



An Investigation of The Lived Experiences of Nigerian Immigrant Mothers' Engagement with their Children's Early Childhood Care and Education

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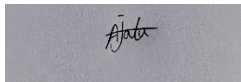
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Signed:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'A. J. ...'.

Date: 15th July 2024.

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Abstract

Parental engagement is an essential element for the development of quality early childhood education and has been proven to have a positive impact on children's learning and development. The study of parental engagement for culturally diverse families has become an important aspect of education. However, a review of the literature shows that less is known about how Nigerian mothers engage with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE) within the Irish context. Nigerians are the largest African immigrant group in Ireland, and the fifth-largest immigrant group overall in Ireland before (Poland, United Kingdom, Lithuania and Latvia). However, their presence is not visible in the Irish early childhood care and education sector in terms of early childhood educational research and early years educators working in the sector (Sabanova and Stout 2023; Knox 2016; Central Statistics Office 2012; Helm 2004). Therefore, this study examines the lived experiences of 15 Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland, with a particular focus on how they engaged with their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood.

The following three research questions frame this study:

- 1. How do Nigerian mothers in Ireland, perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education?*
- 2. What social and cultural factors influence the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's early childhood care and education?*
- 3. How could Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education be enhanced and extended for the benefits of parents, children and early childhood care and education settings?*

The methodology is qualitative, drawing on social constructivism and interpretivism paradigms. Individual interviews were employed as a method to gather data, and this was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Four key themes were identified that provide rich insights into how Nigerian mothers engaged with their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant

status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood.

This study provided first-hand accounts of Nigerian immigrant mothers' perspectives on parental engagement in Irish ECCE. This study showed that parental engagement in ECCE is complex; Nigerian mothers value parental engagement during the early years and their engagement in their children's ECCE is influenced by their culture on gender roles which assigns the roles of childbearing and childrearing to women.

All fifteen Nigerian mothers described the various ways in which they have engaged in their children's ECCE. Engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE is more of home based (e.g., questioning and talking to their children on preschool matters; engagement in play-based learning activities with their children) than preschool based (e.g., attendance at preschool events; seeking feedback from the early years educators with regard to their children's ECCE). Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE is limited in some ways by the cultural context and conceptualisation of engagement they hold. As reported by the Nigerian mothers, the factors that impacted their engagement in their children's ECCE were cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland, restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic and employment.

This study contributes to the body of professional knowledge by presenting an insider account of how Nigerian mothers in Ireland engaged in their children's ECCE. This study is unique in that it is the only focused study to examine Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in ECCE within an Irish context. The findings of this study have the potential to increase Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in Irish early childhood programmes and give early years educators a greater understanding of Nigerian Mothers. This will hopefully lead to a greater mutual understanding that can benefit the children's learning and development.

Acknowledgements

“A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” (John 3:27).

I want to thank God, the giver of life, for granting me the grace to complete this thesis to Him be all the glory, honour and adoration.

A special thanks to my supervisors, Dr Michele Dunleavy and Dr Aimie Brennan, for their support throughout the last five years. Thank you both for working with me tirelessly to actualise this dream of mine. Your words of encouragement and belief in me kept me going until I reached the finish line.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the participants of this study who shared their stories without holding back. I salute their courage and boldness. You are the agent of change and have a place in my heart. This thesis is dedicated to Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland working tirelessly to impact their children's lives positively.

To God be the Glory.

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Abbreviations

CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECCDE	Early Child Care Development and Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECDS	Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria
FRN	Federal Republic of Nigeria
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
NERDC	National Educational Research and Development Council
NPE	National Policy on Education
OMC	Office for the Minister of Children
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter One: Introduction

“According to the Nigerian culture, mothers are critical actors in their children's education process”.

(Aja-Okorie 2013).

Introduction

This research is a phenomenological study of how Nigerian immigrant mothers engaged with their children's early childhood care and education within an Irish context. This study investigates the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE). The study only included Nigerian mothers who had children availing of a free preschool programme between the years of 2020 and 2022. The universal ECCE programme is a state-funded two-year preschool programme available to all children in Ireland between the ages of 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months before they commence primary school (Hanley and Garrity 2022; Hayes et al. 2013).

Specifically, this study includes the voices of fifteen Nigerian mothers and explore the ways in which they engaged with their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood.

Rationale and Motivation for this study

My personal motivation for pursuing this research springs from different sources. It started when I undertook modules titled 'Child, Family and Community 1 and 2' delivered by Mr Caswell and Dr Brennan as part of my undergraduate studies in early childhood care and education. These two modules enlightened me about the benefits of parents and early years educators working together to benefit the child, parents, and early years educators. It helped me develop a vast interest in parental engagement in ECCE and commit to my children's preschool education when they were younger.

Also, having worked in the Irish ECCE sector and completed a series of placements in Irish ECCE settings as part of my undergraduate study. I observed that some immigrant parents were not keen on engaging in discussions with the early year's

educators in relation to their children's progress in the preschool during drop-off or pick-up times, and they do not regularly attend their children's preschool events due to busy schedules, work commitments, language barriers, and many other factors.

Moving on from this event, the main occurrence that triggered my interest in this topic was my experience as a tutor within the Irish further education sector. In June 2018, I went on a week-long Erasmus teachers' program visit to San Miniato, Italy. On this international trip, I visited four different preschool settings within the region, and I observed some effective strategies for engaging parents, such as family workshops, parents sharing their skills in the preschool settings and many more that the educators employed to engage parents in their children's early childhood education which I found very interesting and proactive. Also, during my time as a tutor, the issue relating to the engagement of immigrant parents in their children's ECCE, with particular reference to Nigerian parents, came up during one of my lectures on the course titled QQI Level 6 in early literacy and numeracy skills. One of my students spoke about how her preschool setting organised a multicultural event and invited all the parents to attend, but no immigrant parents, including Nigerian parents, attended, nor were they involved in planning the event. Due to my student's interest in motivating immigrant parents in her preschool setting to actively participate in their children's preschool education, she invited me to speak with immigrant parents to encourage them to actively participate in their children's preschool education. This event sparked my interest in how Nigerian immigrant mothers engaged with their children's ECCE.

Immigrant parents represent a growing but under-represented researched group, who have their own unique experiences and hopes (Anthony-Newman 2019). Nigerians are the largest African immigrant group in Ireland, and the fifth-largest immigrant group overall in Ireland before (Poland, United Kingdom, Lithuania and Latvia). However, their presence is not visible in the Irish ECCE sector in terms of early childhood educational research and early years educators working in the sector (Sabanova and Stout 2023; Knox 2016; Central Statistics Office 2012; Helm 2004). In Ireland, children from different ethnic backgrounds now attend Irish ECCE settings, and there is an increase in the number of children of Nigerian descent attending early childhood services. The cultural diversity now found in ECCE settings has major implications for Irish preschool owners, managers and early years educators in meeting the needs of these children and their families.

Motivating this research is a need to give voice to Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland, as they are often not heard in Irish educational research. Nigerian mothers have important insights into matters that concern their children's ECCE and, like other parents, benefit hugely from being active participants in their children's ECCE.

Research Questions

The following three research questions frame this study:

- 1. How do Nigerian mothers in Ireland, perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education?*
- 2. What social and cultural factors influence the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's early childhood care and education?*
- 3. How could Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education be enhanced and extended for the benefits of parents, children and early childhood care and education settings?*

Addressing these research questions using qualitative empirical data, will help to better understand how Nigerian mothers perceive, and engage with, their children's ECCE. The research explores on the social and cultural factors that prevent Nigerian mothers from engaging in their children's ECCE. Some examples of these factors are cultural differences and ethnic backgrounds, which could prevent immigrant parents from engaging with their children's ECCE (Hickey and Leckey 2021; Lee 2019; Öztürk 2013; Taguma et al. 2010). Identifying and better understanding the factors that prevented Nigerian mothers from engaging in their children's ECCE should help early years educators in Ireland find the best possible ways to eliminate barriers to Nigerian parents' engagement in their children's ECCE and develop more effective parental engagement in ECCE. Based on the data collected in this study from the participants, the answers to this question can help early years educators in Irish ECCE settings map out practical strategies that they can use to support and encourage Nigerian mothers to actively engage in their children's preschool education. The third research question will also illuminate the voices of Nigerian mothers of preschool children about matters that concern their children's ECCE.

Context for this study

Parental engagement, also referred to as parental involvement, family engagement is a complex and largely undefined term. It often involves mothers rather than fathers, and a number of research studies have indicated this (Alharthi 2023; Dooley et al. 2014; Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Moreno and Lopez 1999). The term parental engagement in this study encompasses both home-based and preschool-based engagement. Inspired by the work of Kim et al. (2018), the definition used includes parent's commitment to and actions they do to be engaged in their children's lives at home and/or school to influence their children's overall actions and developmental outcomes, for instance:

- Parents collaborating with the early years educators to promote positive learning outcomes for their children;
- Parent participation in preschool-based events;
- Parent creating a conducive learning environment for their children at home;
- Parents engage in home-based activities such as reading and playing with their children.
- Conversation with the child about preschool during drop off and pick up time.

Past research has focused on parental engagement in ECCE (Kambouri et al. 2022; Gross et al. 2020; Kurtulmuş 2016; Share and Kerrins 2013; Olsen and Fuller 2010). Also, the study of parental engagement for culturally diverse families has become an important aspect of education (Raimbekova 2021; Anthony-Newman 2019; Menon 2013; Taguma et al. 2010; Turney and Kao 2009; Oireachtas Library and Research Service 2008). Likewise, a number of studies have also focused on immigrant mothers' engagement in their children's education (Alharthi 2023; Lirio et al. 2022; Jabar 2015; Dooley et al. 2014; Moreno and Lopez 1999). Fewer international studies in the United States, Greek, Nigeria and Sweden have focused on parental involvement of Nigerian parents in education (Azubuike and Aina 2020; Ekpe 2019; Chukwu 2018; Quaye 2016; Rentzou and Ekine 2017; Fagbeminiyi 2011). In the Irish context, a comprehensive review of the literature indicates that no focused studies have been done on how Nigerian parents engaged with their children's ECCE. Due to the lack of research on how Nigerian immigrant parents in Ireland engaged in their children's ECCE, the researcher seeks to address this gap in the literature. This study gives first-hand expressions to Nigerian immigrant mothers' perspectives on parental

engagement in Irish ECCE settings. This study is unique in that it is the only focused study to examine Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in ECCE within an Irish context.

Parental engagement is an essential element for the development of quality education (Kurucz et al. 2020; Driessen 2019; Kurtulmuş 2016). Also, parents play a central nurturing and educational role in their children's lives, especially during the early childhood period (Spreeuwenberg 2022; Barnardos 2019; Daugherty et al. 2014; OECD 2006). Parental engagement positively impacts children's learning and holistic development (Utami 2022; Oke et al. 2021; Oostdam and Hooge 2013; Fagbeminiyi 2011). However, there are a number of factors that could affect parental engagement in the early years (Kambouri et al. 2022; Levickis et al. 2022; Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020; Lee 2019). Nevertheless, effective communication between parents and educators could strengthen parent-educator relationships (Kurucz et al. 2020; Menon 2013; NCCA 2009; Mitchell and Bryan 2007).

The importance of parental engagement in the early years is recognised in Irish early childhood care and education policies, legislations and frameworks. For example, Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland states that parents are their children's natural and primary educators and have the right to be involved in their children's education. Therefore, they must be consulted concerning their children's education (Mc Partland 2012). Also, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in Ireland in 1992, states that the rights and duties of parents must be respected by all state parties (French 2008). The White Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education highlighted the importance of early years educators involving parents in their children's early education as they are their children's natural and primary educators (Government of Ireland 1999).

Furthermore, the First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 establishes that families must be assisted and enabled to nurture and support their young children's learning and development (Government of Ireland 2018). Equally, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years, and Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, both identify that parents are the primary educators of their children and that they have a role in promoting their children's well-being, learning and

development (NCCA 2009; CECDE 2006). Also, the National Children's Strategy states that parents must be supported and empowered as they afford the best environment for raising their children (Government of Ireland 2000). Therefore, parents play an essential role in their children's education process, and the early years educators have a great responsibility to ensure that the rights of parents in their children's early care and education are respected and valued.

Theoretical Framework for this study

This research is positioned within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological systems theory emphasises the role of parents in their children's lives and the interconnections between two microsystems (the parents and the early years educators), and Joyce Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement which focuses on the interconnected relationships between the child's family, school, and the community to enhance the child's learning and development. In chapter 3 of this thesis, the researcher will discuss the theoretical framework of this study in detail.

Research Design

For this study, a phenomenological research design drawing on social constructivism (knowledge is constructed through interactions with others) and interpretivism (understanding phenomena from the perspectives of individuals) paradigms was used to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE. This research design was suitable because it enabled the researcher to seek in-depth insight into the lived experience of Nigerian mothers in which the experience of ECCE is already rooted (Szanto 2020; Paley 2017). Ethical approval for this study was granted in December 2021 and further approved to extend participants to outside Limerick on the 20th of January 2022 due to difficulty recruiting enough participants in Limerick.

Purposeful sampling was chosen for this study as it was the best sampling criteria relevant to the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE (Pathak 2017; Sharma 2017). Purposive sampling was chosen and based on three criteria: Participants were immigrant mothers of Nigerian descent living in

Ireland, participants had children enrolled in the Universal ECCE Programmes/free-preschool year scheme in the provinces of Ireland for at least three months, and participants could communicate in English or Pidgin English. English language, is the official means of communication used by Nigerians (Aligbe 2017), and Pidgin English, also known as 'Brokin English' is a national but informal language spoken across Nigeria (Ajibade et al. 2012). Pidgin English is a mixed English language with Yoruba and Igbo grammar structure. It is often used to communicate and interact and is widely spoken in Nigeria (Ajibade et al. 2012; Chigozie n.d.).

This study included 15 Nigerian mothers whose children availed of the universal ECCE programme from 2020-2022 in Ireland. (n=3) were from Dublin, four (n=4) were from Galway, three (n=3) were from Cork, and five (n=5) were from Limerick. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews during Phase 1 (January 2022 to February 2022), and Phase 2 (November 2022) to mitigate as far as possible any impact COVID-19 might have on the study and analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2019; 2022).

