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PERCEPTIONS OF OVER-SCHOOLING AMONG PRE-PRIMARY PUPILS IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined the perceptions of over-schooling among pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study specifically focused on the volume of homework given to pupils and the appropriateness of curriculum content. A survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from a sample of 100 teaching practice students selected through simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire titled "Pre-service Teachers' Perception on Over-Schooling Questionnaire (PTPOQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.66, indicating a substantial level of reliability. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that respondents had a negative perception of the volume of homework given to pre-primary pupils, with a mean score of 10.66 (SD = 1.48). This indicates that the amount of homework was perceived as excessive and beyond pupils' developmental capacity. Similarly, respondents expressed a negative perception of the curriculum content provided to pre-primary pupils, with a mean score of 10.90 (SD = 1.49), suggesting that the content was perceived as overly demanding and developmentally inappropriate. The study concludes that over-schooling practices exist in the study area, particularly through excessive homework demands and inappropriate curriculum content. It recommends that stakeholders prioritise age-appropriate learning experiences and ensure that academic activities align with the developmental needs of young learners.

Keywords: Over-schooling, homework, curriculum content, pre-service teachers

Introduction

Pre-primary education refers to organised educational experiences provided to children aged three to five in preparation for primary school, with emphasis on holistic growth across cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains (Kanu & Simon, 2020). It is intended to support the holistic development of children before they enter primary school, while laying the

foundation for lifelong learning and easing their transition into formal education (Nnadi, Akpa & Oke, 2024). The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) posited that the learning process at this stage is expected to be largely play-oriented, with emphasis on exploration, interaction, creativity, and guided experiences rather than rigid academic instruction. Children at this level are expected to engage in a learning curve that is child-centred and developmentally appropriate, where activities align with their age, interests, and individual readiness. Such experiences emphasise play, exploration, social interaction, and gradual skill development rather than formal academic pressure or instruction that exceeds their developmental level (NAEYC, 2020). These provisions clearly position early childhood education as a developmental, child-centred phase rather than an academically intensive one.

Internationally, early childhood education systems adopt different approaches to balancing school readiness and children's holistic development. In some East Asian countries, such as China and South Korea, early childhood education has been influenced by strong expectations regarding school readiness, academic achievement, and parental involvement. However, educational outcomes in these contexts reflect broader factors, including teacher quality, curriculum organisation, family engagement, and educational support systems rather than academic intensity alone (UNESCO, 2024). Conversely, countries such as England, Norway, and Denmark place greater emphasis on play, exploration, social relationships, and children's autonomy, reflecting approaches that prioritise holistic development and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (NAEYC, 2020).

These variations demonstrate that the concern in early childhood education is not simply the presence of academic experiences, but whether such experiences are appropriate, meaningful, and supported by effective educational systems. However, evidence suggests that this foundational purpose is often undermined in practice. In many cases, early childhood education is misinterpreted as a stage for formal schooling, which leads to the introduction of complex tasks and academic demands that exceed children's developmental readiness (Nnadi *et al*., 2024). Such practices reflect a shift away from developmentally appropriate learning towards academically driven instruction that may not align with the needs of young learners. This deviation is captured in the concept of over-schooling.

Over-schooling has been defined as subjecting children to training, instruction or educational experiences far beyond what is provided in the curriculum (Okonkwo, 2014). Similarly, Bosah, Ugwude and Dike (2023) describe it as engaging children in learning activities above their developmental level, while Nuhu (2020) conceptualises it in terms of excessive time spent in school beyond normal instructional hours. From another perspective, it includes keeping pupils for extended periods under the pretext of extra lessons (Omede & Jimba, 2019) and forcing them to achieve beyond reasonable intellectual limits irrespective of the resulting burden (Ibiam & Aleke, 2012). In the context of this study, over-schooling is characterised by two dominant features: the introduction of curriculum content that is developmentally inappropriate and the imposition of excessive academic workload, particularly bulky and advanced homework beyond children's capacity.

