.69*

Significant at 0.05 level, df =118, N= 120; critical r - value=.195

The result of the hypothesis testing in Table 5 indicated that the r-calculated value of .69 is greater than the r-critical value of .195 at 0.05 level of significance and 118 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between caregiver's instructional strategies and their perspectives of nursery school social skill development was rejected. Hence there is a significant relationship between caregivers' instructional strategies and nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant relationship between care-givers motivations and their perspectives of nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 6:** Pearson Product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between caregivers' motivations and nursery school children social skill development

Variables	$\Sigma x$	$\Sigma x^2$	$\Sigma y$	$\Sigma y^2$	$\Sigma xy$	r
Caregivers motivations (X)	2227	41415				
Social skill development (Y)	2173	39527			40431	.84*

Significant at 0.05 level, df =118, N= 120; critical r - value=.195

The result of the hypothesis testing in Table 6 indicated that the r-calculated value of .84 is greater than the r-critical value of .195 at 0.05 level of significance and 118 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between caregivers' motivation and their perspectives of nursery school social skill development was rejected. Hence there is a significant relationship between caregivers' motivations and nursery school social skill development in Uyo Metropolis.

### Discussion of Findings

The results in research question one and hypothesis one in Tables 1 and 4 show that there is a significant relationship between caregivers' attitudes and nursery school children social skill development. the findings of the study reveal that the caregivers' positive attitudes such as good child-caregiver relationship, commitment, appropriate use of punishment, not being bias against a child, among others, stimulate the children's development of positive social skills. This finding agrees with the findings of Ho and Funk (2018) which shows that children who have trusting relationships with their teachers are, on average more willing to ask questions, solve problems, try new tasks, and express their thinking than their peers without such relations; and that in order for teacher to gain children trust, consistently offering warmth, affection, respect, and caring attitude is essential. The result of this study is also in agreement with the opinion of Correia et al. in Banjko-Bak & Guler\_Yildiz (2021) that teachers' pedagogically sensitive

attitudes characterized by respect, attention, and trust in children's capacities are important to promote participation.

The data in Tables 2 and 5 show that there is a significant relationship between caregivers' instructional strategies and nursery school children social skill development in Uyo Metropolis. This implies that caregivers' instructional strategies play significant role in social skill development of nursery school children. If the caregiver uses effective instructional strategy in teaching, the children will develop effective social skill. This finding also reveals that with appropriate age instructional strategies such as play, storytelling, direct instructions etc., pre-school children learn appropriate social skill which contribute to their achievements in primary school, as well as lay a good foundation for well-adjusted and behaved adult life. This study is in agreement with Rau and Dewar (2020) which indicated that the way caregiver communicate not only teaches pre-schoolers how to communicate with others, it shapes their emotional development and how they build relationships later in life. The result of this study also agrees with the opinion of Hilkuemer (2023) that by providing opportunities for children to interact with peers, modeling positive social behaviours, and engaging them in activities that promote social skills caregivers can help children develop the social skills they need to thrive.

The results of research question three and hypothesis three presented in Tables 3 and 6 indicate that there is a significant relationship between caregiver's motivations and nursery school children social skill development. This result means that caregivers' motivation is important for nursery school social skill development. Thus, the well-motivated a caregiver is, the well-developed the children social skill will be. Children under the care of caregivers motivated by love, passion, and desire to see children develop socially acceptable behaviour develops positive social skills than children under caregivers who are not so motivated. The finding also shows that good welfare packages and parents appreciation are motivations necessary to encourage caregivers to assist children in social skills development. Lack of financial support discourages most caregivers from giving their best to see that children learn positive skills. Perhaps this is as a result of the economic situation in the country today which demands that caregivers' welfare packages should be improved to enable them concentrate in teaching the children desirable skills. Where this is lacking there is a tendency for the caregivers to behave inappropriately, in some cases exhibiting transferred aggression towards the children. It is necessary, therefore, to provide financial support good enough to assist caregivers meet their financial needs. This might be a way of reducing depression and unhappiness as a result

financial challenge. With good financial motivation at the disposal of the caregivers it is likely that they will support the social skill development processes of the preschoolers. The findings of this study agrees with the findings of Manyara and Murrungi (2018) that well-motivated preschool teachers are likely to use the right instructional medium, are likely to be fully involved in planning age appropriate activities for children; but when not well motivated, teachers decided to stand back and may not follow up with guidance, scaffolding, or supportive responsive interactions with the children. The findings is also in agreement with the study of Ngotho and Buna (2020) that teachers' motivation is critical to the success in quality ECDE. This is because according to Ngotho and Buna (2020) teachers are the most important implementers since they interface with the learners who have special education needs.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that caregivers' characteristics variables investigated in this study have significant relationship with nursery school children social skill development. The exhibition of positive attitudes towards the children and use of appropriate instructional strategies by the caregiver as well as well caregivers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of caregiving services will enhance desirable and acceptable social skill development among nursery school children. Thus when children are placed under a caregiver who has a positive attitude towards early childhood development and education, the children will grow up to be assets to their parents, community and the nation as a whole.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study

1. Caregivers should always exhibit attitudes and use effective instructional strategies that will encourage and stimulate children to interact within their social environment
2. Opportunities to improve the financial status of the caregivers should be created by the government; supported by the parents and school authorities as means of motivating the caregivers to concentrate on their jobs. By so doing caregivers will be assisted to overcome financial challenges which may likely distract them from attending to the children as supposed.

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