Reflexive thematic analysis is used to describe the lived experiences of a particular social group, thus applicable to this study as it stresses the Nigerian mothers' perceptions, thoughts, and experiences of their engagement in their children's ECCE (Chang and Wang 2021; Brulé and Finnigan 2020).

Chapter Overview

This research consists of six chapters as follows:

Chapter one introduces the research study and outlines the researcher's personal motivation for researching Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE.

Chapter two presents an analysis of the literature related to this study.

Chapter three comprehensively analyses the research design and methodology employed to answer the research question. It provides the rationale for using a qualitative phenomenology methodology, which was considered the best for this study due to limited available information about the phenomenon and also to enable the voice of the Nigerian mothers whose voices are not currently heard within research (Taherdoost 2022; Liamputtong 2006). In this chapter, the researcher also presented the theoretical framework for this study, justified the use of semi-structured interviews

as the data collection method, and how she dealt with ethical issues that arose in this study.

Chapter four presents a brief overview of the findings from the study. This overview of the findings provides insight into how Nigerian mothers engaged with their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood.

Chapter Five examines and discusses the findings of each theme presented in Chapter Four, with reference to extracts from the interviews with the participants, as well as extracts from the researcher's reflective diary, her perspective as a Nigerian mother, relevant literature from Chapter Two and the theoretical framework of this study. This chapter analyses the study's findings, relates them to the research questions and existing literature, and adds to knowledge on immigrant parental engagement in ECCE.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter, summarises the key findings from this study and its implications and suggests recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE). Behind this research is a need to illuminate the voices of Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland, as they are often not heard in Irish educational research. Specifically, it is hoped that this research will give Nigerian mothers a voice in matters concerning their children's ECCE and encourage Nigerian mothers to be active participants in their children's ECCE. When conducting a literature review on this topic, it was evident that, within the Irish context, no focused research has been carried out on how Nigerian immigrant mothers engaged with their children's ECCE. Due to the absence of research in this area in Ireland, an analysis of the research literature related to Nigerian immigrant mothers and parental engagement in ECCE was done by bridging bodies of international literature on: immigrant parents' engagement in early childhood education, immigrant parents' engagement in primary and secondary schools, parental engagement and participation in education and mothers' engagement in their children's education. This chapter, begins by contextualising the research with a discussion of the universal ECCE programme, followed by the Nigerian community in Ireland, and subsequently, a review of the literature related to the research and embedded questions.

The Universal Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE Programme)

Ireland's commitment to universal Early Childhood Care and Education provision led to the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in 2010 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The ECCE programme replaced the Early Childcare Supplement which amounted to a thousand euros per annum for preschool children between three and three months and four years and six months and has brought significant changes to the lives of young children in Ireland (Hanley and Garrity 2022; Murphy 2015; Hayes et al. 2013; Taguma et al. 2010).

The ECCE programme is a universal approach to free quality early childhood care and education which promotes equality of educational opportunity and outcomes for children between the ages of 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months before

they commence primary school. The universal ECCE programme is available to all children living in Ireland who have turned 2 years and 8 months on or before the 31st of August, provided they will not turn 5 years and 6 months on or before the 30th of June of the year they are moving to primary school (Sloan et al. 2022). The ECCE programme runs from September to June each year, and all young children in Ireland within the eligible age range are entitled to two full academic years before they enter primary school (Hanley and Garrity 2022; Hayes et al. 2013; Taguma et al. 2010). To register a child for the ECCE programme, a pre-registration form must be filled out by the parent providing information such as the child's name, date of birth, PPS number, Eircode and information about the child's ethnic or cultural background for the purposes of the provision of appropriate resources to meet the needs of the child in the ECCE settings (DCEDIY 2019).

Through the ECCE programme, early childhood settings such as playgroups, Montessori, Naíonraí¹, creches and many more in Ireland provide appropriate care and education for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week for 38 weeks of the year to children within the eligible age range (Pre-school childcare n.d.). The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs funds and sets the eligible age for the scheme. However, Pobal, who work on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to improve outcomes for children, pays the weekly rate of €62.50, or €73, to Irish ECCE settings for each child where the pre-school leaders hold a Level 7 or 8 degrees in early childhood care and education (Murphy 2015; Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) n.d.).

Through the provision of free early childhood care and education, the universal ECCE programme helps children develop emotionally, socially, and intellectually; make friends; develop practical life skills such as confidence and creativity; and improve children's concentration by allowing them to listen, take turns, and problem-solve in groups (Sloan et al. 2022; Gunning 2010). It gives preschool access to all children regardless of their parents' employment status and helps young children acquire social skills and foundational learning experiences (Curristan et al. 2023; Sloan et al. 2022; Oke et al. 2019; Barnados 2018). According to Mishra (2012), investment in

¹ Naíonraí are playgroups that operate through the medium of Irish (Donohue and Gaynor 2011).

programmes for young children from birth to six years is the foundation for lifelong learning and development.

Through free access to ECCE, the universal ECCE programme encourages children's holistic development, such as social development, independence to structure, literacy and numeracy skills and prepares children for primary school (Sloan et al. 2022; Ring et al. 2016). Likewise, the universal ECCE programme provides child-centred access to ECCE for all children regardless of their parent's income or employment (Barnados 2018; Ring et al. 2016; Horgan et al. 2014).

While the universal ECCE programme has been successful in broadening access to early childhood education for many, researchers have criticised its current format, suggesting that it is not the most convenient form of ECCE for working parents. Oke et al. (2019) and Hayes et al. (2013) reported that the universal ECCE programme is not feasible for working parents; hence, the Irish government should revisit the programme and consider the childcare needs of working parents. Also, Horgan et al. (2014) stated that the sessional nature of the universal ECCE scheme does not support parents' participation in paid work, as many working parents require full-time childcare. Similarly, Curristan et al. (2023) stated that the ECCE hours do not facilitate employment; thus, it must be increased to offer quality childcare to working parents and quality early education to young children in Ireland, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Mishra (2012), ECCE should support working women and children from underprivileged groups.

Likewise, a report by Barnados (2018) on expanding the ECCE programme suggested that the programme should be offered from an earlier age to benefit more children, especially those from disadvantaged areas. Additionally, Barnados (2018) suggests that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs should increase access to the programme for more children to give them the best possible start in life. In addition, the sixth national Early Childhood Ireland (2023) Barometer on public attitudes to early years and school-age care findings indicates that every child in Ireland should have access to free, high-quality and inclusive early years education. Also, due to the high cost of childcare in Ireland and the lack of affordable childcare for families, the Irish government needs to deliver a universal public childcare model that enables families access to public and affordable childcare

(Creed 2023; Kealy and Devaney 2023). This should be available regardless of their financial situation to allow them to return to work, education, or participate in community and political life and also to secure early years education for their children (Creed 2023; Curristan et al. 2023). Likewise, a study undertaken within the Irish context found that working parents in Ireland need greater parenting support provisions in the form of enhanced childcare support (Hickey and Leckey 2021). Overall, the universal ECCE programme is beneficial to parents and their children. However, a reduction in its age of entry and an increase in the hours could benefit working parents in Ireland and more younger children in Ireland, especially disadvantaged and minority children.

Nigerian Community in Ireland

In recent years, there has been a rise in migration to Ireland, primarily of labour migrants, with an increasing proportion of students and asylum seekers from non-European countries (Ryan and Lannin 2021). Ryan and Lannin (2021) state that immigrants in Ireland are diverse groups in terms of nationality, legal status, ethnicity and language skills. Nigerians are one of this diverse group that immigrate to Ireland.

The asylum process is the primary entry mode for Nigerians to Ireland, such that in 2022 and 2023, Nigerians were among Ireland's top international protection applicants (Conneely 2023; Department of Justice 2023; White 2009; Kómoláfé 2008). Also, in the first six months of 2024, 30 per cent of applications for international protection in Ireland were from Nigerians, the highest number from a single country (McGreevy 2024). Nigerians reflect the largest African immigrant group in Ireland, yet their presence is not noticeable in the Irish education sector (Sabanova and Stout 2023; Knox 2016; Central Statistics Office 2012; Helm 2004).

The number of Nigerians migrating to Ireland has risen rapidly due to Nigerian people's perception that the Irish people are humanitarian, which served as an incentive for contemporary Nigerians emigrating to Ireland (White 2009). According to the Central Statistics Office (2022), 5,149,139 live in Ireland, of whom 631,785 identified as having other nationalities other than Irish. Of this figure, 16,453 identified as Nigerians. This is an increase from 535,475 non-Irish nationals from 200 nations in 2016, of which Nigerians make 6,084 of these figures. There is a decrease of 1.6% in the 2011 census figure of 544,357 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland (Central Statistics Office 2016;

2012). In 2011, 544,357 non-Irish nationals lived in Ireland; Nigerians comprised 17,642 of these figures. This represents a 96.7% increase over the 2006 figures of 16,300 (CSO 2012).

The three main languages Nigerians speak are Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo (Ajibade et al. 2012). According to the Irish population and housing census of 2011, Yoruba and Igbo were the most popular spoken languages by the Nigerian community in Ireland. 10,093 Nigerians spoke Yoruba at home, which makes it the most widely spoken African language in Ireland, while 3,875 spoke Igbo (CSO 2012). In 2013, Nigerians were the largest single group to receive Irish citizenship. It equates to 23.9% of all Irish citizenships granted that year (McMahon 2015).

Ireland has a longstanding relationship and long-lasting history with Nigeria. In the early 20th century, Irish Catholic missionaries travelled to Nigeria to build schools, hospitals, churches, and roads, and these achievements were named after them (Egwu 2020; Ejorh 2007). Guinness beer, an Irish product, is a big name in Nigeria such that in the late 2000s, Nigeria surpassed Ireland to become the second-largest market for Guinness consumption (Palmer 2020; Ejorh 2007). Some of these developments contributed to the relational ties between Nigeria and Ireland and promoted the Catholic faith across Nigeria (Egwu 2020; White 2009). The Irish people who visited Nigeria spoke highly of Ireland as a welcoming country. This may set the scene for the movement of Nigerians to Ireland (White 2009; Feldman et al. 2008).

In 1960, Nigerians began moving to Ireland after gaining their independence from the United Kingdom, and numbers increased rapidly late in the same year because of the Nigerian civil war (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). By the 1980s, Nigerians were among those who temporarily moved to Ireland from the United Kingdom to secure Irish visas. After securing their Irish visa extensions, they moved back to the United Kingdom, and those who could not secure their Irish visas remained illegally in Ireland (Kómoláfé 2008; 2005).

Ireland, in the 1990's saw unprecedented levels of prosperity due to an economic boom that transformed the country. Then, from the late 1990s, Nigerians were among the African immigrants who came to Ireland to study and for economic and political prospects (Iroh 2010; Kómoláfé 2005). Nigerians mainly moved to Ireland from Nigeria and other European Union countries due to Ireland's economic boom, success, and

opportunities, as well as the inequalities in the global economy and financial circumstances experienced at home (Iroh 2010; Kómoláfé 2008; 2005).

The development of Ireland's immigration policies since the late 1990s also encouraged Nigerians to move to Ireland, especially Nigerian asylum-seeking migrants due to religious and ethnic persecution, to exercise their religious beliefs and move freely as a member of an ethnic group (Kómoláfé 2008).

After 1995, Nigerians began moving to Ireland due to the case won by the Fajjonu family against the Minister of Justice in 1987. The couple, a Nigerian national man and his Moroccan national wife, were an undocumented family who moved to Ireland from London (*Fajjonu v Minister for Justice* 1987). They challenged a deportation order against the Minister of Justice (Gerry Collins) based on the fact that their two children were born in Ireland. They won the case and were granted leave to remain due to Articles 40, 41 and 42 of the Irish constitution, which states that children have the right to the parentage of their parents within a family unit (Iroh 2010; Kómoláfé 2008). It then resulted in the prohibition of the deportation of parents of Irish-born children, resulting in more Nigerian women coming to Ireland (Iroh 2010).

In the early 2000s, Ireland became a country of net immigration that made many people enter the country; hence, for the first time, it experienced a significant inflow of migrants from both workers and asylum seekers from outside the European Union such that the numbers of persons seeking asylum increased dramatically from 362 in 1994 to a peak of 11,634 in 2002 with the majority from Nigerians. In 2008, it was noted that 26.1 per cent of asylum applications came from Nigerian nationals (Iroh 2010; Ruhs and Quinn 2009).

Also, many Nigerians migrate to Ireland for education due to the instability in the Nigerian higher education system and better work opportunities due to the closure of many international companies in Nigeria (Iroh 2010; Kómoláfé 2005). Likewise, Nigerians seek stable education in countries such as Ireland due to a lack of teaching aids and instability in the Nigerian academic calendar. Similarly, Nigerians also seek education in countries such as Ireland as a result of non-existent facilities due to a lack of funding in Nigerian universities and schools (Kolawale 2018; Umosen 2018).

In addition to the unstable Nigerian educational environment, poor governance, student unrest and lack of Nigerian universities not ranked globally, some Nigerian

citizens sought higher education in other countries such as Ireland (Kolawale 2018; Umosen 2018; Akinsola 2014; White 2009). Moreover, because access to higher education in Nigeria is based on personal connections and money, Nigerian students are inclined to move abroad to seek education (Willott 2011). Ireland is one of such country, where there is an increase in Irish government funding, greater specialisation of Irish institutions and excellent quality in Irish higher education institutions (Oireachtas Library and Research Service 2014).

In 2002, the Irish government under the presidency of Mary McAleese stretched a hand of friendship to Nigerians in Ireland during the first state visit of the then Nigerian President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo to the Republic of Ireland (Ruhs and Quinn 2009; White 2009). However, in 2003, whatever friendship had previously existed between Nigerians and the Irish government was already deteriorating because Ireland had implemented the safe country of origin concept. The implication is that applicants from countries such as Nigeria were presumed to need refugee protection unless shown otherwise (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). This development led to the deportations of Nigerians who came to seek asylum in Ireland, as Nigeria is perceived as a staff country (White 2009).