Thus, over-schoolin g is not defined merely by the presence of academic activities but by the mismatch between educational demands and children's developmental capacities. However, it is important to distinguish between appropriate academic exposure and over-schooling. Early literacy, language, and numeracy experiences can support children's learning when delivered through developmentally appropriate, play-based approaches that consider children's developmental characteristics and individual differences. The concern, therefore, is not the inclusion of academic experiences in pre-primary education but the introduction of content, workload, and instructional practices that exceed children's developmental readiness (NAEYC, 2020).

Empirical evidence further illustrates the dimensions through which over-schooling manifests in practice. These include extended school hours, over-tutoring, use of higher-level instructional materials and large volumes of homework that children struggle to complete independently (Oke & Nnadi, 2020). It also involves retaining children in school beyond official closing time and engaging them in continuous academic activities that limit opportunities for rest and play (Omede & Jimba, 2019). In some cases, children are exposed to curriculum content meant for higher classes and are required to copy notes or complete tasks beyond their developmental level (Nwosu, Azarah, & Iwuoha, 2025). Such practices often result in situations where parents intervene to complete homework, reflecting a mismatch between task demands and children's abilities (Nnadi *et al*., 2024).

The causes of over-schooling are largely rooted in social and institutional pressures. A major factor is parental competition and aspiration, where parents compare their children's academic progress with others and push for early achievement in literacy and numeracy (Nwonkwo, Ogbonda, Ebizie & Wizor, 2026). This aligns with evidence that excessive parental expectations and control can negatively influence children's motivation and development (Yin *et al*., 2024). In many instances, parents, driven by anxiety and societal expectations, support extended schooling and additional lessons with the belief that increased academic exposure leads to better outcomes (Yin *et al*., 2024). Closely related to this is competition among school proprietors. In an attempt to attract enrolment and demonstrate effectiveness, private schools often intensify academic programmes by introducing advanced curriculum content and extending school hours (Kanu & Simon, 2020). This practice is further reinforced by parents who equate long hours and heavy workload with quality education. Consequently, some school owners increase academic demands beyond appropriate levels, thereby sustaining the cycle of over-schooling (Nwonkwo *et al*., 2026).

Teacher-related factors also contribute significantly to this phenomenon. Evidence indicates that some teachers introduce instructional content that exceeds children's intellectual capacity or assign excessive homework without adequate consideration of developmental appropriateness (Nnadi *et al*., 2024). However, instructional practices are also influenced by the educational environment. In schools where learning materials, trained early childhood educators, and supportive facilities are inadequate, formal teacher-directed instruction may become dominant because of resource constraints, limiting the implementation of child-centred

approaches (OECD, 2021). As a result, curriculum implementation becomes distorted and children are overburdened with academic tasks that extend beyond recommended standards (Ibe-Bassey, 2012).

The effects of over-schooling on children are consistently reported as negative across studies. Findings indicate that excessive academic workload leads to difficulty in concentration, fatigue and physical symptoms such as headaches among pupils (Nnadi *et al*., 2024). Children subjected to prolonged academic activities may also sleep in class during extra lessons and exhibit reluctance to attend school. Empirical evidence further shows that over-schooling does not improve intellectual or psychomotor development, suggesting that increased academic exposure does not necessarily translate into better learning outcomes (Nwosu *et al*., 2025). Beyond cognitive outcomes, over-schooling has broader developmental implications. The denial of rest and play deprives children of experiences necessary for physical, emotional, and social development (Odey, Ekarika, & Odey, 2025). Continuous academic pressure may contribute to overstimulation and difficulties related to attention, emotional regulation, executive functioning, and learning capacity (Campos-Gil *et al*., 2020; Wade, Wright, & Finegold, 2022). Similarly, highly structured academic routines may limit opportunities for creativity, peer interaction, curiosity, and problem-solving, while inappropriate language practices may reduce opportunities for strengthening children's first languages (NAEYC, 2020). The cumulative evidence therefore suggests that over-schooling can disrupt developmental processes and contradict the principles underlying early childhood education.

