

The Benefits of Parental Engagement: Nigerian Mothers' Perspectives

Parental engagement

This article gives an insight into Nigerian immigrant mothers' perceptions of the benefits of parental engagement in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland. Fifteen mothers of Nigerian descent who had children availing of a free preschool programme in Ireland during 2020–2022 participated in doctoral research at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The research used a qualitative enquiry based on one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate the many benefits of parental engagement in ECCE for Nigerian mothers and their children.

Parental engagement, also called parental involvement or family engagement, is a complex and largely undefined term. It encompasses both home-based and preschool-based engagement, and research shows that it often involves mothers rather than fathers. Inspired by the work of Kim et al. (2018), the definition used here includes parents' commitment to and acts of engagement in their children's lives at home or school, to influence their children's overall actions and developmental outcomes; for instance:

- » collaborating with early years educators to promote positive learning outcomes
- » participating in preschool-based events
- » creating a conducive learning environment at home
- » engaging in home-based activities such as reading and playing with children
- » talking with children about preschool during drop-off and pick-up time.

Parents' engagement in their children's education benefits both parties (Sohn & Wang 2006). It can positively impact children's developmental outcomes and protect against socio-economic disadvantage (Leitão, 2023). It is essential in early childhood education, as it broadens the



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This article gives an insight into Nigerian immigrant mothers' perceptions of the benefits of parental engagement in early childhood care and education in Ireland. It reports on doctoral research into this topic and describes the main benefits perceived for both parents and children, supported by the participants' own voices.

child's horizon, improves reading scores, enhances social relationships, and promotes self-esteem and self-efficacy (Fagbeminiyi, 2011; Mishra, 2012). It enables parents to share information about their children with educators and get acquainted with the preschool and their children's actions there (Symeou, 2007).

Benefits of engagement

This study revealed the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE. Nigerian mothers indicated that these benefits are: bonding with their children, knowing their children's capabilities and needs, improved development for their children, and boosting of their children's self-esteem and confidence.

Bonding with children

Engaging with their children's ECCE created opportunities for participants to bond with their children, allowing them to connect, communicate, and do things together. It also built friendships and trust between them and their children:

Especially like in Ireland, where it's just you and your children. . . . So you have all the time, especially as a stay-at-home mom that I am, for now, I get all the time to engage with my child positively in something that is good to do. It brings up friendship between you and your child, and the child gets to connect to you.

I would say if you are fully involved in your child's life . . . the trust of the child not being scared to come up to you and tell you things happening around. I mean, because in a world that we are living today, abuse is inevitable, you know, sometimes you get to see some kids . . . not being bold enough to come up to their parents, to tell them things happening in their lives, all because of that bond is not there.

Understanding children's capabilities and needs

Participants get to know their children better when they engage in their ECCE. This engagement gave them opportunities to understand and know their children's abilities, capacities, and needs, easing parental stress:

It is beneficial for me because I know their capacity, I know their abilities, their gifts, because I have always been engaging in their lives. I know what they can do, and most especially, I know what they cannot do.

Benefits of parental engagement as cited by Nigerian mothers:

- bonding with their children,
- knowing their children's capabilities and needs,
- improved development for their children,
- boosting of their children's self-esteem and confidence.

You get to know the child better. Yes, there are lots of benefits to it. Yeah, getting to know the child better also helps you as a parent to know what activity to even plan for the child.

Improved development

Engaging with their children's ECCE improved the children's development. Participants said it made their children independent and better prepared for society:

Okay, it developed the skills of the children as well. . . . I think it's advanced your children; it makes them learn more. It widens their horizons.

The benefits are massive. It teaches the child independence, like now, 'I can put on her jacket, she knows she's going to the crèche, carry your bag and all that, you know, independence.

Evidence from this doctoral research suggests that parental engagement in ECCE positively impacts children's learning outcomes and holistic development.

Self-esteem and confidence

Parents engaging with their children's ECCE boosted children's confidence and self-esteem to relate freely with them and others:

I think it helps the child's self-esteem and development processes. And for example, something happened in my child's preschool, and I had to be involved. And at the end of the day, I see that it helps her confident, to tell me things in case anything happened in future because I said to her, 'It's not your fault.'

It gives the child that confidence that at least I have somebody who trusts me, who can encourage me, who can support me.

Conclusion

Evidence from this study suggests that parental engagement in ECCE positively impacts children's learning outcomes and holistic development (Oke et al., 2021; Oostdam & Hooze, 2013). It shows that this engagement establishes a connection between home and school and brings to light children's needs and capabilities (Peck, 2018; Spreewenberg, 2019).

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