Then, the unrest surrounding the newly democratic Nigeria slowed down the rising number of Nigerian's applications for asylum in Ireland (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). However, in Ireland, the experiences of Nigerians continued to centre on race and racism as studies coupled with interviews indicated that black immigrants, particularly Nigerians, experience more racism and discrimination than other immigrants in Ireland (White 2009). However, with this development and the introduction of the Supreme Court decision in the 2004 citizenship referendum, which restricts the citizenship of children born in Ireland to at least one Irish citizen parent or one of the children's parents must have legally lived in Ireland for 3 years prior to the birth of the child (Ejorh 2007). This did not in any form deter Nigerians from migrating to Ireland such that in 2008, 26.1 per cent of asylum applications came from Nigerians (Ruhs and Quinn 2009).

Similarly, Nigerian women moved to Ireland from Nigeria due to their failed marriages. These women felt that Ireland was safer for them as they would not be stigmatized and shamed (Iroh 2010). Also, Nigerian women moved to European countries such as

Ireland for survival, to financially support their families back home in Nigeria, to gain economic independence, and not to be subordinate to Nigerian men in all social and economic contexts (Kastner 2010; Kómoláfé 2008). Likewise, African immigrant women settled in Ireland because it is a safe location for children and allows them to gain employment and start businesses (Garrity and McGrath 2011; Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). In conclusion, Nigerians migrate to Ireland for various reasons, such as gaining employment, studying, and improving their lives and their children.

Challenges Nigerian Immigrants face in Ireland

The decision of the Nigerian mothers to immigrate to Ireland also had its consequences. Research indicates that people who immigrate to Ireland from Africa often experience difficulty settling into the country as a result of separation from their friends and family, which can lead to isolation and emotional trauma. Also, when Africans arrive in Ireland to seek asylum, they are often dispersed outside Dublin, which can be an unsettling experience of personal hardship for them (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). Likewise, the process of Africans seeking accommodation and employment in Ireland can be frustrating as they are often disadvantaged (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007; Mutwarasibo 2002). This is due to factors such as non-recognition of their academic achievements, language difficulties, cultural differences, lack of Irish language, and lack of work experience in Ireland (Mutwarasibo 2002). The issue of having academic achievements and being unable to get a good job in the host country is common among migrants (Al-deen and Windle 2015).

According to Osuofa (2021), immigration involves emotional pains and challenges as it uproots people from a familiar social and cultural context to an unfamiliar one. Immigration can be stressful due to the process of adjusting to a new culture and difficulty gaining employment (Onwujuba et al. 2015; Garrity and McGrath 2011). Hence, immigrants require additional support to adjust to their host countries and access language supports (Mutwarasibo 2002). According to Hickey and Leckey (2021), there is a strong need for migrant-led peer or parent-parent network support for immigrants in Ireland due to an absence of such resources in Ireland and barriers to engaging in community networks such as language barriers, discrimination, and stigma.

In Nigeria, it is common for family members to help raise children as there is a strong emphasis on communal living, which extends to parenting, in the Nigerian culture (Leaticia 2024). However, in Ireland, Nigerian mothers might experience difficulty raising their children and fitting into the Irish system due to a new unsupportive and permissive culture that is different from theirs. Mothers can find it challenging to cope with the tasks of their daily lives in Ireland due to the lack of support system of their family and friends, which is prevalent among immigrant parents (Kealy and Devaney 2023; Mostoway 2020; Fleck and Fleck 2013; Shor and Bernhard 2003). Hence, immigrants to Ireland need extra support to navigate different systems, such as education and healthcare and to gain access to appropriate services in Ireland (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

Support from family and friends is important in Nigerian culture. It is seen as a way to strengthen family ties and pass on cultural traditions and values from generation to generation (Leaticia 2024). However, the absence of family support for African parents in Ireland can affect them negatively as the childcare support they get in Ireland has to be paid for and is usually expensive (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). Also, research indicates that childcare is a critical issue for African immigrants in Ireland due to the lack of established community support and institutional infrastructures that are not available to them in Ireland (Mutwarasibo 2002).

Nigerian mothers depend heavily on their family network for support and guidance when it comes to rearing their children. They often seek counsel from older relatives when making decisions regarding their children's upbringing (Leaticia 2024). Also, Nigerian mothers are inclined to live in a community built on ties and connections with their families and friends; however, when they migrate to Ireland, they often face the dilemma of living alone coupled with rearing their children without any support, which is a common problem immigrant parents experience irrespective of their host countries (Mostoway 2002). Also, Nigerian mothers are faced with the difficulty of instilling their culture and values in their children due to changes in their role with parenting, differences in parenting practices between Ireland and Nigeria and the new Irish culture, which they might not fully understand which is a problem prevalent among immigrant families (Dalikeni 2021; Hickey and Leckey 2021; Fleck and Fleck 2013). Hence, research shows that migrant parents must be supported in their parenting journey, particularly within the first months of their arrival in Ireland, and signposted to

ongoing parenting support in Ireland to decrease their parenting stress and for them to learn appropriate discipline practices as well as adjust to Irish parenting culture (Hickey and Leckey 2021). Likewise, it is also essential that there is parenting support for migrant parents in Ireland that acknowledges their cultural values and traditions (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

From a younger age, Nigerian mothers must teach their children respect for elders by using formal language and avoiding eye contact when talking to elders. This is highly valued and rooted in the Nigerian culture (Leaticia 2024). However, when they moved to Ireland, they often faced the challenge of disciplining their children due to changes in parenting roles as a result of the new culture, for which they were unprepared. This is typical for African immigrant parents (Dalikeni 2021; Onwujuba et al. 2015). Due to differences in parenting patterns between Irish and Africans, African parents in Ireland find it challenging to discipline their children the way their culture permits (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). For example, as a result of the ban on corporal punishment in Ireland, it could be challenging for African immigrant parents to adopt appropriate discipline practices when confronted with their children's misbehaviours, which may result in significant parenting challenges in the host country (Hickey and Leakey 2021). Hence, research suggests that there is a need for training on child development to help parents of young children mitigate concerns that they might have about disciplining their children, as easily accessible interventions can contribute to positive outcomes while avoiding stigmatisation (Leitão 2023; Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020). Overall, it is evident that Nigerian immigrant parents often experience challenges in Ireland, and there is a need for support that acknowledges their cultural values and traditions in Ireland both from a government policy perspective, and also from a social and emotional perspective.

Nigerian Culture

Before discussing Nigerian culture, the term 'culture' will be defined. The word 'culture' is derived from a French term meaning to cultivate or nurture (Pappas and McKelvie 2022). Culture can be defined as the cognitive codes and maps, norms of appropriate behaviour, assumptions about values and worldviews shared by a group or society (Shafiq 2015). Also, culture is defined as the characteristics and knowledge of a group of people surrounding their language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, arts and

many more (Pappas and McKelvie 2022). According to Causadias (2020), culture is a source of diversity as it binds people-places-practices together into a system. People create culture through shared practices in places, shaped by how people engage in practices and build places. Therefore, there is no culture without people and no people without culture (Causadias 2020).



Figure 1: African Map, source: (Maps Nigeria 2024).

In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from British rule (Dass and Shehu 2018). Nigeria is located in West Africa and shares boundaries with the Republic of Benin to the west, Chad and Cameroun to the east, Niger to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. Nigeria is the single largest black nation, the most populated, the largest country in Africa, one of the richest African countries and one of the largest producers of oil in the world (Dass and Shehu 2018; Gbadegesin 2018; Adams 2016; Chigozie n.d). According to Adams (2016), Nigeria is ranked the world's seventh most populated country.

The three largest and most dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria are Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Igbo, and each has its own language (Alake 2021; Aligbe 2017; Obomanu 2017; Ajibade et al. 2012; Chigozie n.d.). The Hausa-Fulani predominantly occupy the country's Northern region; the Igbos occupy the South-East, and the Yoruba occupy the South-Western region. The capital of Nigeria is Abuja, and Lagos is the country's largest city (Ogbozor 2016; Chigozie n.d.).

The official language in Nigeria is English, which is used as the primary means of communication in all government interactions and schools. Pidgin English, a pseudo-lingua Franca, is Nigeria's national but informal language. Pidgin English, often referred to as 'Broken' is a mix of English language with Yoruba and Igbo grammar structure, and it is often used to communicate, interact and be widely spoken in Nigeria without any formal education (Alake 2021; Ajibade et al. 2012; Chigozie n.d.).

Nigeria is a developing country with poor health facilities, low literacy rates, a high infant mortality rate and a poor standard of education. The population of Nigeria is over 210 million (Omorogiwa 2022; Ogazi 2021). The Nigerian society is patriarchal, a traditional system in which power is in the hands of men and this is rooted in Nigeria's cultural and religious beliefs that put women in the same place as children and men as breadwinners (Ogu and Areji 2023; Uthman and Uthman 2021; Adeyemi 2016; Makama 2013). Women constitute half of the population of Nigeria, and they are often reduced to second-class citizens; hence, the common saying 'the best place for women is in the kitchen' (Makama 2013; Uthman and Uthman 2012). This results in gender disparity in Nigeria, which cuts across the social, economic and political landscapes (Omorogiwa 2022; Oluwalogbon 2021; Adams 2016; Adams and Jenyo 2016). Given the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, women occupy the base of the socio-cultural ladder, which enables men to dominate them, hence the reason they face discrimination in home and cultural matters (Ogu and Areji 2023; Omorogiwa 2022; Makama 2013).

Nigerian Child Rearing Practices

Child-rearing is the interaction between the child and the caregiver, in this case, the parents, in which the child achieves moral values and grows holistically (Adamu 2018). In Nigeria, children are nurtured and raised by their parents. However, the parents' attitudes, beliefs, and educational status often influence their child-rearing practices,

discipline, and parenting style (Adamu 2018; Doherty-Mason 2008). As a result of the parenting style of Nigerian parents, which is heavily influenced by their cultural beliefs and values, this influences the way they raise their children (Leaticia 2024).

The birth of a new baby is hugely celebrated in Nigeria by all, as children are considered treasured gifts from God and taken care of seriously (Ajayi and Owumi 2013; Okafor 2003). Each ethnic group in Nigeria has different child-rearing practices and instils values in its tribe and generations of offspring. However, across these ethnic groups, the boys are trained to be dominant, defensive, and strong, while the girls are trained to be submissive, humble, caring, perform domestic chores and take care of the home (Nwoke 2013).

Nigerian parenting styles are rooted in the values and beliefs of the Nigerian culture and are passed down to generations (Leaticia 2024). Nigerian parents are authoritative, and they discipline their children with the hope of bringing up excellent human beings and outstanding world citizens (Doherty-Mason 2008). According to Barnardos (2023), authoritative parents are strict and demanding in nature. Nigerian parents are strict with their children regarding respecting elders as they expect their children to be courteous to their elders, especially those within their own family and community. This is seen as a way to pass down their traditional values to the next generation and maintain the family and community bond (Leaticia 2024).

From an early age, children are trained to be obedient, respectful, and submissive to elders and to abide by the Nigerian culture. The use of corporal punishment is widely accepted as a norm in Nigeria as there is a socio-cultural belief in corporal punishment. It is not limited to homes but schools, the judicial system, and other early childhood institutions (Edo 2021; Nwafor 2021). In the Nigerian culture, control practices such as scolding, spanking, deprivation of playtime, name callings in anger, harsh tone of voice and facial expressions are permitted to prevent children from misbehaving and losing focus in life (Okafor 2003). According to Nigerian culture, children are expected to behave well; hence, when they disobey, discipline is often administered through physical punishment (Leaticia 2024). The reliance on corporal punishment is rooted in Nigerian religious, cultural, social, and moral beliefs (Nwafor 2021). In general, culture plays a role in how Nigerian parents rear their children.

The Role of Nigerian Mothers in their Children's Care and Education

In the Nigerian culture, gender roles continue to influence crucial decisions in the family; hence, men are to provide materially for their families (Adams 2016). As a rule, in Nigeria, men are referred to as heads of household and decision-makers while women are confined to domestic responsibilities such as bearing and rearing children and looking after the home and these roles are attributed to the Nigerian culture (Makama 2013; Uthman and Uthman 2012; Salami 2007). The Nigerian culture perceives and treats men as superior to women; thus, women are restricted to stereotypical roles such as home keepers, child bearers and child rearers irrespective of their social, educational or economic status (Ogu and Areji 2023; Adams and Jenyo 2016).

Motherhood is of major significance in Nigerian culture; hence, it is the role of women to give birth to children (Adams and Jenyo 2016; Dein and Dimka 2013; Salami 2007). However, all these roles accord Nigerian women the responsibility of solely overseeing their children's early care and education. The Nigerian culture places so much value on the importance of women as homemakers, and failure to fulfil these roles causes Nigerian women to experience the wrath of their husbands and families (Makama 2013; Salami 2007).

The traditional role of Nigerian mothers includes teaching, guiding, bearing and raising children to become lasting, solid members of the public (Azubuike and Aina 2020; Adams and Jenyo 2016). Other roles of Nigerian mothers include talking to their young children during daily routines such as feeding, bathing, changing times, and teaching them to be obedient and respectful (Onwujuba et al. 2015; Burns and Radford 2008).

Earlier in Nigerian history, women used to work longer hours in their homes and farms, but due to modernisation, numerous Nigerian women are now educated, and they have to combine working outside their homes and looking after their families, i.e., marriage and child-rearing (Salami 2007). In Nigeria, the bond between mother and child is solid, and the mother is never far away from the child during the first few years of a child's life (Nigeria n.d.).

In the Nigerian culture, women are critical actors in their children's education process because of their natural affinities and innate love for teaching and nurturing the

children, coupled with their ability to do this (Aja-Okorie 2013). When a child is born, the mother starts to raise the child and attune to the child's emotions and moods; hence, mothers are best positioned to sense how their children learn best (De Burca 2013; Dein and Dimka 2013).

In Nigeria, parenting is considered the responsibility of the extended family and not just the immediate parents (Okafor 2003). Also, childrearing is a shared responsibility of all members of a community as children are often reared by a relative other than the biological parents, and all members of a community have a stake in the upbringing of a child regardless of whether they are biologically related (Onwujuba et al. 2015; Ajayi 2006).

