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Research Article

Assessing Maternal Emotion During Child's Pre-School Placement Among Nursing Mothers in Ilorin West, Kwara State

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Abstract:

Background: During the process of conception, foetus largely depends on the mothers for food, protection, stability and smooth transitioning of development until delivery.

Objective: The study assessed the maternal emotion in child's pre-school placement among nursing mothers in Ilorin West, Kwara State.

Methods: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with one research question and two hypotheses. The sample population consisted of 100 nursing mothers and were randomly selected. A self-constructed questionnaire titled "Maternal Emotion Questionnaire" (MEQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and pre-tested through coefficient Alpha and its reliability Coefficient yielded a significant value of 0.76. The retrieved data were analysed using mean and standard deviation, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the research question and hypotheses respectively.

Results: The findings revealed that nursing mothers have high level of maternal emotion on child's pre-school placement with a mean score of 2.95. The finding further revealed that there is a significant difference between marital status and maternal emotional experience of nursing mothers during pre-school placement (.000<0.05) and no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of nursing mothers (.251 >.05) during pre-school placement in Ilorin West, Kwara State.

Conclusion: This suggests that family composition and marital status play a more critical role than employment status in shaping mothers' emotional cues to their children's early educational transition

Keywords: Maternal Emotion, Nursing Mothers, Preschool Placement

1. INTRODUCTION

Mothers are children first point of contact before birth. During the process of conception, foetus largely depends on the mothers for food, protection, stability and smooth transitioning of development until delivery. From the moment they are born, infants are extremely sensitive to the emotional signals of their mothers. A mother's reactions to her infant's needs, whether through feeding, soothing, or playful interactions, lays the groundwork for initial understandings of trust and security. It has been stated that the neural connections within a child's brain develop significantly in the initial five years of life. During this period, youngsters are especially open to social interactions.

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It is also the age when their window of learning has a major influence on their growth in later years. A mother plays multiple roles in a child's development, serving as a teacher in every aspect of a child's developmental growth; social emotional, physical, cognitive and independence.

Asserted in their study that both the quantity and quality of a mother's involvement in development are very important, as the mother's skills determine how effectively child monitoring is performed (Araújo et al., 2023). Also conducted a longitudinal study, measuring the attachment between mothers and children during infancy and revisiting it when the children reached adulthood. The study proved that the infant attachment experience has a lasting effect, influencing the ability to form attachments later in life. A mother's ability to understand and empathize with her own feelings helps her make informed decisions that contribute to the child's overall development (Welch et al., 2023).

Child placement refers to the process by which parents or guardians select and enroll their children in preschool or early learning programs. (Beyerlein et al., 2019) defines child placement as the selection and enrollment of a child in an early childhood education setting, such as preschool or daycare. This decision-making process is influenced by parental beliefs about the importance of early education, the perceived quality of available programs, and logistical considerations such as proximity and cost (Patterson et al., 2019).

The importance of early placement in quality educational settings cannot be overemphasized. Explored the impact of universal preschool programs on children and found that children enrolled in such programs showed significant improvements in language, math, and social skills compared to their peers who did not attend preschool. This study further reinforces the importance of early placement in quality educational settings for child development. Preschool education, also known as early childhood education is a critical stage in a child's development that occurs before they enter formal schooling, typically between the ages of three and five (Li et al., 2025). This initial educational stage includes a mix of organized and spontaneous tasks aimed at fostering physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Research indicates that kids enrolled in preschool are more equipped for kindergarten and achieve higher academic performance in subsequent years. Preschool plays a crucial role in helping children cultivate essential thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are vital for their future academic achievements (Durkin et al., 2022).

Preschool programmes can vary widely in their approaches, including play-based, Montessori, and academic-focused models, each aiming to create a nurturing environment that fosters children's curiosity and love for learning. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) also indicates that high-quality preschool education has a profound impact on a child's future academic and social success. Preschool offers an organized environment in which kids engage with other children and adults beyond their home life. This engagement is essential for cultivating social abilities like sharing, teamwork, and resolving disputes. Furthermore, preschool aids young ones in recognizing and handling their feelings, which is important for their emotional health overall (Watts et al., 2023).

