



## Caregivers' Teaching Styles and Preschoolers' Participation in Classroom Activities in Early Childhood Centres in Rivers East Senatorial District, Rivers State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between caregivers' teaching styles and preschoolers' participation in classroom activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Specifically, the study examined how activity-based teaching relates to preschoolers' verbal expression and how collaborative teaching relates to their engagement in group activities. A correlational research design was adopted, and a sample of 698 participants comprising 173 caregivers and 523 preschoolers was drawn from 35 public early childhood centres using multi-stage sampling techniques. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Caregivers' Teaching Styles Questionnaire (CTSQ) and an observation checklist, the Participation in Classroom Activities Observation Checklist (PCAOC). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for data analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression ( $r = .476, p < .05$ ). The study also found a strong, positive, and significant relationship between collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities ( $r = .743, p < .05$ ). Based on these results, the paper concludes that child-centred teaching styles significantly promote preschoolers' participation, language development, and cooperative learning behaviours. It recommends enhanced teacher training, provision of instructional materials, adoption of collaborative and activity-based pedagogies, and improved supervision to strengthen teaching practices in early childhood centres.

**Keyword:** Caregivers Teaching Styles, Preschoolers' Participation, Classroom Activities, Early Childhood Centres, Rivers East Senatorial District

### Introduction

Participation in classroom activities is a vital developmental requirement for preschoolers because it enables them to express ideas, collaborate with peers, build language competence, and develop confidence in learning environments. It also supports socio-emotional functioning by helping children negotiate roles, take turns, follow instructions, and interact with learning materials. According to Udom and Chukwu (2022), participation is essential for effective learning because it cultivates curiosity, strengthens language use, and promotes the development of foundational academic skills. In Rivers East Senatorial District, where early childhood centres vary widely in instructional resources, caregiver competencies, and learner diversity—preschoolers' ability to participate actively is critical for ensuring equitable learning outcomes. Two prominent teaching styles activity-based and collaborative teaching—play significant roles in promoting children's verbal expression and engagement in group activities. Activity-based teaching emphasizes hands-on learning, experiential tasks, and child-centred activities that allow young learners to explore concepts through play, manipulation, and physical involvement. Collaborative teaching, on the other hand, fosters cooperative learning, peer interaction, group assignments, and shared responsibilities. Both styles are developmentally appropriate for early childhood education and are aligned with global best practices in teaching young

learners (Johnson & Carter, 2021). However, despite the importance of these teaching styles, many caregivers in public early childhood centres struggle to implement them effectively. Overcrowded classrooms, limited training, inadequate materials, and pressure to prioritize drilling methods often hinder caregivers' ability to adopt child-centred instructional strategies (Ojoru & Wike, 2020). As a result, preschoolers may exhibit low verbal participation, minimal involvement in group activities, passive learning behaviours, and reduced confidence during classroom engagements. These concerns indicate a pressing need to examine how caregivers' teaching styles influence preschoolers' participation patterns across early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Teaching styles represent the characteristic approaches caregivers adopt when planning, delivering, and managing instructional activities in early childhood settings. These styles influence how young learners interact with materials, peers, and learning tasks; how they respond to instruction; and how they participate in activities that shape their cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic development. According to Bennett and Harris (2020), teaching styles serve as a bridge between instructional goals and children's learning behaviours, determining the extent to which preschoolers become active, expressive, and engaged members of the classroom. In early childhood settings, teaching styles are especially important because children depend largely on caregiver guidance, modelling, and instructional structure to understand expectations and participate meaningfully in classroom activities.