Learning remains a lifelong process; however, existing studies have largely focused on parents Learning remains a lifelong process as supported by existing literature. However, the focus of much of the literature has continued to centre on learning facilitators and caregivers, particularly parents and teachers. This limited focus may not fully capture the underlying issues surrounding over-schooling. Therefore, involving other key actors, such as Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teaching Practice students, who are trained in developmentally appropriate practices and exposed to real classroom environments during their practicum, is important. Their experiences enable them to identify discrepancies between theoretical expectations and actual teaching practices. Therefore, understanding their perceptions is important. In view of this gap, the purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teaching Practice students on over-schooling of pre-primary pupils in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State.

Statement of the Problem

Over-schooling among pre-primary school pupils is increasingly evident in the form of developmentally inappropriate curriculum content and excessive, advanced homework demands that exceed children's capacity. Empirical evidence shows that such practices lead to poor concentration, fatigue, inability to complete tasks independently and physical complaints such as headaches, while also failing to improve intellectual or psychomotor development (Nnadi *et al*., 2024; Nwosu *et al*., 2025). This indicates a clear mismatch between academic demands and

pupils' developmental readiness. This problem persists due to parental pressure and school competition, where heavy workload and extended school hours are wrongly perceived as indicators of quality education (Nwonkwo *et al*., 2026). Consequently, children are deprived of rest and play, leading to stress and negative learning experiences (Odey *et al*., 2025; Malave, van Dijk, & Anacker, 2022). Despite this, limited attention has been given to the perceptions of Early Childhood Education Teaching Practice students, who are uniquely positioned to observe these practices, thereby creating a gap that this study seeks to address.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and popularised by Bredekamp (1987). Bredekamp (1987) presented DAP as an approach to early childhood education which emphasises that teaching and learning experiences should correspond with children's developmental characteristics, abilities, interests, and experiences. The framework argues that effective early childhood education should be based on what is appropriate for children's age, individual differences, and social and cultural contexts rather than on academic demands that exceed their developmental readiness.

DAP is guided by three major principles: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and social and cultural appropriateness. Age appropriateness requires that learning experiences correspond with children's developmental stage and expected abilities. Individual appropriateness recognises that children develop at different rates and possess unique learning needs, interests, and abilities. Social and cultural appropriateness emphasises that children's learning experiences should reflect their family backgrounds, communities, and cultural contexts. These principles support the use of play-based learning, exploration, interaction, and meaningful experiences rather than rigid academic instruction that places excessive demands on young learners (Kanu & Simon, 2020; Nnadi *et al*., 2024). In support of this position, Selzing-Musa and Onuigbo (2023) emphasised that teaching and learning experiences should be carefully designed to suit children's age, individuality, and interests through engaging and activity-based approaches that make learning meaningful and enjoyable.

A major assumption of DAP is that children learn effectively when they participate in experiences that are achievable, meaningful, and appropriate to their developmental level. The framework maintains that when learning activities exceed children's developmental capacities, they may experience frustration, reduced engagement, and limited understanding because they are unable to meaningfully connect with the content or activities. Thus, effective early childhood instruction requires a balance between introducing new knowledge and ensuring that such experiences remain within children's developmental capabilities.

In relation to this study, DAP provides a useful framework for understanding over-schooling among pre-primary pupils. Over-schooling, as reflected in developmentally inappropriate curriculum content and excessive academic workload such as advanced homework demands, represents a departure from the principles of DAP (Okonkwo, 2014; Oke & Nnadi,

2020). The framework suggests that academic activities in pre-primary education should not be assessed merely by the quantity of content covered but by their appropriateness, relevance, and suitability to children's developmental needs.