Maternal emotion refers to the range of emotional experiences and expressions that a mother undergoes in relation to her role as a caregiver. Maternal emotion is not just about responding to distress; it also encompasses a range of emotions, from joy to sadness, and involves validating these feelings. Maternal emotion in their study as encompassing the attitudes and emotional expressions of a mother toward her child, which can significantly influence the child's behavioral and emotional development (Lestari & Alam, 2020). Asserted in their study that maternal emotion includes both the positive and negative feelings a mother experiences in response to her child's behavior and developmental stages (Spreuwel et al., 2021). These emotions are crucial in shaping the mother's caregiving strategies and the emotional climate of the home. When a mother responds negatively to a child's emotions by ignoring, dismissing, or demeaning them, there are significant short-term and long-term effects on the child's overall development (Spenner, 2020). These emotions can greatly influence maternal behaviors, decision-making processes, and overall family dynamics.

The expression of emotion is guided by social norms that vary according to context, environment, and culture (Beyerlein et al., 2019). Emotions play a key role by preparing individuals for actions that are aimed at promoting the welfare of children. Different emotions can be distinguished from each other through specific patterns of evaluation and preparedness for actions. For instance, sadness is marked by the recognition that a goal has been missed, leading to a desire to distance oneself from a triggering situation, which helps to reserve energy for pursuing other, more reachable objectives. On the other hand, happiness is described by a person's evaluation of a goal as achieved or accessible, coupled with a desire to move closer to a stimulus, which aids in either reaching or sustaining the desired state. Significantly, the connection between the elements of emotion and actions is evident: whether it be a drive to retreat or the act of pulling away, any particular feeling could potentially result in a corresponding action or might not (Sabalbal et al., 2025). In certain instances, feelings are managed to promote actions that are suitable for the situation or to fulfill various or conflicting objectives. The act of regulation is understood as a multifaceted process that can be intentional, yet can also occur automatically and without conscious awareness (Glatz et al., 2024). The emotional health of mothers is closely connected to how they interact with their children, and this relationship affects the social and emotional growth of the children (Norcross et al., 2021).

The decision to place a child in preschool is one of the most significant early decisions parents make, and it is influenced by a range of factors, including maternal emotions. Preschool placement is critical for a child's development, as it provides the foundation for academic success, social skills, and emotional growth (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020). Investigated how maternal emotional regulation affects decision-making processes related to child-rearing, including educational choices. They found that mothers with better emotional regulation skills are more likely to make informed and confident decisions regarding their children's education. It is particularly relevant to study maternal emotions during critical parenting decisions, such as school placement, because a mother's emotional responses to her child's perceived readiness or distress about school transitions can significantly influence the child's developmental outcomes. The way a mother manages her emotions in the face of these challenges can directly affect not only the decision-making process for school placement but also the child's ability to adapt to new environments and experience long-term academic and social success (Rao et al., 2021). Argued that maternal anxiety about a child's readiness and adjustment to preschool can lead mothers to prioritize certain aspects of preschool

programs that may not be particularly relevant to the child's well-being. An anxious mother might prioritize proximity over other factors, such as selecting a more nurturing and supportive school environment that could better help the child cope with the transition (K, 2024).

The stress associated with making educational decisions can affect how thoroughly mothers research and evaluate preschools (Aldrup et al., 2020). Stress can also heighten the emphasis on factors such as proximity to home and cost, potentially overshadowing the educational quality. Highlighted that confidence in decision-making is often linked to emotional support from partners, family, or friends, which can mitigate feelings of anxiety and stress. Confident mothers are more likely to consider a broader range of factors, including the quality of education, when choosing a preschool, leading to better outcomes for their children (Park & Hassairi, 2021). Previous literature has established that mothers' emotions significantly influence a child's overall development. Several studies have also examined various aspects of maternal emotions, including anxiety, stress, and confidence, and how these emotions shape the decision-making process for selecting a preschool. Factors such as maternal stress, anxiety, and general mood can notably impact decisions regarding a child's school placement.