Likewise, in Nigeria, working and new mums often resort to fostering through their lineage network to combat childcare issues (Onwujuba et al. 2015). From an African perspective, African women value family support; hence, they traditionally receive support from extended families and grown-up daughters in performing child-rearing and early childhood education tasks. Thus, communal parenting is a norm in the African culture (Dalikeni 2021; Garrity and McGrath 2011; Ajayi 2006).

Traditionally, in African society, it is the norm that women inculcate discipline into their children as they are considered the first and best teachers; thus, they are responsible for caring for the African child (Ajayi 2006). In an African home, mothers traditionally provide emotional care. They are the primary and most crucial caregiver of the child as men are considered to neglect their caring responsibilities as they show little concern for the well-being of their children (Haagsman and Mazzucato 2014). In general, mothers have the potential to play the essential role of educators in a child's early life as they are the key caregivers and can sense every aspect of their children's education (De Burca 2013).

Under the African mother's guidance, the child undertakes the journey of discovery and receives love and affection, which assists them in developing a sense of security and emotional stability and becoming successful adults. Also, African mothers motivate their children toward education, which contributes to the children's success (Umeana 2017; Haagsman and Mazzucato 2014). Mothers are active participants in their children's learning, and their love and attitude often make their children's brains healthy and ready to learn (Tobin et al. 2022; De Burca 2013). According to Alharthi

(2023) mothers are more active in their children's learning process. Likewise, mothers are the sole caregivers for their children, and their maternal roles are deemed critical to their children's growth and development (Lirio et al. 2022). In addition, educated mothers often support their children's education in numerous ways, such as providing stimulating activities for their children's development and advocating for their children's education. They are part of the social networks relevant to their children's academic success (Sutherland 2015). Overall, the role of Nigerian mothers in their children's care and education is influenced by their culture on gender roles, level of education, social class, and urbanisation (Gbadegesin 2018).

The Nigerian Early Child Care and Development Educational Context

Early childhood education is the key foundation of the Nigerian educational system and the bedrock upon which all other educational levels are built (Arop et al. 2018; Nwuche 2018; Obiweluzor 2015). In Nigeria, early childhood education is defined as semi-formal education through play-like activities offered to children both male and female who have yet to attain the constitutional age of 6 (Ibhaze 2018).

Early childhood education is the foundation of the child's education; thus, it forms an integral part of their early education, which may be formal or informal in an educational institution (Ibhaze 2018). In Nigeria, early childhood education is called Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) and caters to a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development and education (Gabriel 2015; Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council 2013). The Nigerian Early Child Care Development and Education are segmented into ages 0-4 years, located in day-care or creches and entirely in the hands of the private sector and social development and ages 5-6 within the Nigerian formal education sector (NERDC 2013). As a result of day-care and creches being entirely in the hands of the private sector, the cost influences the number of Nigerian children with access to them.

Before 1977, Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain. Upon independence in 1960, Nigeria continued to use this system until Nigeria developed its own educational system (Okoroma 2006). In 1842, the Christian missions started formal Western education, excluding early child care development for children and adult converts in Nigeria (Gabriel 2015). Then, the first infant school in Nigeria was opened in 1942 by the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries, 100 years after formal

Western education had started in Nigeria. However, the first well-known nursery school in Nigeria was established in 1961 (Bernard Carr Street Port Harcourt Rivers State) by a non-government group called 'The Young Women's Christian Association' (Gabriel 2015; Fafunwa 1974).

Throughout the colonial era, faith-established non-governmental organisations controlled ECCDE in Nigeria since the post-colonial private individuals dominated the sector (Gabriel 2015). Prior to 1960, before Nigeria got its independence from Britain, all efforts to provide early child care development and education were limited to the voluntary sector, and there was little or no support for the sector from the government (Sooter 2013).

In Nigeria, official recognition was given to pre-primary education (Early Child Care Development and Education) in the National Policy on Education (1977) as the military government saw the link between early childhood education and children's educational performance in primary school. Before 1977, parents did not value pre-primary education, as they often preferred to keep their children with extended family members for childcare purposes rather than sending them to day-care centres or nursery schools (Obiweluzor 2015). The Nigerian government's involvement in early child care development and education became noticeable following the UN Convention (1990), which states the child's right to basic education and that the government should ensure free universal education accessible to all (Gbadegesin 2018).

Prior to the 21st century in Nigeria, mothers were mainly at home nurturing their children before they entered school at age 6. Therefore, mothers are the ones who teach their children values, morals, cultures, and traditions before they enter primary school (Rentzou and Ekine 2017). Before 2014, early child care development and education in Nigeria, the key foundation of the Nigerian educational system, was for children aged between 3 and 5 years, with children then entering primary education at age 6 (NERDC 2013). Then, in 2014, a review of early child care development and education was carried out in Nigeria, which prompted the inclusion of children from birth to five years in the age bracket for early child care development and education curriculum (Salami 2016).

Although the early child care development and education are drafted for pre-schoolers or children ages 0-6 years in the Nigeria policy of education, there are three forms of

pre-primary education in Nigerian namely: the creche, the nursery and the kindergarten (Umana 2018; NERDC 2013). The creche is six months to two years; nursery is two years to four years; kindergarten/pre-primary education is five years to six years old within the formal education sector before children start primary school (Gabriel 2015; NERDC 2013).

Although the Nigerian federal government recognises pre-primary education in the national policy on education, the government's financial contribution to pre-primary education is insignificant. The government only financed early child care development and education at the federal level in Nigeria through the Early Child Care (ECC) project of the NERDC in collaboration with UNICEF and other international agencies (Obiweluozor 2015). While the Nigerian government is not directly involved in creche and nursery schools, as private and social development services manage these, the Nigerian government continues to play a regulatory role over policy guidelines for establishing and managing all pre-primary institutions (Gabriel 2015; Obiweluozor 2015).

In August 2004, experts and stakeholders such as parents, teachers, government agencies, researchers and many more in early child care in Nigeria held a meeting with the support of UNICEF, which led to the production of the national minimum standards for early child care centres in Nigeria (Obiweluozor 2015). Then, in 2014, the federal government of Nigeria, with the support of the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF), implemented a 1-year pre-primary school education curriculum with the expectation of giving all children between the ages of 5 and 6 years access to a compulsory free pre-primary education (Salami 2016). The compulsory free pre-primary education was rolled out in 2014, but due to limited access and funding, not all children between the ages of 5 and 6 could avail of the scheme.

Before the introduction of the compulsory preschool year in 2014 in Nigeria, most preschool children were seen on the farm or in the marketplace with their parents. Only a few children of wealthy and middle-class earners attended standard/private preschools (Rentzou and Ekine 2017). As important as early child care development and education are for children's development, a report in 2017 found only 35.6 per cent of children aged 36-59 months attended an organised early childhood education programme in Nigeria (Omeje 2017; UNICEF 2013).

Another report in 2019 also found that out of over 146 thousand public classrooms required for preschool education in public school in Nigeria, only 100.4 thousand public classrooms were made available. This indicates that there is a lack of over 45.6 thousand public classrooms for pre-primary education in Nigerian public schools (Sasu 2023).

In response to the 2017 and 2019 reports, the Lagos state government, in October 2019, introduced more ECCDE classes in public schools to encourage learning from a younger age (SUBEB Chair advocates early childhood education n.d.).

In Nigeria, there is no uniformity in the ECCDE curriculum, quality of teachers, equipment, facilities, teacher/pupil ratio, fees, and activities among ECCDE providers. Hence, most ECCDE providers adopt foreign early year's curricula from the British, American and many more (Gabriel 2015).

As stated in the 2013 Nigerian National Policy on Education, the teacher-pupil ratio is 1:10 for the Creche and 1:25 for the Nursery with a helper and an assistant (NERDC 2013). The objectives of Nigeria's early child care development and education, according to the National Educational Research and Development Council (2013), are:

To effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; To prepare the child for the primary level of education; To provide adequate care and supervision for the children while parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or in offices; To Inculcate social norms; To Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit; To Learn good habits especially good health habit; Creativity through exploration of nature, the environment, art, music, playing with toys and so on through a well-planned out curriculum and to teach the fundamentals of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, and forms and many more through play (NERDC 2013, p.5).

As a consequence, Nigeria's early child care development and education sector, teacher's quality is low as most teachers are school certificate holders. Only a few preschool institutions employ university graduates and holders of Nigerian Certificates in Education (NCE), negatively impacting effective teaching and learning in the sector (Arop et al. 2018; Nwuche 2018).

In Africa, while the government plays the primary role in providing schooling, parents decide when to send their children to school and how long they remain there (Llyod and Balnc 1996). Although it is the role of the Nigerian government to provide free education, Nigeria still has an estimated 13.2 million out-of-school children who do not receive a formal education, the highest in the world due to a lack of access to basic education in many communities (Adedigba 2019).

In Nigeria, because of lower budgetary allocation and the privatisation of the education sector, most parents find it expensive to send their children to school, including preschool (Adedigba 2019; Arop et al. 2018). Although in Nigeria, the government has to provide education, due to a lack of resources, the need for a better education for students, and because Nigeria's education is a large expenditure item, which the Nigerian budgets cannot cater to, hence the sector became privatised (Chikwem 2008). Also, because of the lack of financial inability of the government to purchase items such as computers, the inability to build sufficient classrooms and the lack of quality and standard in the public schools, the Nigerian education sector became privatised (Kolawale 2018; Willott 2011).

Timeline of Nigerian Early Child Care Development and Education Policies

Below is a basic representation of Nigerian's early child care development and education policies. It covers the periods between 1977 and 2013.



Figure 2: Timeline of Nigerian Early Child Care Development and Education policies.

The policy timeline represents the changes that took place over time in early child care development and education in Nigeria. The first educational policy in Nigeria that included early child care development and education in its provisions was the National Policy on Education in 1977, then revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2008 and 2013. The National Policy on Education (1977) emphasised the need for the Nigerian early childhood curriculum to aid the early acquisition of Nigerian languages at the pre-primary school level. The Nigerian government believes that Nigerian children must be proficient in their mother tongue as opposed to English, the official language, hence enforcing the three main languages, Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, at the pre-primary level of education (Udoye 2016). Then, in 1981, the National Policy on Education was revised to promote Nigerian languages and culture. It values the Nigerian early childhood curriculum to ensure the teaching mode is mainly the child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate community (NPE 1981). Fast forward to 1998, the National Policy on Education was revised to improve the quality of Nigerian education by including the English language in the nation's educational system. The implication was that native tongues were abolished in the Nigerian early childhood education sector, and English is now the main mode of teaching in the entire Nigerian educational system (Kolesnik 2017; Okanlawon 2006). In 2004, the National Policy on Education was revised to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers and to embrace the engagement of parents in education. It was also revised to develop a suitable curriculum that emphasises the importance of play in pre-primary and focuses on the teachers-pupils in Nigeria's early childhood curriculum (FRN 2004).

While the National Policy on Education (2004) recommends that children in pre-primary education should be engaged in active learning, there are no guidelines on how to go about this; hence, the development of the early childhood curriculum in Nigeria rests in the hands of owners and teachers (Shoaga 2016). However, it was noted that a typical Nigerian preschool curriculum emphasises the intellectual development of the children and other key areas such as learning alphabets, numbers, colouring, storytelling, nursery rhymes, reading, writing and many more (Kolesnik 2017).

Before 2004, parental engagement was not the focus of Nigeria's National Policy on Education. To embrace the engagement of parents in education, the National Policy on Education (FRN 2004) gave a mandate that parents should be part of the school

management to combat poor student conduct in and out of school, poor academics, poor schooling and many more (Olibie 2014; Kutelu and Olowe 2013). This mandate gave birth to the Nigerian National Parent Teachers Association in private and public schools to ensure parents are part of the preschool and school management (Olibie 2014).

With the mandate, it was established that privately owned preschools engaged parents more in their children's preschool education than those attending public schools. Also, a Nigerian study in 2013 on the level of parent involvement in primary school education found the level of parents' engagement in the provision of instructional materials, curriculum implementation and administration were low in public primary schools (Rentzou and Ekine 2017; Kutelu and Olowe 2013). In a quest for private schools in Nigeria to engage parents in their children's education, the National Parents Teachers Association of Nigeria devised 100 ways parents could engage in their children's education. The National Parents Teachers Association is an integral part of the Nigerian education system, and its role is to serve as a link between the school and the home to create a conducive atmosphere that will facilitate the process of learning and teaching in schools (Obi 2016). Some of the 100 ways the National Parents Teachers Association devised to bridge the gap between homes and schools in Nigeria are opportunities for parents to engage in decision-making, influence policy enactment and implementation, enforce discipline, negotiate and collaborate in curriculum, supervise and monitor school processes, and provide staff funds and facilities (Olibie 2014). The National Parents Teachers Association believed that through these methods, good working relationships would be established between the home and the school, which would be fruitful in nurturing the children (Obi 2016; Olibie 2014). Moving on to 2007, with support from The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centres was produced by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). This standard was developed to ensure the standardisation of the practices and operation of pre-primary education in Nigeria (Odiagbe 2015). Also, the standard emphasises the minimum standard for operating ECCE centres in Nigeria and highlights early childhood in Nigeria as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3 to 5 plus before primary school (Salami 2016; NERDC 2007).

In the same year, 2007, the government of Nigeria implemented a multi-sectoral approach to early child-care development and education by establishing guidelines to promote the provision of Early Childhood Development Services (Newman and Obed 2015). Then, in 2008, the National Policy of Education was revised to include early childhood education (0-5) under basic education (FRN 2008). In 2013, the National Policy on Education specified Early Child Care Development and Education for ages 0-4 years and a 1-year pre-primary education for ages 5- 6 years (NERDC 2013). The policy specifies the categories of pre-primary education that exist in Nigeria. In the same year, 2013, a guideline was produced for teachers, parents, and other stakeholders on providing learning experiences for children ages 0 to 5 years (Salami 2016). To ensure quality in the Nigerian early childhood sector, The Early Childhood Development Standards for Nigeria (ECDS) were published to cover early learning and development standards such as physical, language, safety, gender issues, and many more. This was the last document published on early child care development and education in Nigeria, which specified the standards and safety measures in the Nigerian early childhood sector (Salami 2016).

