

PREDICTIVE POWER OF PARENT-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON CAREGIVERS' JOB SATISFACTION AND JOB COMMITMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, and the corresponding two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A correlational survey design was adopted, with a population of 290 caregivers across five Federal University-owned early childhood education centers. A census of 230 caregivers from the three universities with the highest populations was used for sampling. The instruments for data collection were a self-structured questionnaire developed by the researchers, titled: Parent-Community Engagement Rating Scale (PCERS), Caregivers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (CJSQ), and Caregivers' Job Commitment Questionnaire (CJCQ). The instruments were face validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The validated instruments were found to be highly reliable, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, indicating a high level of internal consistency. These values indicate strong internal consistency and suitability of the instruments for the main study. Data were analyzed using multiple regressions, while hypotheses were tested using ANOVA at 0.05 significance level. The findings of the study revealed that parent-community engagement strategies have a very high joint predictive power on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. The findings of the study also indicated that parent community engagement strategies jointly have a high predictive power on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among other that caregivers actively participate in parent-community engagement initiatives to improve their job satisfaction and commitment.

Keywords: Parent-community engagement strategies, job satisfaction, job commitment, caregivers, early childhood education centres

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres serve as the foundational stage for children's development, where learning experiences are intentionally structured to support cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. Within these centres, caregivers play a central role in delivering daily care, guidance, and instructional support that shape children's early learning outcomes (Chukwuemeka, Onyeka, & Kelechi, 2021). The effectiveness of ECE programmes is therefore closely linked to the quality of caregivers' performance, which is largely influenced by their level of job satisfaction and job commitment. Without adequate satisfaction and strong commitment, the goals of early childhood education may not be fully achieved. In recent times, concerns have continued to emerge regarding the state of caregivers' job satisfaction and commitment in ECE

centres, particularly within Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. Reports from scholars and stakeholders suggest that many caregivers experience reduced motivation, declining enthusiasm for work, and weak attachment to their roles. These conditions are often reflected in inconsistent service delivery, increased absenteeism, emotional exhaustion, and high tendencies toward job withdrawal, all of which can negatively affect the quality of early childhood education (Okeke, Eze & Ojukwu, 2022; Uche, 2024). Such conditions point to deeper structural and environmental factors influencing caregivers' work attitudes.

Early Childhood Education refers to the educational and care experiences provided to children from birth to about eight years, aimed at laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning and holistic development. According to UNESCO (2021), ECE forms the basis for later academic success and overall life adjustment. In Nigeria, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) in the National Policy on Education emphasizes ECE as a programme designed to support early learning, child care, and preparation for formal schooling while parents engage in other socioeconomic activities. These objectives highlight the importance of effective service delivery within ECE centres and the need for a stable, motivated caregiving workforce.

Caregivers are therefore essential actors in achieving these objectives. They are responsible for creating safe, nurturing, and stimulating environments that support children's development and learning. Their roles extend beyond supervision to include facilitating play-based learning, promoting emotional stability, and supporting social interaction among children (Brown & Lee, 2019). According to Afolabi, Temitope, and Lawal (2024), the effectiveness of caregivers is significantly influenced by the level of support they receive within their working environment, including institutional and stakeholder support systems that enhance their motivation and performance. Job satisfaction refers to the extent to which caregivers feel contented and fulfilled with their work conditions, responsibilities, and professional experiences (Oshagbemi, 2017). It reflects their emotional and psychological response to their job roles. Job commitment, on the other hand, describes the level of dedication, loyalty, and willingness of caregivers to remain engaged in their professional duties despite challenges. According to Smith and Lee (2022), job commitment reflects a strong psychological attachment to one's profession, while Okeke, Eze & Ojukwu (2022) further emphasized that commitment is sustained when caregivers perceive fairness, support, and recognition in their work environment. From an organizational perspective, job satisfaction and job commitment are interrelated constructs that influence employee performance, retention, and service quality (Kumar & Singh, 2020). When caregivers are satisfied, they are more likely to be emotionally attached to their work, demonstrate higher levels of commitment, and engage positively with children and colleagues (Aluko, & Adebola, 2023). Conversely, dissatisfaction often results in low morale, disengagement, and reduced productivity.