Activity-based teaching is a child-centred instructional approach that prioritizes experiential learning, hands-on exploration, practical engagement, and sensory-rich activities. It encourages children to learn through doing rather than passive listening. According to Malik and Spencer (2021), activity-based teaching promotes holistic development by enabling learners to manipulate objects, experiment with materials, and engage in meaningful tasks that stimulate thinking, movement, and creativity. In early childhood contexts, this teaching style aligns with children's natural desire for exploration and movement, making learning more authentic, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate. Activity-based teaching enhances participation because it captures attention, sustains motivation, and promotes curiosity. In classroom settings, activity-based teaching encourages preschoolers to participate more fully by engaging them in storytelling, role-play, sorting tasks, dramatization, outdoor exploration, puzzle manipulation, and interactive learning stations. Each activity provides opportunities for children to speak, ask questions, express ideas, and collaborate informally with peers. Alade and Benson (2022) emphasize that activity-based learning strengthens communication and participation because children are more likely to express themselves when they are physically involved in stimulating tasks. This teaching style also reduces fear and anxiety among young learners, creating a comfortable atmosphere where they can contribute verbally without fear of making mistakes. Additionally, activity-based teaching allows personalized support, enabling caregivers to provide scaffolding that increases participation among shy or hesitant learners. Although highly effective, the style may be challenging to implement when classroom sizes are large or materials are insufficient.

Collaborative teaching is an instructional approach that emphasizes cooperative learning, shared responsibilities, peer interaction, and teamwork. It involves grouping children to work on shared tasks, solve problems collectively, and support each other in achieving learning objectives. According to Edwards and Fubara (2020), collaborative teaching improves participation because it enables children to learn from peers, negotiate roles, communicate ideas, and jointly construct knowledge. This teaching style creates opportunities for deeper interaction, as preschoolers engage in discussions, group storytelling, joint artwork, building projects, and cooperative play. Through structured collaboration, learners become active contributors to classroom activities rather than passive recipients of information. In early childhood centres, collaborative teaching enhances children's verbal expression and engagement by promoting social communication, turn-taking, idea sharing, and cooperative problem-solving. Young learners become more comfortable speaking in small groups, rehearsing responses, and expressing themselves during group tasks. Research shows that collaboration fosters confidence because children feel supported when working with peers, especially during challenging activities (Nnaji & Peters, 2021). Collaborative teaching also strengthens emotional and social skills, which are essential for group participation. Children learn to listen, respond, and coordinate actions, leading to increased involvement in group activities. However, this teaching style requires classroom management skills, clear routines, and adequate resources to be effective. Without proper guidance, some children may dominate tasks, while others remain passive.

Verbal expression involves a child's ability to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, and responses through spoken language. It encompasses vocabulary use, sentence formation, questioning, storytelling, and conversation. According to Lawson and Steele (2021), verbal expression is a key indicator of classroom participation because it reflects the extent to which learners engage in discussions, respond to instructions, and express their understanding. In early

childhood settings, verbal expression contributes to literacy development, cognitive growth, and social interaction. When caregivers adopt teaching styles that encourage independent thinking and active participation, children are more likely to speak confidently and contribute meaningfully during lessons. Classroom environments that promote free expression also help children develop listening and comprehension skills. Teaching styles greatly influence verbal expression. Activity-based teaching provides opportunities for children to discuss tasks, describe objects, ask questions, and narrate experiences during hands-on activities. Collaborative teaching further enhances verbal expression by encouraging peer-to-peer communication, shared dialogue, collective problem-solving, and cooperative exchanges. According to Chike and Roberts (2022), preschoolers develop stronger language skills when instruction emphasizes interaction rather than rote learning. Additionally, children who participate verbally become more confident and self-regulated. However, verbal participation declines in classrooms where teaching is rigid, teacher-centred, or overly directive. This highlights the importance of teaching styles that prioritize communication and learner involvement.