However, existing research primarily focuses on how maternal emotions relate to a child's emotion regulation in school, parenting practices, and children's cognitive skills, while neglecting the critical decision-making process that precedes a child's behaviour. Despite the established importance of maternal emotions in child development and educational decisions, little research has focused on how these maternal emotions influence school placement decisions in regions like Ilorin West, Kwara State. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the influence of maternal emotions on the decision to place a child aged 3-5 years in a specific school. Moderating variables such as marital status and employment have not received sufficient attention in relation to their impact on school placement decisions for young children. Most studies in this area concentrate on children aged 7 years and older. Schools serve as formal structures that prepare children for future success. This research aims to fill this gap by systematically assessing the maternal emotion in child's pre-school placement among nursing mothers in Ilorin West, Kwara State.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study used a descriptive survey research design, and a simple random sampling method was used to select 100 nursing mothers as the respondents. The study was conducted in Ilorin West local government area of Kwara State, Nigeria, over a long period of nine months. The 100 sampled nursing mothers gave their consent, anonymity and safety were assured which the researcher ensured. The research instrument was given to the respondent at their children's and the instrument was collected at the spot to avoid loss since no address or contact of the mothers were collected. The tool used in this research was a self-made questionnaire called "Maternal Emotion Questionnaire" (MEQ). The questionnaire had a closed format and included two sections, A and B. Section A includes information about the respondents' background such as their education, marriage status, and job. Section B has 13 items that measure a mother's feelings like anxiety and stress. A four Likert scale was used as the response format for the instrument which are A-Always (4points), S-Sometimes (3points), R-Rarely (2points), N-Never (1point).

The research tool was checked for face and content validity by experts in childhood education. To make sure it was reliable, the Coefficient Alpha method was used, and it gave a reliability score of 0.76, which is considered significant. The person's demographic information was looked at using counts and percentages, and the data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics like average and how spread out the numbers were to answer the research question. The mean cutoff point was 2.50, which served as the benchmark for determining whether respondents exhibited a high or low level of the construct. Mean scores equal to or above 2.50 were considered to indicate a high level, while scores below 2.50 indicated a low level of the construct. The Research hypotheses were analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a significance level of 0.05.

This research scope assessed maternal emotion during child's preschool placement in Ilorin Weat, Kwara state, Nigeria. Specifically, the research examined the level of maternal emotion during child's preschool placement, the significant difference between marital status, employment and maternal emotion. The study focused on selected nursing mothers with aged 3-5 children with the use of structured questionnaires. The data sampled population is relatively small in size, the use of structured questionnaires cannot be substituted for interviews which could provide qualitative responses. However, these limitations did not significantly affect the overall findings, as necessary measures were taken to minimize their effects on the study. The data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0). The results of the findings are shown below:

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Respondents

Mariatal Status	Frequency	(%)
Married	82	82.0
Separated/Divorced	09	9.0
Single Mother	07	7.0
Widowed	02	2.0
Total	100	100.0
EDUCATION		
Ssce	03	3.0
Ond/Nce	19	19.0
Degree & Above	78	78.0
Total	100	100.0
OCCUPATION		
Civil Service	41	41.0
Non-Civil Service	45	45.0
Artisan	14	14.0
Total	100	100.0

Data in Table1 indicates that out of 100 sampled mothers; 82(82.0%) were married, 9(9.0%) were separated/ divorced, 7(7.0%) were single mothers and 2(2.0) were widowed. The result implies that married mothers were the highest percentage sampled in this study. Also from the table, 3(3.0%) were SSCE holders, 19 (19.0) were OND/NCE holders while 78 (78.0%) were Degree & above holders. The result implies that the largest percentage of the total number of mothers sampled were Degree &above holders. Moreso, 41(41.0%) were public employee, 45(45.0%) were private employee while 14(14.0%) were into crafts. The result implies that the most sampled mothers in this study were private employees.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

NCE Nigerian Certificate in Education
NIEER National Institute for Early Education Research
OND Ordinary National Diploma
SSCE Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I feel anxious when I think about my child's interaction with other children in preschool.	2.09	1.173
2.	The idea of leaving my child in preschool make me feel uneasy every morning.	2.33	1.111
3.	I'm happy that my child is away from home for a while.	2.65	.978
4.	I feel a lot pressure to choose appropriate preschool for my child	2.66	1.14
5.	The process of selecting preschool is stressful for me.	2.66	1.13
6.	The financial aspects of preschool placement add to my stress	2.75	.999
7.	I experienced physical symptoms (Migraine, sweating and increased heart beat) when my child is in a preschool	2.88	.935
8.	The thought of my child is in a preschool make me nervous	2.89	.984
9.	I worry about how my child will adapt in preschool	2.95	.968

10.	I often feel overwhelmed combining taking care of my child's preschool needs with other responsibilities at home.	3.16	.861
11.	I feel anxious when my child starts Preschool.	3.20	.876
12.	I feel confident in my choice of school for my child	3.60	.752
13.	I believe the preschool I chose will meet my child's developmental needs.	3.76	.515
14.	I worry about my child when I'm far away	3.76	.524
	Average Mean	2.95	