Notwithstanding their importance, existing evidence indicates that caregivers in many ECE centres in Nigeria experience low job satisfaction and weak commitment. Factors such as inadequate resources, poor remuneration, limited professional development opportunities, and unfavorable working conditions have been identified as key contributors (Eze, Nnadi, & Chukwu, 2023). In South-East Nigeria, particularly within Federal Universities, these challenges appear persistent, raising concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of early childhood education delivery. Uche (2022) observed that such conditions significantly reduce caregivers' enthusiasm and weaken their sense of responsibility toward their duties. Similarly, Okeke and Ogbeche (2022)

noted that work-related stress and lack of institutional support negatively affect early childhood educators' emotional well-being, thereby influencing their level of commitment. These challenges suggest that caregivers' work attitudes are not only individually driven but also shaped by environmental and relational factors within the educational system (Chen, Li, Cao, Wang, Luo, & Xu, 2020).

In response to these challenges, attention has increasingly shifted to the role of external stakeholders, particularly parents and the community, in supporting early childhood education. Parent-community engagement involves the active participation and collaboration of parents and community members in school-related activities aimed at improving children's learning experiences and supporting caregivers in their duties (Amadi, Chinwe, & Emeka, 2019). Such engagement may include communication with caregivers, participation in school programmes, and provision of instructional materials, volunteering, and involvement in decision-making processes. Theoretical and empirical perspectives suggest that education is most effective when it operates as a shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities. Epstein (2018) emphasized that strong school-family-community partnerships enhance learning outcomes and improve institutional effectiveness. Similarly, Kim and Sheridan (2022) highlighted that meaningful engagement between parents and educators fosters emotional support, trust, and shared responsibility for children's development. These interactions not only benefit learners but also create a more supportive working environment for caregivers.

Effective parent-community engagement has been associated with improved school climate, increased caregiver motivation, and stronger professional commitment (Akubue, 2020). When caregivers receive adequate support from parents and the community, they are more likely to feel valued, respected, and encouraged in their work (Nwankwo & Obasi, 2022). This positive work environment can enhance their job satisfaction and strengthen their commitment to duty. Conversely, weak or inconsistent engagement may lead to increased workload pressure, communication gaps, emotional strain, and reduced morale among caregivers (López, Sullivan & Freeman, 2021; Harrison & Williams, 2023; Chukwu & Ofoegbu, 2024). In the Nigerian context, particularly in the South-East, evidence suggests that parent-community engagement in early childhood education is still developing and often inconsistent (Bello, Fatima, & Yusuf, 2024). Socioeconomic constraints, lack of awareness, and limited structured collaboration between schools and stakeholders have been identified as contributing factors. These limitations may indirectly affect caregivers' job experiences and attitudes toward their work.

Although studies have acknowledged the importance of parent and community involvement in education, limited empirical attention has been given to how these engagement strategies jointly predict caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment, especially within Federal University ECE centres in South-East Nigeria. While Afolabi, Temitope, and Lawal (2024), Adebayo, Mariam, & Kunle, (2022) and Okeke, Eze & Ojukwu (2022) have contributed to understanding aspects of caregiver performance and educational support systems, there remains a gap in literature regarding the combined predictive influence of parent-community engagement on caregivers' work attitudes in this specific context. It is against this background that this study is undertaken to examine the joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The quality of early childhood education is strongly influenced by the performance of caregivers, who are responsible for the day-to-day nurturing, teaching, and overall development of young children. For caregivers to function effectively in this role, their level of job satisfaction and job commitment is very important, as these factors directly affect the quality of service they provide. However, there are growing concerns that many caregivers in early childhood education centres within Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria are experiencing low job satisfaction and declining commitment to duty. This situation is reflected in issues such as reduced enthusiasm for work, irregular attendance, and increasing tendencies toward disengagement, which may ultimately undermine the quality of early childhood education delivery. Research evidence has consistently pointed to the importance of stakeholder involvement in improving school outcomes. In particular, parent-community engagement is considered a key support system in early childhood education, where parents and community members contribute through participation in school activities, provision of learning resources, collaboration with caregivers, and general support for educational programmes (Mwila & Meremo, 2022). These forms of engagement have the potential to create a more supportive work environment that can enhance caregivers' satisfaction and strengthen their commitment to their roles. Notwithstanding this understanding, the level of parent-community engagement in early childhood education centres in South-East Nigeria, especially within Federal Universities, appears to be uneven and not well coordinated. This weak engagement may be limiting the extent to which caregivers receive the necessary support needed to perform effectively in their duties. In view of this situation, it remains unclear whether the challenges of low job satisfaction and weak job commitment among caregivers could be linked to parent-community engagement practices. Therefore, this study seeks to determine the ****joint** predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to determine the predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the predictive powers of:

1. Joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria
2. Joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria South-East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were guided the study:

1. What is joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in South-East, Nigeria?
2. What is joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

To guide the study, the follow null hypotheses are formulated and were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁: There is no significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.
- Ho₂: There is no significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The study was conducted in ECE centres in Federal Universities South-East Nigeria, which comprises five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The population for this study consists of 290 caregivers working in Federal University-owned early childhood education centres across South-East Nigeria. The distribution is as follows: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) – 140; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK)–32; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU) – 48; Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO)–28; and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State–42 caregivers. This population represents a cross-section of caregivers, reflecting diverse professional experiences and exposure to varying institutional and community contexts. The study population comprised 290 caregivers from five federal universities in South-East Nigeria. The universities with the highest caregiver populations were purposively selected to provide a representative cross-section of the target population. These universities include: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN)–140 caregivers; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU)–48 caregivers; and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State–42 caregivers. From these selected institutions, all 230 caregivers were included in the study, representing the entire accessible population. Therefore, the study employed a purposive sampling technique for the selection of universities and a total population (census) sampling technique for the selection of caregivers. This approach ensured a representative sample while maintaining practicality and feasibility for data collection. These institutions were chosen because they have well-established early childhood education centres with accessible records, active parent-community engagement practices, and diverse socio-cultural contexts that reflect the broader South-East region. A census approach was adopted for this study, including all 230 caregivers in the selected universities. Including all caregivers in the selected Early Childhood Education Centres ensures complete coverage of the target population, reduces the potential for sampling bias, and provides comprehensive data that accurately reflects the experiences and perspectives of every caregiver within these centres (Oni,2024).This approach strengthens the representativeness and reliability of the study findings. Three researcher-designed instruments titled: Parent-Community Engagement Rating Scale (PCERS), Caregivers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (CJSQ), and Caregivers' Job Commitment Questionnaire (CJCQ) were used to collect data for the study. The instruments were face validated by three experts, one from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, one from Educational Psychology Unit in the Department of Educational Foundations and one from the Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The validated instruments were

found to be highly reliable, with an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, indicating a high level of internal consistency. These values indicate strong internal consistency and suitability of the instruments for the main study. Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. In analyzing the data, multiple regressions were used to answer research questions. The hypotheses were tested using t-test associated with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) associated with multiple regressions to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The decision rule was based on Nworgu (2015) categorization as follows: 0.00 – 0.20 (Very Low), 0.20 – 0.40 (Low), 0.40 – 0.60 (Moderate), 0.60 – 0.80 (High) and 0.80 and above (Very High).

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in South-East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Multiple regression joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.924 ^a	.853	.851	Very high predictive power

0.00 – 0.20 (Very Low), 0.20 – 0.40 (Low), 0.40 – 0.60 (Moderate), 0.60 – 0.80 (High) and 0.80 and above (Very High)

Data on table 1 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are .924 and .853 respectively. The coefficient of determinism of 85.3% showed that parent-community engagement has a very high predictive power on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria. The 14.7% variance in caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria is not accounted for by parent-community engagement.

H₀₁: There is no significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 2: ANOVA associated with multiple regression joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5294.423	4	1323.606	327.072	.000 ^b
	Residual	910.538	225	4.047		
	Total	6204.961	229			

Data on table 2 showed that the ANOVA value is 327.072. With a degree of freedom of 4 and 225, the hypothesis is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the probability value of .05. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria?

Table 3: multiple regression of the joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.887 ^a	.787	.708	High predictive power
0.00 – 0.20 (Very Low), 0.20 – 0.40 (Low), 0.40 – 0.60 (Moderate), 0.60 – 0.80 (High) and 0.80 and above (Very High)				

Data on table 3 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are .887 and .787 respectively. The coefficient of determinism of 78.7% showed that parent-community engagement has a very high predictive power on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria. The 21.7% variance in caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria is not accounted for by parent-community engagement.