Engagement in group activities refers to a preschooler's ability to participate actively in collaborative tasks such as group play, joint problem-solving, cooperative games, shared reading, and artistic projects. It demonstrates how well children interact with peers, follow group instructions, contribute ideas, and coordinate actions. According to Ibrahim and Lawson (2020), group activity participation enhances socio-emotional development, builds teamwork skills, and strengthens children's sense of belonging in learning environments. Engagement in group tasks is a major indicator of effective participation because it shows that children are involved, attentive, and supportive of collective learning goals. It also cultivates empathy, negotiation skills, and mutual respect. Teaching styles shape how children participate in group activities. Activity-based teaching fosters group engagement by encouraging shared exploration and collaborative manipulation of learning materials. Collaborative teaching explicitly structures group work, enabling children to take roles, share responsibilities, and discuss solutions. According to Faniyi and Briggs (2021), group-based teaching approaches promote active engagement because they reduce isolation and motivate children to learn from one another. Group participation also supports motor skills, communication, creativity, and problem-solving. Caregivers play an essential role by modeling cooperative behaviour, guiding interactions, and ensuring inclusiveness. However, group participation may decline when teaching styles are overly authoritarian or when caregivers fail to provide clear guidance during collaborative tasks. Given these gaps, this seminar paper investigates the relationship between caregivers' teaching styles particularly activity-based and collaborative teaching and preschoolers' participation in classroom activities, focusing specifically on verbal expression and engagement in group activities. Understanding these relationships is crucial for improving instructional practices, enhancing participation outcomes, and strengthening early childhood education quality across the district.

### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between caregivers' teaching styles and preschoolers' participation in classroom activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between caregivers' use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.
2. Determine the relationship between caregivers' use of collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between caregivers' use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District?
2. What relationship exists between caregivers' use of collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District?

### Hypotheses

**H01:** There is no significant relationship between caregivers' use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

**H02:** Caregivers' use of collaborative teaching style does not significantly relate with preschoolers' engagement in group activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

## Methodology

The study will adopt the correlational research design. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to determine the extent and direction of the relationship between caregivers' teaching styles specifically activity-based and collaborative teaching styles and preschoolers' participation in classroom activities as measured by verbal expression and engagement in group activities. According to Nworgu (2015), correlational design is suitable when the researcher intends to ascertain the degree of association between two or more variables without manipulating them. The choice of this design is justified because both the independent variables (teaching styles) and dependent variables (participation indicators) naturally occur in preschool classroom settings and cannot be experimentally controlled. 4,652 subjects (comprising 1,163 caregivers and 3,489 preschoolers) found across the 233 public early childhood education centres in Rivers East Senatorial District were the population of the paper (Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board, Statistics Unit (RSUBEB, 2024). 698 subjects, which comprised 173 caregivers and 523 preschoolers drawn from 35 public early childhood education centres representing 15% of the target population, formed the sample size for the study. The sample of the study was drawn using the multi-stage sampling technique. In stage one of the sampling process, the researcher used the stratified sampling technique to group the local government areas within Rivers East Senatorial District into two strata; namely, Urban and Rural areas. In stage two, the lottery format of the simple random sampling technique was used to draw two (2) local government areas from each of the strata. In stage three, the ballot without replacement format of the simple random sampling technique will be used in selecting 35 public early childhood centres in the 4 local government areas selected for the study. To do this, the researcher will compile a list of public early childhood centres in the four local government areas, cut them into strips of paper, fold them and put them in a container. The researchers asked the research assistants to pick 35 papers in no particular order; all public early childhood centres that were written on the selected papers formed the sampled centres for the paper. In stage four, the hat and draw format of the simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the caregivers. To do this, the researcher wrote "Yes and No" on small pieces of paper, folded them and put them in a basket. After shaking the basket to mix the papers, the researcher then allowed the caregivers to pick the papers one after the other; all those who picked the papers written 'Yes' formed part of the sample. In stage five, the 4<sup>th</sup>-interval format of the systematic sampling technique was used to draw the preschoolers' sample. To do this, the researchers ensured the preschoolers were seated on their designated seats and began to count from the right-hand side; all those who fell on the 4<sup>th</sup> position at every interval during the count formed part of the paper's sample. The process were undergone in sampled early childhood centres until the sample size was complete. The instruments that were used for data collection in the study were the researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Caregivers' Teaching Styles Questionnaire (CTSQ)" for the caregivers and the observation checklist "Participation in Classroom Activities Observation Checklist (PCAOC)" for preschoolers. The instruments were administered by the help of two well-trained research assistants. To create two arrays of scores for correlation, the mean score for each class was computed by aggregating the preschoolers' scores on verbal expression for each caregiver. This was then matched with the score the caregiver received on activity-based teaching style. Also, the mean score for each class was computed by aggregating the preschoolers' scores on engagement in group activities for each caregiver. This was then matched with the score the caregiver received on collaborative teaching style. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on research question and hypothesis one**

|                               |                     | Activity-based teaching style | Verbal expression |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Activity-based teaching style | Pearson Correlation | 1                             | .476              |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                               | .000              |
|                               | N                   | 173                           | 173               |
| Verbal expression             | Pearson Correlation | .476                          | 1                 |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                          |                   |