The extension of DAP to this study lies in examining whether the academic experiences provided to pre-primary pupils align with developmentally appropriate principles. Specifically, the theory guides the investigation of teaching practice students' perceptions of curriculum content and homework practices as indicators of possible over-schooling. Since ECE Teaching Practice students are trained in child development and developmentally appropriate practices, their perceptions provide insight into whether classroom experiences correspond with the principles of DAP. The adoption of DAP as the theoretical foundation of this study is justified because the study focuses on over-schooling, a phenomenon primarily concerned with the mismatch between educational demands and children's developmental readiness. The theory provides an appropriate lens for examining whether curriculum content and homework expectations placed on pre-primary pupils support or contradict the principles of child-centred and developmentally appropriate education.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the perceptions of teaching practice students on the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.
2. To ascertain the perceptions of teaching practice students on the curriculum content of pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of teaching practice students on the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?
2. What are the perceptions of teaching practice students on the curriculum content of pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design. This design was appropriate as it enabled the collection of students' opinions on homework and curriculum practices. The population comprised of 202 teaching practice students in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Jos. A sample of 100 students (50 from 200 level and 50 from 400 level) was selected using simple random sampling through the hat-and-draw method, ensuring equal chance of selection. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Pre-service Teachers' Perception on Over-Schooling Questionnaire (PTPOQ)", designed on a four-point rating scale and containing five items on homework and five items on curriculum content. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.66. Data collection was carried out by the researcher through direct administration and retrieval of questionnaires. The data obtained were analysed using mean and standard deviation, with 2.5 as the cut-off point for decision-making.

Results

Research Question One:

What are the perceptions of teaching practice students on the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

Table 1: Overall Perceptions of Students on the Volume of Homework Given to Pre-primary School Pupils

Perceptions	Range of Scores	Frequency	%	$\overline{X}$	SD
Negative Perception	5–13	73	73.0	10.66	1.48
Positive Perception	14–20	27	27.0	14.13	0.97
Overall	5–20	100	100.0	11.60	2.06

N = 100

Note: *The volume of homework construct consisted of five questionnaire items measured on a four-point rating scale. Therefore, respondents' total scores ranged from 5 to 20. Scores between 5 and 13 were classified as negative perceptions, while scores between 14 and 20 were classified as positive perceptions.*

Table 1 shows that the majority of teaching practice students (73%) had a negative perception of the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils, while 27% expressed a positive perception. The data imply that the majority of ECE teaching practice students showed a negative perception of the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. This indicates that most respondents perceived the amount of homework assigned to pre-primary pupils as excessive and beyond what is developmentally appropriate.

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Volume of Homework Given to Pre-primary Pupils

Items	$\overline{X}$	SD
Too much homework develops good study habits in children.	1.66	.946
Doing too much homework prevents children from learning simple home chores.	3.08	.694
Most homework is often too demanding for children's age.	1.47	.839
Homework is burdensome for children to do due to long hours spent at school.	1.88	.606
Too much homework prevents children from playing and exploring their environment.	3.51	.921

Decision Mean = 2.50

Table 2 shows that respondents agreed that excessive homework prevents children from engaging in simple home chores (Mean = 3.08, SD = .694) and limits their opportunities for play and exploration (Mean = 3.51, SD = .921), as these mean values were above the decision mean of 2.50. However, respondents disagreed that too much homework develops good study habits in children (Mean = 1.66, SD = .946), that most homework is appropriate for children's age (Mean = 1.47, SD = .839), and that homework is not burdensome for children despite long hours spent at school (Mean = 1.88, SD = .606), as these mean values were below the decision mean. The findings indicate that teaching practice students generally perceived the volume of homework

given to pre-primary pupils as excessive, burdensome, and inconsistent with children's developmental needs.

Research Question Two:

What are the perceptions of teaching practice students on the curriculum content of pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State?

Table 3: Overall Perceptions of Teaching Practice Students on Curriculum Content of Pre-primary School Pupils

Perceptions	Range of Scores	Frequency	%	$\overline{X}$	SD
Negative Perception	5–13	61	61.0	10.90	1.49
Positive Perception	14–20	39	39.0	13.53	0.75
Overall	5–20	100	100.0	11.95	1.79

N = 100

Note: *The curriculum content construct consisted of five questionnaire items measured on a four-point rating scale. Respondents' total scores therefore ranged from 5 to 20. Scores between 5 and 13 were classified as negative perceptions, while scores between 14 and 20 were classified as positive perceptions.*

Table 3 shows that the majority of teaching practice students (61.0%) had a negative perception of the curriculum content provided for pre-primary school pupils, while 39.0% expressed a positive perception. The data imply that the majority of ECE teaching practice students showed a negative perception of the curriculum content of pre-primary school pupils in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. This suggests that most respondents perceived some aspects of the curriculum content as inappropriate for the developmental level of pre-primary pupils.