Ho₂: There is no significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.

Table 4: ANOVA associated with multiple regression of the joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	877.833	4	219.458	25.275	.000 ^b
	Residual	1953.649	225	8.683		
	Total	2831.483	229			

Data on table 4 showed that the ANOVA value is 25.275. With a degree of freedom of 4 and 225, the hypothesis is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the probability value of .05. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant joint predictive power of parent-community engagement strategies on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centers in Federal Universities in South-East, Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that parent-community engagement strategies have a very high joint predictive power on caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. This means that when parents and community members actively collaborate with early childhood education centres through support programmes, capacity-building initiatives, and participatory decision-making caregivers experience a greater sense of satisfaction, motivation, and professional fulfillment (Adeyemi, Okafor, & Bello, 2024). The joint contribution of these engagement strategies provides a holistic support system that strengthens caregivers' morale and enhances the overall quality of early childhood education. The findings are in agreement with the study of Afolabi, Temitope, and Lawal (2024), who found that the collective participation of parents and community stakeholders in educational activities

significantly improves caregivers' job satisfaction in early childhood centres in Enugu State. Their research noted that collaborative initiatives, such as providing instructional resources, encouraging home-school communication, and participating in school improvement programmes, help caregivers feel appreciated and supported. Similarly, Okeke, Eze & Ojukwu (2022) reported that integrated community engagement approaches encompassing parental involvement, community recognition, and shared decision-making serve as powerful predictors of job satisfaction among caregivers in early childhood education. They explained that when both parents and communities partner with schools, caregivers develop a deeper emotional connection and professional pride in their work.

The findings of the study indicated that parent community engagement strategies jointly have a high predictive power on caregivers' job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. This could be because mutual cooperation from parents and community stakeholders creates a sense of shared ownership and motivation among caregivers. Such support systems promote emotional attachment, professional dedication, and long-term commitment to improving the quality of early childhood education in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. This implies that when parents and community members work collaboratively with schools through active participation in school programmes, provision of resources, and moral support, caregivers become more devoted, dependable, and emotionally connected to their professional responsibilities. The result shows that a large proportion of the variation in caregivers' job commitment can be explained by the combined effect of parent community engagement strategies, while the remaining proportion is due to other factors not examined in this study. The finding agrees with the report of Uche (2024), who found that parent community partnership in early childhood education significantly influences teachers' work commitment and organizational loyalty. They observed that caregivers who receive encouragement and recognition from parents and communities tend to show stronger commitment to their duties. Similarly, Okeke, Eze & Ojukwu (2022) structured community support strategies predict caregivers' job commitment, particularly when such support includes active communication, collaboration, and recognition of caregivers' contributions to children's learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The study concludes that parent-community engagement strategies significantly influence caregivers' job satisfaction and job commitment in early childhood education centres in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria. Active involvement of parents and community members through support, collaboration, and shared decision-making helps create a more supportive work environment for caregivers. When such engagement is strong, caregivers feel more valued, motivated, and committed to their duties, which enhance both job satisfaction and commitment. Therefore, strengthening parent-community engagement is essential for improving caregivers' work experience and the overall effectiveness of early childhood education in the region.

Educational Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study imply that improving caregivers' job satisfaction and commitment in ECE centres requires active parent-community engagement; without it, efforts may have limited effectiveness. It also suggests a close link between job satisfaction and job commitment, meaning that enhancing one is likely to strengthen the other among caregivers. Furthermore, the study highlights that creating collaborative and inclusive school environments involving caregivers, parents, and the community can

promote professional growth and sustain caregivers' commitment, thereby improving the overall quality of early childhood education in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should be encouraged to strengthen parent–community engagement through active involvement in school activities, as such collaboration enhances caregivers' job satisfaction and the learning experiences of children.
2. Children's welfare and development should remain central in all parent–community engagement efforts. Caregivers, parents, and community members should work together to create a nurturing environment that supports children's holistic growth and encourages caregivers' commitment to their professional responsibilities.

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