Table 2 shows that nursing mothers rarely feel anxious when they think about their children's interactions with other children in preschool. The mean score for this feeling is 2.09, and the standard deviation is 1.173. Item 2, which says "The idea of leaving my child in preschool makes me feel uneasy every morning," has a mean score of 2.33 and a standard deviation of 1.111. Item 3, which says "I'm happy that my child is away from home for a while," has a mean score of 2.65 and a standard deviation of 1.148. Item 4, which says "I feel a lot of pressure to choose an appropriate preschool for my child," has a mean score of 2.66 and a standard deviation of 1.130. Item 5, which says "The process of selecting a preschool is stressful for me," has an average score of 2.66 and a standard deviation of 1.130. Item 6, which is about the financial aspects of preschool placement adding to stress, has a mean score of 2.75 and a standard deviation of 0.999. Item 7 mentions that someone felt physical symptoms like migraine, sweating, and a faster heart rate when their child was in preschool. The average score for this item is 2.88, and the standard deviation is 0.935. Item 8, which says "The thought of my child being in preschool makes me nervous," has a mean score of 2.89 and a standard deviation of 0.984. Item 9 "I worry about how my child will adapt in preschool" has a mean score (2.95) and standard deviation (.968). Item 10 "I often feel overwhelmed combining taking care of my child's preschool needs with other responsibilities at home" has a mean score (3.16) and a standard deviation (.861). Item 11 "I feel anxious when my child starts Preschool" has a mean score (3.20) and a standard deviation (.876). Item 12 "I feel confident in my choice of school for my child" has a mean score (3.60) and a standard deviation (.752). Item 13 "I believe the preschool I chose will meet my child's developmental needs" has a mean score (3.76) and a standard deviation (.515). Item 14 "I worry about my child when I'm far away" has a mean score (3.78) and a standard deviation (.524). The table also shows an average mean score of **2.95** which is greater than the benchmark of 2.5. This means that nursing mothers in Ilorin West, which is part of Kwara state, have a strong emotional connection to their children's pre-school placement. The study showed that nursing mothers in Ilorin West, Kwara state, have strong feelings about where their children go to preschool. This was shown by the average score of 2.95 from all the responses, which is higher than the cutoff point of 2.50.

Table 3: ANOVA Showing Difference Between Marital Status and Maternal Emotional Experience of Mothers during Pre-school Placement.

Source of Variable	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Group	810.9	3	270.3	7.610	.000	Significant
Within Group	3410.1	96	35.5			

*Significant P<.05

The data in Table 3 showed an F-value of 7.610 and a p-value of .000. The p-value is smaller than the significant level of 0.05. So, the idea that there is no big difference in how mothers feel emotionally during pre-school placement based on their marital status is not true. This means there is actually a noticeable difference in the emotional experiences of mothers depending on their marital status during pre-school placement. The findings of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference between marital status and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement in Ilorin West, Kwara State. This was shown because the response value of 0.00 is lower than the alpha level of 0.05.

H_{O2}: There is no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement.

Table 4: ANOVA Showing Difference between Occupation and maternal Emotional Experience of Mothers during Pre-school Placement

Source of Variable	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Group	118.769	2	59.385	1.40	.251	Not Significant
Within Group	4102.271	97	42.291			

*Significant P<.05

Data in Table 4 showed the F-Value calculated of 1.404, while p-value is .251. Since the p-value is greater than the significant value of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement is not rejected which implies that there is no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement. Hypothesis two finding revealed that there is no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement in Ilorin West, Kwara State. This was revealed by the significant value of the response 0.25 which is more than the alpha value of 0.05.

3.2 Discussion

The key findings from the study were that there is a high level of maternal emotion among nursing mothers during preschool placement. Maternal emotion is meaningfully associated with parenting, stress, fatigue, and other factors that causes incapability of making informed decision. This finding was supported by (Wall-Wieler et al., 2020), in their study children exposed to negative maternal emotion such as depression are at higher risk for developmental vulnerability at school entry. Mothers became emotionally connected to their children (Setyowati et al., 2023). Factors like emotional states (depression and anxiety), attitudes towards pregnancy and motherhood, marital satisfaction, and a sociodemographic variable (age) contribute significantly for the explanation of maternal antenatal attachment (Camarneiro et al., 2024). Even though (Verhagen et al., 2026) was based on how Mothers having trouble managing their emotions and children having issues with their social and emotional behavior are connected in a positive way that goes both ways during the toddler years. The feelings of a nursing mother can greatly affect decisions about which school to choose, the expected age of the children, and where they should go to preschool.