\*\*Significant p<0.05

Table 1 above shows the Pearson correlation on the between caregivers' use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) for the relationship between use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression is ( $r=.476$ ) with  $p$ -value .000 lesser than .05. This indicates a positively moderate and significant correlation. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between caregivers' use of activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) on research question and hypothesis one**

|                                | Collaborative teaching style | Engagement in group activities |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Collaborative teaching style   | 1                            | .74**                          |
|                                |                              | .000                           |
|                                | 173                          | 173                            |
| Engagement in group activities | .743**                       | 1                              |
|                                | .000                         |                                |

\*\*Significant  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 above shows the Pearson correlation on the between caregivers' use of collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) for the relationship between caregivers' use of collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities is ( $r=.743$ ) with a  $p$ -value of .000, less than .05. This indicates a strong and significant positive correlation. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that caregivers' use of a collaborative teaching style is significantly related to preschoolers' engagement in group activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District.

## Discussion

The findings of the paper revealed a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between caregivers' activity-based teaching style and preschoolers' verbal expression ( $r = .476$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This implies that the more caregivers adopt activity-based instructional strategies, the more preschoolers demonstrate improved verbal communication, vocabulary use, questioning, and expression of ideas. This finding aligns with the assertions of Alade and Benson (2022) who emphasized that hands-on activities stimulate expressive communication among preschoolers by creating opportunities for children to describe, inquire, narrate, and interact verbally while engaged in meaningful tasks. Likewise, Malik and Spencer (2021) noted that activity-based learning enhances participation because it encourages children to explore materials, discuss their observations, and articulate their thought processes.

The second finding of the paper revealed a strong, positive, and significant relationship between caregivers' collaborative teaching style and preschoolers' engagement in group activities ( $r = .743$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that when caregivers employ collaborative instructional methods—such as cooperative play, group artwork, partner tasks, and team problem-solving—preschoolers participate more actively in joint learning situations. This finding corroborates the view of Edwards and Fubara (2020) that collaborative teaching enhances participation by providing structured opportunities for peer interaction, role-sharing, and teamwork. Preschoolers tend to be more motivated when learning with peers, and collaborative tasks make it easier for young children to follow instructions, support one another, and remain engaged. Similarly, Nnaji and Peters (2021) stressed that peer-supported learning builds confidence, reduces fear of failure, and increases willingness to participate in group assignments. The findings are also consistent with Faniyi and Briggs (2021), who highlighted that group-based teaching strategies boost social participation and help children develop essential social-emotional skills necessary for teamwork and cooperative learning environments.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that caregivers' teaching styles significantly influence preschoolers' participation in classroom activities in early childhood centres in Rivers East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Activity-based teaching style significantly enhances preschoolers' verbal expression. When caregivers adopt

hands-on, child-centred activities, children respond with increased verbal communication, improved vocabulary, and greater confidence in expressing ideas. Collaborative teaching style significantly improves preschoolers' engagement in group activities. Preschoolers participate more actively in group tasks, demonstrate teamwork, and engage in cooperative problem-solving when caregivers utilize collaborative strategies.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Caregivers should be trained regularly on the effective use of activity-based instructional strategies. Workshops and short courses should be organized by SUBEB and other education authorities to strengthen caregivers' competence in using hands-on learning materials and interactive tasks.
2. Early childhood centres should adopt collaborative teaching as a core instructional practice. Caregivers should intentionally structure learning activities that promote teamwork, peer interaction, and cooperative learning among preschoolers.

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