The Irish Early Childhood Care and Education Context and Parental Engagement

Early childhood care and education in Ireland covers birth to six years. It includes infant classes in primary schools and childcare and preschool services (Mc Partland 2012; Early childhood education n.d.). In Ireland, a combination of voluntary, community, and private services offers early childhood care and education (Murphy 2015). Prior to this development in the 1980s and 1990s, only a few nurseries existed because the female labour force was low, coupled with the fact that working parents relied mainly on childminders or family members to look after their children (Donohoe and Gaynor 2011). For the main part of the 20th century, young children were cared for in the family home, worked on the farm, and added economic value to the family (Fallon 2005). The recent development in the ECCE sector began because many women decided to return to education or join the workforce and the need for quality early years services. It was the case because of the lifting of the marriage bar² in the

² The Marriage bar was the first of a series of restrictive measures adopted by successive governments in Ireland to curtail women's participation in public life and the public sector. The marriage bar is a situation whereby women working in the public sector and some areas of the private sector had to resign from their positions upon marriage (Redmond et al. 2023).

civil service in July 1973, which restricted women from employment (Murphy 2015; Donohoe and Gaynor 2011; Fallon 2005).

The past decades have seen a rapid increase in the development of early childhood services in Ireland for these reasons: increased participation by women in the paid labour force and recognition of the value of play and socialisation opportunities for children's development (Flood and Hardy 2013). According to Domina (2005), parental engagement policies strive to distribute cultural and social capital and boost the resources accessible to disadvantaged children. Pre-1990, early childhood issues did not receive important attention in educational dialogue and policy in Ireland because the sector was mainly a matter of the family, especially mothers (Coolahan 2017). After 1990, the government began paying attention to and investing in early childhood education issues due to the increase of women in the labour market, to make family issues equitable for women, and the need to combat childcare issues which prevent immigrant parents from accessing work and from addressing educational disadvantages that young children might face (OECD 2006).

From 1991 to date, Irish policies and legislation have reflected the distinctive role of parents as the natural and primary educators of the child with duties and rights to active participation in their children's early childhood care and education. Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland recognises parents as the primary educators: The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the holistic development of their children (Bunreacht na hEireann 1937). Despite the constitutional recognition of parents as primary educators, it was not reflected in government policy. However, this changed a little in the 1960s and 1970s as researchers began to focus on the importance of parental engagement from the earliest age in the educational development of children (Kavanagh 2013; Barnardos 2006). In the 1980s, there was an increased demand from the public for more direct involvement in decisions affecting all aspects of their lives. It led to the establishment of The National Parents Council in 1985, which has the same rights to consultation as the management and teachers' unions (Barnados 2006).

Moving from the 1980s, in 1991, The Child Care Act 1991 was published, and this was the starting point for the most significant changes in Irish ECCE. The Child Care Act

1991 offers family support services where necessary, made the Irish government commit to the care and welfare of all children, and drew required attention to the constitutional rights of every child to be cared for in the family (Mc Partland 2012).

However, in 1991, there was still a vacuum regarding parental engagement in early childhood education. In line with the need for parental engagement in Irish education, the Irish government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child in 1992. It gave parents the right to active participation with the educators (The Children's Rights Alliance n.d.).

Although Article 5 of the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child gave parents the right to active participation with the educators, there was still a need for strategies to facilitate parental engagement in early childhood education. In response, the Ready-to-Learn White Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education was established in 1999 to employ meaningful dialogue and strategies, such as increased parenting courses and unfettered parent access to preschool settings. Also, the Ready-to-Learn White Paper was implemented to facilitate parental engagement in early childhood education and to strike a balance between the needs of early childhood educators, parents and, most notably, the children (Government of Ireland 1999).

Then, in 2000, to promote more dialogue in terms of parental engagement in early childhood education, the National Children's Strategy was established to view quality childcare services by taking family-friendly measures to understand children's lives from the whole child's perspective, most importantly, family, childcare, and education. These family-friendly measures include cultural activities that enrich children's childhood, opportunities and experiences that reflect the diversity of needs in the ECCE settings and many more (Government of Ireland 2000). In 2001, the Family Support Agency Act emphasised the need to promote information about issues on parenting (Connolly and Devaney 2017).

Moving on to 2006, the Pre-School Regulations were established to better understand children's lives from the family's perspectives. The Pre-School Regulations enabled early years settings in Ireland to implement inclusion policies. They formed a comprehensive set of policies and procedures in consultation with parents, staff, and children where appropriate. The Pre-School Regulations also facilitate parents to make informed decisions about their children's early childhood education and work in

partnership with the early childhood educators to enhance their children's experience in the service (Department of Health 2006).

Also, in 2006, the Diversity and Equality Guidelines were established to acknowledge parents as the most knowledgeable regarding culture, background, language, and needs. The diversity and equality guidelines policy prompted Irish early childhood settings to seek information from parents on how their children's culture could be valued and celebrated (OMC 2006). Additionally, because of the diversity and equality guidelines, Irish early years settings now implement strategies such as celebrating festivals such as Saint Patrick's Day, Eid Mubarak, and many more, as well as having words representing children's languages displayed in early years settings.

Due to the continuous attention placed on the importance of parental engagement in early childhood care and education settings and in the quest that Ireland needs an evidence-based national framework for parental engagement in early years, Siolta Quality Standards was established in 2006 and Aistear Curriculum Framework was published in 2009 (Kavanagh 2013).

Siolta, the National Quality Framework for early childhood education, recognises parents as the child's primary educators and their pre-eminent role in promoting a child's well-being, learning and development (CECDE 2006). Siolta acknowledges parental engagement in early childhood care and education by prompting early childhood settings in Ireland to have open-door policies where parents can discuss issues concerning their children with staff members. Siolta was also established so that early childhood educators can keep parents in the loop about their children's learning and development through various means such as phone calls, meetings and many more.

Aistear The Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework emphasises parents' role in its twelve learning and development principles. Its guidelines of good practices focus on different aspects of pedagogy. It describes how adults can support children's learning and development across these four themes: communicating, well-being, identity and belonging, exploring, and thinking (NCCA 2009). Aistear facilitates early childhood settings in Ireland to hold parent information evenings, Christmas plays, and parent-teacher meetings. Aistear also creates opportunities for parents to share

information about their culture and traditions, see their children in the classrooms and discuss their jobs during the year.

In 2015, Aistear Siolta's Practice Guide was published to provide early childhood educators with a range of resources to build stronger partnerships with parents in their ECCE settings (NCCA 2015). In the same 2015, A High-Level policy statement on supporting parents and families was published by the Department of Children, and Youth Affairs to emphasise the significance of proactive, evidence-based, integrated services with children and their parents at the core (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2015).

Then, in 2016, the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations were published, revoking The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations published in 2006. Regulation four specifies that ECCE services must provide information to parents about the service, including details such as the staff members, opening hours, the adult/child ratios, the type of care, facilities, etc. (DCYA 2016). Also in 2016, the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education were published to empower early childhood educators to develop inclusive practices, expand their knowledge on diversity issues and partner with parents to meet the needs of their children (DCYA 2016).

Then in 2018, First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, a 10-year plan was established to focus on improving young children's and their families' lives in Ireland (Government of Ireland 2018). In 2018, Tusla published a Quality and Regulatory Framework highlighting the importance of Irish preschool services partnering with parents, guardians and families to enhance children's learning and development (Tusla 2018). This framework sets out standards for early childhood educators in early childhood care and education settings to value the importance of partnership with parents, guardians and families.

Overall, it is evident that Ireland recognises the critical role of parents in their children's early learning and development by putting in place policies and initiatives to foster parental engagement in early childhood care and education.

How Early Childhood Education Differs in Nigeria and Ireland

In Nigeria, early childhood education is referred to as Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE), while in Ireland, early childhood education is referred to as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (Gabriel 2015; Mc Partland 2012). In Nigeria, early child care and development education are segmented into ages 0-4 years located in day-care or creches, entirely in the hands of the private sector and social development, and ages 5-6 within the Nigerian formal education sector, while in Ireland early childhood care and education is for children from birth to six years with a specific focus on early childhood settings such as crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language pre-schools), playgroups and day-care services and delivered separately from the formal education system by private, community and voluntary organisations (Department of Education 2019; NERDC 2013; NCCA 2009).

In Nigeria, a one-year pre-primary education is compulsory for children ages 5 to 6 years before they enter primary school. Although there is a one-year compulsory free pre-primary education stipulated for children ages 5 to 6 years in Nigeria, not all children within the age group can avail of the scheme because of limited access and funding by the government (Rentzou and Ekine 2017; NERDC 2013). Meanwhile, in Ireland, pre-primary education is optional (Department of Education 2019). However, there is universally free preschool education for children aged 2 years and 8 months and 5 years and 4 months before they enter primary school (Sloan et al. 2022; Hanley and Garrity 2022; Hayes et al. 2013; Taguma et al. 2010).

Nigeria has no uniformity in early child care development, education curriculum, and staff ratios. In contrast, in Ireland, there is a framework for early childhood care and education called 'Aistear,' which serves as a guide to providing quality activities for young children, and 'Siolta' ensures quality in Irish ECCE settings (Gabriel 2015; NCCA 2009; CECDE 2006).

In Nigeria, early child care development and education are not publicly funded. However, the government plays a regulatory role in the policies and management of the sector. Meanwhile, the Irish government invests in early childhood settings in Ireland and manages the sector through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs (DCEDIY) (Department of Education 2019; Obiweluzor 2015; Gabriel 2015).

In Nigeria, the early child care development and education programmes are geared towards ensuring the overall development of Nigerian children, covering the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, providing a positive influence on the educational development of children in later life and also preparing the child for primary school (NERDC 2013; Sooter 2013). In Ireland, early childhood care and education focus on the holistic care and education of young children and preparing the children for transitioning into primary school (NCCA 2009; Hayes 2001). Overall, it is evident that early childhood education differs in Nigeria and Ireland.

Studies on Parental Engagement and Participation

Research suggest that parental engagement often involves mothers rather than fathers, and a number of research studies indicates this (Alharthi 2023; Dooley et al. 2014; Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Moreno and Lopez 1999). International studies have highlighted how mothers engaged with their children's education. For example, a study of Latina mothers' involvement in Los Angeles elementary schools reported that these mothers participated in school activities and performed basic tasks such as volunteering in the classroom. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, studies proved that black mothers read to their children and were much more involved in their children's school activities, including homework (DCSF 2008; Moreno and Lopez 1999). Similarly, studies on Filipino mothers' involvement in children's education found that they communicated with their children's teachers, attended their children's school activities, and helped their children with homework. These mothers also dropped up and picked up their children from school, provided learning materials and opportunities for their children to learn, and discussed school matters with their children (Lirio et al. 2022; Jabar 2015).

Also, a study in London on mothers' involvement in their children's schooling found that mothers helped their children with school work, prepared them for school, picked them up from school, assisted their children with reading and offered general support (Reay 2002). Likewise, a study on European American, African American, and Hispanic mothers' motivation to be involved with their children's schooling found that they discussed school-related matters with their children and participated in school events such as fundraising and volunteering. Also, these mothers attended school

conferences and parent-teacher meetings, played games with their children, and visited the library with their children (Grolnick 2015).

Other studies have also highlighted parents' engagement in their children's education. For example, a study in the United States on international relocatee parents' involvement practices in their young children's early learning and development found that they played and talked to their children, read, and taught them cultural values and morals (Raimbekova 2021). As well, a study by Zhou et al. (2020) on Chinese parents in Canada found that Chinese immigrant parents are actively involved in their children's education outside of school as they help their children with schoolwork, read to their children, provide moral education to their children and fosters basic life skills in their children.

Also, a study on Iraqi mothers with school-aged children in Australia found that they took an active role in their children's educational work at home as influenced by their culture. These mothers took their children to the library, read, and assisted their children with their homework and many more (Al-deen and Windle 2015). Likewise, in Ireland, a study by Kiely et al. (2021) found that as part of parents' engagement in their children's learning, they played with their children, talked and engaged in an ongoing conversation with their children for development purposes, read stories to their children, and dropped off and picked up their children from school. These parents also regularly discussed with the teachers how their children got on in school and talked to the school personnel when there were issues, they needed to discuss or address about their children's learning.

Likewise, in Ireland, another study by Hickey and Leckey (2021) on Irish parents' experiences of support and parenting support services found that parent viewed their parenting roles in their children's education as multidimensional. These parents promoted their children's learning, read to their children and supported their children's psychological, social and emotional well-being as part of their parenting roles in their children's education.

Also in Ireland, parents are part of the boards of management and parent associations in schools and the national parents' councils (Barnardos 2006). Additionally, in Ireland, immigrant parents are part of the parent councils in primary and secondary schools that influence anti-racism school policies and intercultural events. They are also part

of the migrant parent groups in primary schools that promote linguistic diversity through storytelling and the creation of multilingual cards (Taguma et al. 2010; Oireachtas Library and Research Service 2008). Furthermore, an Irish Report compiled by Early Years Inspectorates during their visits to ECCE settings in Ireland noted that as part of parents' engagement in their children's ECCE, they settled their children into the ECCE settings and discussed their children's learning and development with the early childhood educators at specific times such as arrival and pick-up times. Parents also gave consent in matters relating to their children's preschool education and took part in preschool events where they shared about their culture and jobs (Department of Education 2021).

Studies in the US, Sweden and others countries have highlighted how Nigerians engage in their children's education. For example, in the United States, research on why Nigerian parents are indifferent about engaging in their children's education found that they dropped off and picked up their children from school and provided financial support for their children's education (Ekpe 2019). Another study in the United States on parental involvement among Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant parents in urban public schools found that Nigerian parents participated in one-on-one parent-teacher conferences and supported their children with homework. They also communicated with their children's teachers through emails, text messages and phone calls on matters relating to their children's education (Quaye 2016). In addition, another study on parental involvement in education amongst Nigerian parents in Sweden found that Nigerian parents provided learning aids and incentives to their children and used their native dialects to explain in easy terms what is expected of their children in schoolwork (Chukwu 2018).