Another key finding in the study was that there is a significant difference between maternal emotion of nursing mothers based on marital status. This finding is in line with (Heggeness, 2019) who provided evidence that marital status influence household bargaining and investment in schooling. (De, 2024) also indicated in his study that parental involvement significantly influenced the association between marital status and children's quality education. Higher maternal marital satisfaction is associated with more positive emotional expressivity and less negative emotional expressivity (Liu et al., 2024). This suggests that marital status may influence not only the quality of parental engagement but also the decision-making process regarding children's placements in school.

Lastly, the finding revealed that there is no significant difference between occupation and maternal emotional experience of mothers during pre-school placement in Ilorin West, Kwara State. This finding is in contrast with (Atolagbe et al., 2019) which revealed that occupation influence the placement of children in school and their educational outcomes. Parental occupation, educational levels, and household income may affect children's psychological adjustment in school (Abdul Karim et al., 2022). mother's education affects her desire to work; besides mother's education will affect her mindset and behavior (Lilia et.al., 2023).

3.2.1 Implications

Based on the findings, maternal emotion plays a critical role in preschool placement decisions among nursing mothers. The high level of maternal emotion, coupled with its association with stress, fatigue, and challenges in informed decision-making, implies that preschool placement processes should be emotionally responsive. Early childhood education providers and policymakers should integrate supportive measures such as parental counseling, clear communication, and guidance services to assist nursing mothers during placement decisions. It's especially important for moms of young kids to help them be independent while teaching them how to act nicely in social situations. Helping mothers feel better about their children, teaching them what to expect from preschool, and encouraging older play activities with young kids can make it easier for mothers to talk and play with their children in ways that help the kids learn to manage their own emotions on their own.

The significant influence of marital status on maternal emotion further implies that family structure affects mothers' emotional readiness and decision-making

capacity. Schools and education stakeholders should therefore adopt inclusive engagement strategies that consider variations in marital support systems. The absence of a significant difference based on occupation suggests that emotional experiences during preschool placement are not primarily determined by employment status, highlighting the need to focus interventions on psychological and relational factors rather than occupational classifications.

3.2.2 Research Contribution

This study contributes to existing literature by empirically establishing maternal emotion as a significant factor in preschool placement decisions, extending research beyond general parenting and child development outcomes. The study provides context-specific evidence from Ilorin West, Kwara State, thereby enriching Nigerian and African scholarship on maternal emotional experiences in early childhood education.

Additionally, the finding that marital status significantly influences maternal emotion, while occupation does not, challenges assumptions in previous studies that emphasize socioeconomic variables over emotional and relational factors. This study offers a foundation for future research and policy interventions aimed at improving early childhood education planning and parental support systems.

3.2.3 Limitations

This study explored the maternal emotions during preach placement among nursing mothers in Ilorin West, Kwara State, Nigeria. The method used a descriptive survey design with a random sampling technique to select the 100 sampled mothers. Because of this research design, it allows generalizability only to the geographical location of the study.

3.2.4 Suggestions

Therefore, the researcher suggested that counseling and emotional support programs be established for married mothers, especially those who might be struggling with the emotional burden of preschool placement. This could include marriage-focused parenting workshops to address shared parenting responsibilities, communication, and emotional well-being. There is no doubt that the family structure which cuts across married, co-parenting status, divorced and widowed have an implication on how nursing mothers can have emotional balance to make suitable preschool choices that have nurtured the whole of a child. It is therefore, recommended that stakeholders such as ministry of women affairs, education, Non-Governmental Organization e.t.c should incorporate emotional intelligence training into prenatal and postnatal care.

The modern world thrives for women to have nourishing careers, striving business and hand skills which have an impact when mothers are making decisions for their child in preschool. It was recommended that the community should organize information sessions and seminars on preschool placement processes, where mothers can be provided with information about the emotional and psychological aspects of transitioning their children into pre-school.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, there was a high level of maternal emotion during preschool placement, there was a significant difference in maternal emotion during child's placement based on marital status and lastly there was no significant difference in maternal emotion during child's preschool placement based on occupation.

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6. CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Eniola Keji OLA-ALANI(Ph.D) provided supervision, feedback, and guidance throughout the research process and manuscript development. Rahmatallahi Taiye OJIBARA conceived and designed the study, collected and analysed the data and drafted the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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