Table 4: Mean Responses on the Curriculum Content of Pre-primary Pupils

Items	$\overline{X}$	SD
The content that pupils are exposed to at this level is appropriate for their age.	1.42	.746
Pupils at this level should be allowed sufficient time to play and explore their environment than to engage in too much academic work at school.	3.56	.879
Higher curriculum content is necessary because it promotes hard work.	1.91	.590
Children need to be taught things higher than their age for academic excellence.	1.42	.822
The curriculum content of some schools is sometimes overloaded beyond the level of the children.	3.64	.738

Decision Mean = 2.50

Table 4 indicates that respondents disagreed that the content pupils are exposed to at this level is appropriate for their age (Mean = 1.42, SD = .746), that higher curriculum content is necessary because it promotes hard work (Mean = 1.91, SD = .590), and that children need to be taught things beyond their age for academic excellence (Mean = 1.42, SD = .822), as these mean values were below the decision mean of 2.50. However, respondents agreed that pupils at this level should be allowed sufficient time to play and explore their environment rather than engage

in too much academic work at school (Mean = 3.56, SD = .879), and that the curriculum content of some schools is overloaded beyond the level of children (Mean = 3.64, SD = .738), as these values were above the decision mean. These findings indicate that teaching practice students perceived some curriculum practices in pre-primary schools as excessive and not sufficiently aligned with children's developmental needs.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teaching practice students expressed a negative perception of the volume of homework given to pre-primary school pupils, describing it as excessive, burdensome, and developmentally inappropriate. This finding aligns with existing literature which emphasises that early childhood education is designed to be play-oriented rather than academically intensive (FRN, 2014; Kanu & Simon, 2020). The result supports the position of Oke and Nnadi (2020), who identified large volumes of homework as a key dimension of over-schooling, as well as Nnadi *et al*. (2024), who reported that excessive academic workload leads to fatigue, poor concentration, and inability to complete tasks independently. Similarly, the finding is consistent with Nwosu *et al*. (2025), who observed that over-schooling does not improve intellectual or psychomotor development. It further agrees with Odey *et al*. (2025), who noted that excessive academic engagement deprives children of play and rest, thereby affecting their overall development. In addition, Selzing-Musa and Onuigbo (2023) emphasised that learning experiences that are not developmentally appropriate often become frustrating and ineffective for children, particularly when they exceed the child's level of understanding and engagement. However, this finding contradicts assumptions held by some parents and schools that increased academic workload enhances learning, as suggested by parental expectations for early achievement (Nwonkwo *et al*., 2026). The implication is that, contrary to these beliefs, excessive homework may hinder rather than support effective learning in early childhood.

The findings also show that teaching practice students held a negative perception of the curriculum content to which pre-primary school pupils are exposed, indicating that such content was often developmentally inappropriate and overly demanding. This supports the argument that early childhood education is frequently misinterpreted as a stage for formal academic instruction, leading to the introduction of advanced content beyond children's developmental level (Nnadi *et al*., 2024). The result is consistent with Okonkwo (2014) and Bosah, Ugwude, and Dike (2023), who defined over-schooling as exposing children to educational content beyond what is appropriate for their level. It also corroborates findings by Nwosu *et al*. (2025) that children are often required to engage with curriculum meant for higher classes, resulting in a mismatch between instructional demands and developmental readiness. Furthermore, the finding agrees with Ikenyiri (2025), who noted that exposure to excessive academic routines and reduced play opportunities limits creativity and social interaction among young learners. This position is further reinforced by Selzing-Musa and Onuigbo (2023), who stressed that teaching and learning experiences must be carefully aligned with children's age, interests, and developmental level, as

any mismatch reduces meaningful learning and engagement. Although curriculum development and appropriate educational content are important factors that influence learners' academic outcomes (Alanamu, 2025), the present finding suggests that curriculum content at the pre-primary level should not be judged solely by academic demands but by its alignment with children's developmental readiness.

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