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, parental engagement increased hugely due to shifts in roles that appoint parents as the prominent persons directly responsible for their children's online education activities (Lansford 2020; Vinayak 2020). Parents took on active roles, such as teaching and creating more time to support their children's online education; thus, this led to family dynamics (Vinayak 2020). A study in the UK found that 53% of parents felt more engaged in their children's learning than before the lockdown. These parents thought they had a say in school decisions affecting their children's education during the lockdown and now see the need for a home and school partnership built on trust (Packman 2020). Also, an Irish survey of parents of junior

and senior school children was conducted to establish the engagement of parents in education during the pandemic, and it found parents took an active role in making the choices to educate their children and deliver the curriculum (Education in Ireland during COVID-19 2020). Likewise, studies on how Nigerian parents engaged in their preschool children's education before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria found that Nigerian parents provided school provisions for their children, supported their children with assignments and home projects, and supported their children's learning virtually. The Nigerian mothers also read to their children and are part of the school management boards in public schools and the Parents' Teachers Association in private schools, which oversees the affairs of the schools (Azubuike and Aina 2020; Rentzou and Ekine 2017). Overall, there is no Irish empirical evidence on the model of engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE. Hence, this study sought to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE.

Understanding Parental Engagement

An African proverb says, 'It takes a village to rear a child' (French 2008). Parental engagement, also referred to as parental involvement, family engagement is a complex and largely undefined term. Menon (2013) refers to engagement/involvement as when parents, school and community work together for the betterment of the child. Kurtulmuş (2016) refers to parental engagement as a vital component of early childhood education, and it is the participation of parents in their children's educational processes. In addition, parental engagement refers to the amount of participation parents have when it comes to schooling and the day-to-day activities of their child (Ireland 2017; Menon 2013). McDermott (2010) refers to parental engagement as a partnership, that is, - all adults working together for the child's benefit and responding to the child's individual holistic needs.

Parental engagement is how parents participate in their children's learning process through consultation, planning, implementation, and evaluations of programmes to assist their children's development (Ntekane 2018; Barnardos 2006). In contrast, Ntekane (2018) refers to parental engagement as how parents are consistently and directly involved in their children's education.

According to Kim et al. (2018), parental engagement is the parent's commitment to and actions they do to be engaged in their children's lives at home and or school to influence their children's overall actions and developmental outcomes. Menon (2013) refers to parental engagement as some degree of participation by parents at all major stages of an early education program. The Harvard Family Research Project also defines parental engagement as activities parents conduct at home and in early childhood settings to support their children's learning (Peck 2018). Ma et al. (2016) refers to parental engagement as the proactive participation of parents in various activities and behaviours that aim to promote their children's learning and development.

Parental engagement can mean parents assisting within the school system (Karakus and Savas 2012). It ranges from an impersonal visit to the school, frequent parent-teacher consultations, parents' engagement with the broad sphere of their children's learning and many more (Goodall and Editor 2018; Menon 2013). Parent engagement can take many forms, from involvement at preschools such as volunteer activities to reading to the child at home, teaching songs or nursery rhymes, from a conversation at going home time and many more (Barnardos 2019; Ireland 2017; Fitzpatrick 2012; DCSF 2008). In summary, parental engagement in early childhood is when parents and educators actively work together to support and promote learning and the child's holistic development regarding physical, intellectual, cognitive, language, emotional, social, spiritual, and cultural development.

Parental engagement is a shared responsibility between parents and educators and should be considered based on a two-way flow of information; thus, it requires time and dialogue (Kambouri et al. 2022; Jolly 2018; Dooley et al. 2014). Also, it requires work on both sides based on dignity and respect (Barnardos 2023).

Parental engagement in early childhood education is between three parties: parents, early childhood educators and the child. Parents-individuals who know the child's interests, likes, dislikes, needs and many more; Early childhood educators- who have experience in child development and group care; The child- who is developing their ideas about how to play, likes and dislikes. In return, the child expresses these opinions with the adults in their life (McDermott 2010). However, two key elements work together to make up the model of parental engagement: one is the level of

commitment to parent support, and two is the level of parental activities and participation (Menon 2013).

Drawing on previous works on parental engagement, the current study defines parental engagement in ECCE as the support parents receive from educators to engage in their children's ECCE, inclusive strategies employed by ECCE settings to foster parental engagement in ECCE, and the development of the holistic child.

Support is the assistance parents receive from preschools regarding their children's learning and development progress and the efforts initiated by preschools and preschool programs to foster parental engagement with parents (Bierman et al. 2017; Juvonen et al. 2004). Bierman et al. (2017) also refer to support as the preschools' effort to show parents how to use learning materials to help their children enjoy learning at home. While Symeou (2006) refer to support as how educators and parents collaborate to meet the needs of the children and the degree to which educators maintain friendly and cordial relationships with parents to make them more knowledgeable about their children's education. Devarakonda (2012) refers to it as how parents collaborate with educators and express their opinions on the quality of their children's early childhood experiences.

According to Devarakonda (2012) and Bierman et al. (2017), inclusion is an approach designed to aid success for all children and a model where preschools see parents as key partners in their children's development, learning and health. Inclusion is how preschool settings develop and maintain a welcoming environment and well-designed programs to ensure solid collaborative relationships between parents and preschools to benefit the parents, the child, and the preschools (Bierman et al. 2017; Daugherty et al. 2014; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005). Devarakonda (2012) refers to inclusion as how parents engage in pre-school activities and challenge stereotypes in early childhood.

Inclusion is also a strategy educators and preschools employ to keep parents up to date on their children's progress. Examples of inclusive strategies are a conducive preschool environment where children learn and develop, avenues where parents are part of the preschool decision-makers, opportunities for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and many more (Bierman et al. 2017; Juvonen et al. 2004).

The development of the holistic child entails the influence of parents on their children's holistic development, parent commitment and positive attention to their parenting role to improve their children's learning, personality, and development (Singh and Banerjee 2019; Mohammed and Mohammed 2017; Bruce et al. 2010). According to Tassoni and Beith (2007), all aspects of child development, such as physical, intellectual, language, emotional, and social, must be integrated.

The development of the holistic child involves the parents' efforts, such as actively reading to their children, helping their children with homework, parents volunteering in preschool classrooms, and many more to improve their children's development (Bierman et al. 2017; Mohammed and Mohammed 2017; Harris and Robinson 2016).

Examining the different definitions of parental engagement gave insights into the various terms used and the different way they are used. Also, it allowed for the synthesis of existing definitions to create a comprehensive description of parental engagement that combines these three factors: the support parents receive from educators to engage in their children's ECCE, inclusive strategies employed by ECCE settings to foster parental engagement in ECCE, and the development of the holistic child.

The Benefits of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education

Research indicates parent's engagement in their children's education is beneficial to children and parents as well as to the educator (Tekin 2019; Sohn and Wang 2006). The benefits of parental engagement will be discussed under these three headings: The benefits of parental engagement for children, the benefits of parental engagement for parents, and the benefits of parental engagement for educators.

Benefits for the Children

Partnerships between parents and early childhood educators are widely acknowledged as essential for children's well-being, learning and development (Norheim and Moser 2020; Epstein 2018; Tekin 2011). Researchers have proven that parental engagement is linked with stronger children's learning outcomes. Menon (2013), Oostdam and Hooge (2013) and Oke et al. (2021) claim that parental engagement has a positive impact on children's learning outcomes and holistic development. Also, Leitão (2023) states that parental engagement in the early years

can positively impact children's developmental outcomes and protect against socio-economic disadvantage.

Parental engagement is essential in early childhood education as it helps broaden the child's horizon, improves reading scores, enhances social relationships, and promotes self-esteem and self-efficacy (Mishra 2012; Fagbeminiyi 2011; Domina 2005). According to Spreewenberg (2019), when parents take an active role in their children's early childhood education, it helps the children develop their full potential, creates a more positive experience for the children and extends teaching outside the classroom.

Parental engagement is critically important in a child's early childhood education as it is a key component of their development and learning (Spreewenberg 2019; Peck 2018). Parental engagement strengthens the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected. Therefore, the child sees the school as an integral part of family life (Sapungan and Sapungan 2014). Ekpe (2019) argues that the most accurate predictors of children's achievement in school are not the family income, social status, or parental educational level but the extent to which parents engage in their children's education. Parental engagement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood (DCSF 2008). According to Peck (2018), parental engagement at the preschool level has several lifelong benefits, such as establishing the importance of education to the child and providing the child with a springboard that makes the move to primary school a more tranquil transition.

Parental engagement is one of the most important deciding factors in a child's education as it contributes positively to their education (Kiely et al. 2021). When parents intercede earlier in their children's education, the more successful those children will eventually be (Ireland 2017). Regardless of family income or background, children whose parents are engaged in their early education are more likely to develop better social skills, adapt well at preschool and show improved behaviours (Ekpe 2019).

Studies have also indicated that children whose parents are engaged in their education regardless of socioeconomic status or demographic and cultural background, are more likely to earn higher grades, graduate and move on to post-secondary education (Menon 2013). Parental engagement creates a positive

experience for the children. It helps the children understand the importance of preschool and family and supports children in performing better in school (Spreewenberg 2019; Jolly 2018). Also, parental engagement in early childhood education helps improve learning outcomes for children by ensuring children have all the support they need to succeed (Spreewenberg 2019).

Parental engagement at the early year's level aids children in learning beyond the classroom and helps children develop positive attitudes towards school as they grow up. It also has multiple long-term benefits, such as its links with better outcomes, particularly cognitive development. It helps children have improved behaviour in school, less suspension for disciplinary reasons and helps them become more aware of their social-emotional needs. It also makes it easier for the children to understand that their parents love and care about them (Jolly 2018; Olsen and Fuller 2010; DCSF 2008).

Wade and Moore (1998) argue that children who excel academically often have parents who are interested and engaged in their learning from an early age. Parental engagement in early childhood education extends a child's experiences in the classroom to real-world activities in the home. It helps children grow up to be productive and responsible members of society (Sapungan and Sapungan 2014). Also, parental engagement in their children's education improves their positive social behaviour, prepares them to learn from a younger age and boosts their self-esteem (Fraser-Thill 2019; Ntekena 2018; Hornby and Lafaele 2011).

Research has shown parents' positive engagement in their children's education is associated with many encouraging outcomes (Utami 2022; O'Toole et al. 2019; Kurtuluş 2016). Studies show that parents who actively engage in their children's early childhood education are more likely to stay involved when their children enter primary school (Spreewenberg 2022). Children who have attended quality early childhood services where staff work in partnership with parents are better able to learn, better prepared for school and have fewer emotional difficulties as they can regulate their emotions (Fraser-Thill 2019; McDermott 2010). Parental engagement also aids children in developing social functioning skills, helps them learn necessary life skills, and makes them feel happy and secure (Fraser-Thill 2019; McDermott 2010). According to Utami (2022), parental participation benefits student in terms of their self-

confidence, self-worth, and social and emotional well-being. In conclusion, children whose parents are engaged in their education relate well with their peers and adults and have positive attitudes to learning compared to children whose parents are not involved (Tekin 2019; Kurtulmuş 2016).

Benefits for the Parents

Parents play an essential role in their children's lives (Menon 2013). Parents are considered one of the stakeholders of the school community as they play a huge role in their children's educational and environmental transformation (Tekin 2019; Sapungan and Sapungan 2014). Parents are the first and primary teachers that children encounter in life. They provide experiences that stimulate children's learning and development (Chukwu 2018; Menon 2013; DCSF 2008).

There are many benefits associated with parents engaging in their children's early years education. One of the benefits is that parents become comfortable when the preschool education system requires their engagement in preschool activities. Parents also develop a network of helpful connections and have a general idea of the preschool curriculum (Peck 2018). Likewise, parental engagement keeps parents socially active, such as knowing other parents and educators (Turney and Kao 2009).

Parents who are engaged in their children's education are party to many aspects of their children's day and establish a connection between what is learned at school and what takes place at home (Spreeuwenberg 2019; Peck 2018). Parental engagement helps parents to be part of their children's education well into the future, increases parental confidence and creates opportunities for parent self-growth (Spreeuwenberg 2022; Hornby and Blackwell 2018). Also, parental engagement enables parents to share information about their children with the educators and get acquainted with the preschool and their children's actions in the preschool (Symeou 2006).

According to Spreeuwenberg (2022), a parent who understands what their child is working on at preschool has a better sense of their child's competency and areas they need to work on to improve their child's confidence and ability. Parental engagement teaches parents how to intervene successfully in their children's schooling (Domina 2005). Also, when parents are engaged in their children's preschool education, they take charge of their children's preschool education and support their children's learning at home (McMillan 2005).

According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), parent engagement in their child's education leads to improved development for their child and enhances their relationships with the educators. It helps bridge the gap between home and preschool and improves children's outcomes (O'Toole et al. 2019). Parental engagement allows parents to contribute to their children's learning and development by sharing their time, experiences, and talents in early childhood settings (Barnardos 2019). In conclusion, parents benefit hugely from engaging in their children's early years education.

Benefits for the Educators

Parental engagement is integral to professional practice in early years services as children's emotional, intellectual, social, and physical development depend on caring, nurturing relationships they experience in their first few years (McDermott 2010; French 2009). Parental engagement improves parent-educator's relationships and communication, makes parents respect the teaching profession, and helps form teamwork based on mutual respect to create a formidable educational team. Also, parental engagement encourages educators to build trust with parents and students constructively, effectively solve conflicts in the classroom and boost educators' morale (Hornby and Blackwell 2018; Learning Liftoff 2015; Karakus and Savas 2012). Caulfield (1996) argued that a cooperative relationship between the early years practitioners and parents helps to improve the quality of care in a two-way shared commitment. Also, parental engagement intensifies the relationships between parents and educators (Symeou 2006). Parental engagement helps educators develop support networks with other parents and themselves (Fitzpatrick 2012). Likewise, parental engagement serves as a professional reward for educators and gives communities higher opinions of schools (Learning Liftoff 2015).

Parental engagement sensitizes school personnel to parents' needs and fosters social closure by creating opportunities for parents, educators, and administrators to network and share information (Marshall 2010; Domina 2005). As a result of this, educators can learn about family perspectives on their children's education (Sohn and Wang 2006). Similarly, parental engagement influences how educators respond to conflict by encouraging educators to use constructive conflict management strategies such as integrating, compromising, and obliging (Karakus and Savas 2012). Parental engagement inspires educators to integrate techniques with their teaching and helps ease educators' burdens (Learning Liftoff 2015; Karakus and Savas 2012). In addition,

parental engagement makes the educational system self-governing, develops more power at the local level and allows for greater accountability by schools to society (Kutelu and Olowe 2013). According to Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), the strong collaboration of parents with school authorities can create a tsunami of improvements in the physical and academic performance of the school, thus contributing to the school's success.

In conclusion, the family is a unique world for children, and the presence of parents in schools and the openness of schools to parents strengthens ties between schools and families from socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups (McGrath and Kuriloff 1999). Overall, it is evident that children, parents and educators benefit from parental engagement in the early years.

Enablers to Parental Engagement

According to Tekin (2019), parents and teachers must work together to achieve a common goal. Also, Ryan (2021) claims that the key to parental engagement is that educators should not tell parents what to do but collaborate with them to help their children achieve their full potential. Moreover, Kurucz et al. (2020) state that effective communication between parents and preschool teachers is the basis for parent engagement in their children's learning at home and preschool. Likewise, Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) state that engagement is fostered when two-way communication is promoted between the school and home, where parents can initiate and direct interactions through technology. Similarly, Willis and Exley (2018) establish that the widespread use of digital technologies such as email, text messaging and online social media platforms strengthens connections across home and school. Ryan and Lannin (2021) also state that effective and regular communication is the key to positive home-school relationships.

Similarly, Ryan (2021) affirmed that communication should be two-way and parents' views regarding their children's education should be listened to and considered. According to Leitão (2023), educators must support parents to enhance their engagement in their children's early childhood education. Symeou (2006), Fitzpatrick (2012) and Norheim and Moser (2020) note that it is essential that early childhood educators consider the needs of working parents and their circumstances when aiming at effective parental engagement in early childhood education. Also, Leitão (2023)

note that schools should implement easily accessible interventions to contribute to the successful engagement of diverse families in their children's education. Similarly, Öztürk (2013) states that there must be strong links between the homes and schools and an environment where immigrant parents feel welcome to collaborate with educators to enhance their children's growth and development. Likewise, Sohn and Wang (2006) and Turney and Kao (2009) state that schools should make parents from diverse immigrant backgrounds feel welcome to enhance parent-school relationships.

Also, in developing approaches to parental engagement, schools must recognise and respond to diversity issues and personal factors related to individual parents (Kiely et al. 2021). As well, important qualities such as educators having self-efficacy for inclusion and positive beliefs about multiculturalism are important for working with immigrant parents (Kurucz et al. 2020). According to Kiely et al. (2021), positive relationships and environments where parents feel welcome can enhance parent-school relationships. When parents are welcome into the preschool settings, this can strengthen the relationships between them and the educators as it shows that they are valued (Ryan 2021; Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020).

According to Payne (1996) and NCCA (2009), when it comes to parental engagement in ECCE, different cultures and ethnic groups should be considered, and educators should widen their understanding of families to include sensitivity to cultural forces hidden beneath daily life activities. Likewise, early childhood educators must examine and challenge their cultural beliefs and stereotypes about parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and as well engage in discussions with these parents to understand their culture to facilitate successful communication between both parties (Mitchell and Bryan 2007). If early childhood educators understand, appreciate, and respect cultural differences, they will be better equipped to support young children and their families (Barnardos 2023). Also, if educators have a multicultural mindset and a shared understanding of how to deal with cultural diversity, these could lead to the positive engagement of immigrant parents in their children's early education (Kurucz et al. 2020). Therefore, educators must engage in training on cultural competence to help bridge the gap between them and families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020). According to Milner (2006) and Kidd et al. (2008), there is a need for teacher education courses on cultural and racial diversity to help preservice teachers develop the skills to work in diverse contexts.

Likewise, to build preschool-family partnerships, educators should engage in training in cultural awareness (Öztürk 2013; Taguma et al. 2010; Denessen et al. 2007). Similarly, educators should be familiar with each family's values, culture, structures and traditions to build strong preschool-family partnerships (Ryan and Lannin 2021; Fitzpatrick 2012; Sohn and Wang 2006; Shor and Bernhard 2003). Swick (2003) stresses the need for humans to become cultural learners in their communicative relationships and that early childhood educators and parents must use cultural differences to enhance their relationships. Likewise, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, states that where there are specific needs in ECCE settings, such as cultural identity, the parent-early childhood educator partnership is primarily important (NCCA 2009). According to Kiely et al. (2021), one of the effective ways to ensure that parents from ethnic minorities are engaged in their children's education is for schools to ensure that cultures are visible in the curriculum content. Overall, these enablers of parental engagement are explored to improve parent-preschool relationships.

Barriers to Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education

Many factors influence parental engagement in early childhood education. Also, many parents want to engage in their children's education, but many circumstances prohibit this. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that the nature of the job, the place of work, and many more factors might limit parents from visiting their children's preschool. Parental engagement has been challenging because more mothers are now in the workforce (Barnados 2006). Mothers experience barriers such as work commitment, lack of time, childcare issues, the demands of other children and language when it comes to their engagement with their children's early childhood education (DCSF 2008). Also, Kiely et al. (2021) state that poor access to childcare for their other children might make it difficult for parents to commit to their children's education.

Mothers who work part-time compared with their full-time counterparts are most likely to be engaged in their children's education (Fagbeminiyi 2010; Turney and Kao 2009). Also, McMillan (2005) and Savacool (2011) highlight that parents who work full time might find it hard to balance work and their children's preschool commitment, as they cannot afford to take a day off work to attend their children's preschool activities. According to Kambouri et al. (2022), a parent who work long hours and shift work can

limit their visits to preschool settings. Also, Ryan (2021) states that working-class parents are often less engaged in their children's education as they depend on the educator to educate their children due to their busy work schedules. Likewise, Kiely et al. (2021) highlight that working-class families sometimes struggle to participate in their children's school activities due to their tight work schedules. Also, parents with enough trust in the teacher might not see the need for direct school-based involvement because they trust the teachers to look after their children's education (Kiely et al. 2021). Lack of time is a barrier to parental engagement, as parents cannot risk their jobs to take time out to visit their children's preschool services (Donohue and Gaynor 2011). Most times, when parents are busy with their work, less time is available to engage in their children's education. For instance, less time is available for parents to speak with the educators in the morning before they go to work, and mothers are usually too tired after work to play with their children or even find out what their children did in preschool (Menon 2013; Savacool 2011; Ajayi 2008). Also, an Irish study found that parent employment impacted how they rear their children (Kealy and Devaney 2023).

According to Oke et al. (2021) study, early childhood educators often find it challenging to communicate with parents from diverse backgrounds due to limited time as a result of parental employment obligations. Likewise, lack of time and other personal and social pressures often prevent parents from committing to their children's early care and education (Fitzpatrick 2012). The busy lifestyles of parents can be another barrier to parental engagement in early childhood (Savacool 2011). A study in the United States found that Nigerian parents do not have the time for active parental engagement in their children's education due to their work-life balance (Ekpe 2019).

Also, the physical access, geographical location of the preschool services and practical considerations such as pushing buggies and transportation can pose a challenge to parental engagement in early childhood as some parents depend on public transport to travel to their children's preschool services (Kats et al. 2007). A study in Northern Ireland found that a lack of child-minding facilities prevents parents from meeting educators and partaking in social events connected to preschool settings (McMillan 2005). It was noted that parents particularly single parents could not partake in preschool events and meet with the preschool teachers to discuss issues relating

to their children's preschool education due to limited child-minding facilities (McMillan 2005).

Studies have also shown that many unique factors prevent immigrant parents from engaging with their children's education (Öztürk 2013; Turney and Kao 2009; Denessen et al. 2007). For instance, when parents and educators come from different cultural backgrounds, this could pose a barrier or prevent parent-preschool relationships (Ryan and Lannin 2021; Joshi et al. 2005). Also, Öztürk (2013) and Lee (2019) noted that cultural differences and ethnic backgrounds impact parental engagement. Likewise, Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) state that immigrant families often engage less due to perceived language and cultural barriers.

Öztürk (2013) highlights culture often leads to a mismatch in the communication styles of diverse parents and practitioners. Also, the lack of diversity in the teaching profession could lead to a sociocultural disconnect between teachers and families, which could strain parent-teacher relationships (Ryan and Lannin 2021; Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020).

According to Donohue and Gaynor (2010), culture is another factor that prevents parents from engaging in their children's education. Some cultures solely depend on schools to oversee their children's education, which might make parents withdraw and put the schools in total control of their children's education (Turney and Kao 2009; Denessen et al. 2007). For instance, cultures where parents are not expected to take an active interest in their children's education or educational services might make parents totally put their trust in the school and rarely question its authority and decision-making (Kats et al. 2007). Turney and Kao (2009) and The OECD reviews of migrant education in Ireland (Taguma et al. 2010) found unfamiliarity with the English language and culture as major barriers preventing immigrant parents from engaging in their children's education.

Also, immigrant parents have different expectations of teachers due to prior experiences in their country of origin, and their perceptions, values, and experiences play a significant role in their interaction with professionals in their new country, even though they may have been in the new country for several years (Shor and Bernhard 2003). Likewise, educators' beliefs about parents from culturally diverse backgrounds

could hinder successful communication between both parties (Mitchell and Bryan 2007).

Also, educators sometimes do not have enough time to focus on parents; they might not have the necessary training in parental interaction with parents and might not be confident to have insight into families' lives that are not their own, which could be a barrier to parental engagement in education (Hornby and Blackwell 2018; Fitzpatrick 2012). Likewise, the parents' beliefs often influence the dynamics and communication between home and preschool (Hu et al. 2021; Fitzpatrick 2012; Horny and Lafaele 2011). If parent's norms and values differ from those of the early childhood educators, this could pose a barrier to collaboration (Shor and Bernhard 2003). Also, Zhou et al. (2020) state that culture often influences the involvement of parents from culturally diverse parents in their children's education.

According to Kidd et al. (2008), culture influences parents' values, beliefs and child-rearing practices. For example, some cultures influence how parent rear their children, which could impact their engagement with their children's educators due to a lack of mutual understanding (Denessen et al. 2007). Also, parents' roles in their children's education are shaped by their cultural norms and circumstances, often leading to misunderstandings, mistrust, and stressed relationships between parents and teachers (Gonzales and Gabel 2017; Keane 2007). Likewise, an Irish study found that cultural traditions, practices, beliefs and values impact the parenting roles of parents from non-Irish backgrounds (Hickey and Lecky et al. 2021). Also, another Irish study found that cultural norms play a significant role in how parents perceive their role as parents (Kealy and Devaney (2023). Equally, when educators are not knowledgeable and aware of specific cultural differences, this could be a barrier to building school-family partnerships (Ryan and Lannin 2021).

Similarly, parents whose first language is not English might find engaging in their children's education challenging. Parents who are not proficient in English might find it hard to speak with their children's educators and engage in their children's preschool events (Hickey and Leakey 2021; Donohue and Gaynor, 2010; Taguma et al. 2010). Likewise, a study found that the language barrier significantly affects immigrants' parental engagement in their children's education. As a result of a language barrier, most immigrant parents are confused about their roles in their children's education;

they find it challenging to communicate with educators and might not know how to help their children in terms of their education (Sohn and Wang 2006). Also, a study by Savacool (2011) found that language is a barrier to parental engagement in pre-kindergarten education, as educators often use jargon that minority parents find hard to understand. Also, it was noted that schools that use English as their primary mode of communication with parents tend not to keep mothers who do not speak English fluently informed on their children's education (DCSF 2008; Moreno and Lopez 1999). Likewise, a study by Kim (2009) found language barriers, differences in child-rearing practices, and lack of social networks as reasons why minority parents are not involved in their children's education. Similarly, Jabar (2015) found that due to language and cultural differences, migrant parents may experience challenges or difficulties as they participate in their children's education.

According to Denessen et al. (2007), lack of language skills to communicate with the schools, not being interested in school matters, and parents holding schools fully responsible for their child's education are barriers that prevent ethnic minority parents from engaging in their children's education. Joshi et al. (2005) argue that lack of confidence, work interference, negative past experiences with schools, and understanding of the school system are causing many more strains on parent-school relationships. Likewise, Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) noted that the negative experiences of the parents may hinder family engagement.

Öztürk (2013) states that parents prefer when they feel appreciated and welcomed, especially regarding their children's education. However, the lack of strong links between the homes and schools or an environment where parents do not feel welcomed is another key challenge to immigrant parental engagement. Also, a study in the United States on why parental engagement is low among Nigerian parents found that Nigerian parents compared the American system to the Nigerian system. They felt that because Nigeria is a system that does not emphasize parental engagement, they developed apathy towards parental engagement on moving to the United States (Ekpe 2019).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlighted that environmental changes such as COVID-19 restrict parental engagement in ECCE settings. A study by Levickis et al. (2022) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was challenging for mothers in Victoria,

Australia, to communicate and engage with educators in ECCE settings. It was reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, these mothers were not permitted to observe their children within the ECCE settings during pick-up and drop-off times. Likewise, opportunities for informal face-to-face conversations with educators were eliminated. Also, a study by O'Toole and Dobutowitsch (2020) found that during COVID-19, early years educators in Ireland couldn't engage in face-to-face contact with parents due to the preventive measures implemented to curb the spread of the disease. Likewise, a study by Kambouri et al. (2022) found that the relationship between parents and early childhood educators were altered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, a study by Alharthi (2023) on mothers' involvement in children's online education during COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia found that many parents were forced to change the style and extent of their involvement in their children's education to online due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parental engagement differs depending on parents' race, ethnicity, and class background, and some researchers have found connections between these elements (Quaye 2016; Öztürk 2013; Turney and Kao 2009; Denessen et al. 2007; Domina 2005). According to Dooley et al. (2004), parents in higher socioeconomic groups are more visible in formal school engagement. Also, mothers' educational background often influences their level of engagement in their children's education, as educated mothers tend to be more engaged in their children's education because they value education and see the need to support their children's education (Kainuwa and Yusuf 2013). In addition to the stratification of parental engagement along racial and ethnic lines, the effectiveness of parental engagement in children's education may be conditional on parents' race and class and shaped by the resources and opportunities parents have (Turney and Kao 2009; Domina 2005).

These barriers to parental engagement highlight issues that might prevent immigrant parents from engaging with their children's ECCE. Overall, these barriers show that early childhood educators have a role in overcoming these barriers to enhance effective parental engagement in ECCE for culturally diverse families. Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology of the study.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This research is positioned within the qualitative research paradigm, and the methodology underpinning it is phenomenology. This qualitative phenomenological study aims to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE). This study explores how Nigerian mothers in Ireland engaged with their ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood.

This chapter begins by presenting the theoretical framework for this study, then the theoretical underpinning of parental engagement in early childhood education. This is followed by a comprehensive analysis of the methodology employed to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education. This chapter rationalises the choice of qualitative design and how other methodologies, such as ethnographic, grounded theory and narrative research, are less appropriate for this study. The method of the study is considered, and how other forms of data collection, such as open-ended questionnaires, case studies and observations, are less appropriate for the study. Also, the selection of the participants, data analysis, validity and reliability, ethical considerations, limitations are described in detail, and the researcher's positionality in the study. Lastly, the researcher reflects on the process of carrying out this study.

The following research questions are explored in this study, '*A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian Immigrant Mothers' Engagement with their children's Early Childhood Care and Education*:

1. *How do Nigerian mothers in Ireland, perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education?*
2. *What social and cultural factors influence the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's early childhood care and education?*

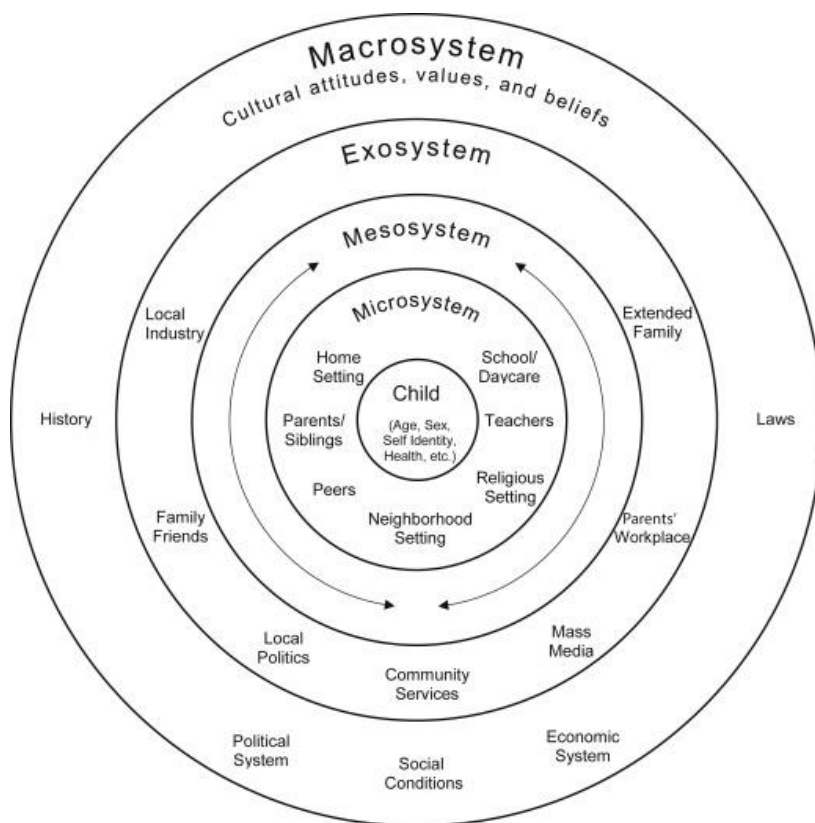
- 3. How could Nigerian Mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education be enhanced and extended for the benefits of parents, children and ECCE settings?*

Theoretical Framework for this study

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory

The origin of parental engagement is embedded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory pinpoints the role of parents in their children's lives and ECCE settings. The theory explains how the four layers of systems, influence a child's development, namely the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

The microsystem is the first layer of Bronfenbrenner's theory and is the thing the child has direct contact with in their immediate environment. The microsystem is the layer that affects the child intimately (Tekin 2019; 2011). In this research, the microsystem comprises the child, Nigerian mothers, early years educators, the child's peers, and the preschool setting. At the micro level, Bronfenbrenner explains that the relationship between the child, their parents and the early years educator impacts the child's learning and development (Yngvesson and Garvis 2019). Also, Aistear states that children learn and develop through loving and nurturing relationships with others, and the quality of these interactions impacts their learning and development (NCCA 2009). Likewise, a Barnardos (2023) report highlights that the relationships children have with parents and early years educators are significant for their growth and development.



Macrosystem
 Nigerian mothers' cultural norms and beliefs
 Social distancing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic

Exosystem
 Preschool Policies
 Curriculum design
 Nigerian mothers' employment

Mesosystem
 The interactions between Nigerian mothers and the early years educators

Microsystem
 The child
 Nigerian mothers
 Early childhood educators
 The preschool setting

Figure 3: A visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory.

Figure 4: Text box created by the researcher to highlight how Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems relate to this research.

Children's homes and preschools are the two most influential contexts in which learning and development occur (Galindo and Sheldon 2012). Family and preschool settings are the two most important microsystems in children's lives, and parents and educators play vital roles as co-constructors of children's learning and caregiving environment (Norheim and Moser 2020). In this study, the microsystem describes the relationships between Nigerian mothers and their children and the relationships between the children, their peers and the early years educator to enhance parental engagement in ECCE and promote the children's learning and development in early childhood.

The mesosystem is a system of two or more microsystems. It is the interrelations among settings where the child is an active participant (Tekin 2011). It involves the interactions between two microsystems, such as the interactions between the child's parents and the early years educators. At the meso level, Bronfenbrenner explains

that the relationships between the parents and the early years educators affect the child's growth and development (Yngvesson and Garvis 2019; Hayes et al. 2017). For example, a positive relationship between the child's parents and the child's preschool teacher will positively affect the child's growth and development. In this research, the mesosystem is the interactions between Nigerian mothers and early years educators within and outside the ECCE settings to strengthen parental engagement in ECCE and promote the child's learning and development.

The exosystem includes factors such as relevant preschool policy or curriculum design that affect the child (Hayes et al. 2017). For instance, ECCE settings in Ireland participating in the universal ECCE programme and agreeing to adhere to the principles of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth up to the age of six years can create opportunities for Nigerian mothers to interact with their children and early years educators, thus affecting their children's learning and development. Likewise, the exosystem indirectly affects a child's development and is the setting where the child does not actively participate. An example is parents' employment, which can affect how they engage with their children's ECCE (Ashiabi and O'Neal 2015). In this study, data will be gathered from Nigerian mothers about factors that influence their engagement with their children's ECCE.

The macrosystem includes cultural factors such as cultural norms, societal beliefs, and values that indirectly influence a child's development (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2013; Tekin 2011). There are also healthcare policies, such as social distancing policies that were implemented in preschool settings to slow the transmission of COVID-19 (Browne et al. 2021). Although these elements are not part of the child's immediate environment, they are essential to children's development (Tekin 2011). This study gathers data from Nigerian mothers to determine the influence of cultural beliefs, norms, and COVID-19 on their engagement with their children's ECCE.

In this study, the interrelations among nested environments will allow for the examination of how patterns of interactions within these systems influence Nigerian mothers' engagement in ECCE and their children's development (Ashiabi and O'Neal 2015). This current study argues that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory rather than his revised Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris

2006) is most relevant to a phenomenology study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE.

Epstein's (2019) Six Types of Involvement

Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnership in the US, expanded on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory by developing a theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein's theory is based on the idea that children learn more when parents, educators and others in the community work together to guide and support their learning and development (Barnardos 2019; Epstein 2011). She argues that children learn and grow through the three overlapping spheres of influence and that partnerships must be formed between the family, ECCE setting and community to effectively meet the needs of the child (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) (n.d.).

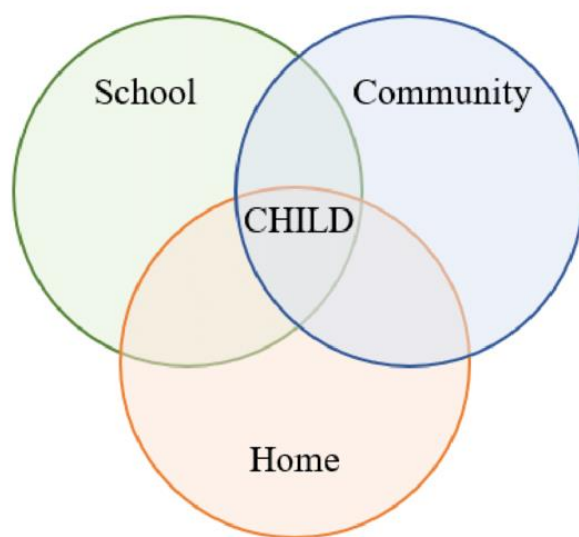


Figure 5: A Visual Representation of the Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which form the basis of Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement.

Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement focuses on the family, school, and community with the child at the centre. It presents opportunities for parents and educators to share responsibility for promoting the growth and development of

children. Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement is based on the concept that parental involvement falls into six different types of categories, namely: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community.

Parenting, which is type 1, involves the educators' responsibility to help all families establish home environments to support their children as learners and educators having an understanding of the children's families (Epstein 2019). Parenting also involves the parents' responsibility to create an environment that supports their children's learning and development and the need for educators to help and assist parents with parenting and child-rearing skills (Anthony-Newman et al. 2019; Epstein 2007). Examples are parent education and training, family support programmes, etc.

Type 2, which is communicating, is all about educators and parents establishing effective two-way home-to-preschool communication using varied technologies about preschool programs and the child's progress (Epstein 2019; Tekin 2011). Phone calls, emails, and preschool software apps are examples of this kind of communication. According to Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020), engagement is fostered when two-way communication is promoted between the school and home, where parents can initiate and direct interactions through technology. Also, Willis and Exley (2018) and Kiely et al. (2021) state that using digital technology such as emails, phone calls, text messages, and online social media platforms supports positive home-school communication and strengthens the connections across home and school.

Regarding volunteering, which is type 3, Epstein suggested that educators should recruit and organise parents as helpers at preschool, home, or other locations, and parents serve as the audience for preschool activities. Through volunteering, parents can share their time, experiences, and expertise within preschool settings, and children can increase their learning skills and communication with adults (Barnardos 2019; Tekin 2011). For example, if educators invite parents to discuss their profession during career days, children could learn about the different careers and discuss the subject matter with adults and their peers. Hence, educators must ensure that volunteering opportunities stem from parents' interests and are planned and implemented with parent support and feedback (Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020).

Fostering learning at home, which is type 4, involves educators providing information and ideas to families about supporting their children's learning at home (Epstein 2019). Fostering learning at home also entails parents' involvement in their children's learning

and other curriculum-related activities at home (Mishra 2012; Tekin 2011). Examples are books that early years educators can recommend to parents to support their children's growth and development. Decision-making, which is type 5, involves family members serving as representatives, leaders on preschool committees, and advocates for children on preschool decisions (Epstein 2019). This involves parents making decisions and advocating for changes through parent associations such as parent-teacher associations, parent committees, etc. Collaborating with the communities, which is type 6, involves the educators identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen preschool programs and family practices and enable children to assist the community (Epstein 2019). This also involves parents using community resources to supplement their children's learning (Epstein 2001).

These theories will be applied as the theoretical framework in this study to examine the relationships between Nigerian mothers and their young children and between Nigerian mothers and early years educators concerning parental engagement in ECCE. The choice of this theoretical model was justified as it provided the basis for investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE. This framework offers a critical lens through which to better understand how Nigerian immigrant mothers and early years educators can create positive interactions and linkages to support children's learning and development. By applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological systems theory and Epstein's (2019) six types of involvement as the theoretical framework for this research, this study will contribute to these theories by validating the possibility of using these theories to deepen understanding of parental engagement in ECCE. This framework will also provide the basis for using the findings from this study to inform and improve practices in Irish ECCE settings involving parents from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Theoretical Underpinning of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood

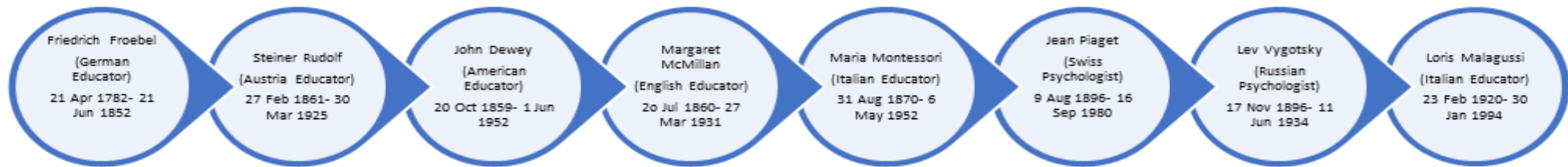


Figure 6: Timeline of Major Educational Theorists who acknowledged the Vital Role of Parents in their Children's Early Education.

Froebel (1782-1852) was the first educator who acknowledged parents as the main influence on their children's education. He believed parents provide the first and the most stable educational influence in children's lives. Thus, he encourages schools to be communities where parents are welcome to join their children (McMillan 2005; Froebel 1907). Also, Steiner Waldorf's approach (1861-1925) to early years education believes parents are children's primary attachment figures, and they must be afforded opportunities to interact with the educators for the development and progress of their children (Nicol and Taplin 2012; Symeou 2007).

Dewey (1859-1952) argued that children would imitate what they are in direct relationships with through the observations of daily family life, preparing them for later educational, developmental states and social interaction skills. McMillan (1860-1931) also stated that the early years settings should be an extension and not a substitute for the home (Domina 2005; McMillan 2005). The Montessori educational approach (1870-1952) encourages parents in their educatory role; hence, she welcomes parental engagement as opportunities offered within a supportive learning environment (McMillan 2005). Likewise, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a constructivist and an interactionist, states the influence of the constructive role of experience with peers and family members on the child (French 2008). He supports the idea that parental engagement is crucial to children's development (Tekin 2019). The fundamental belief of Piaget's theory is that parental engagement helps children to be responsible beings and that young children are active learners with a relentless drive to match their view of the natural world and the external realities they face within their surroundings (Sapungan and Sapungan 2014; French 2008).

Affected partially by Piaget's views, Vygotsky (as cited in Tekin 2011) stresses that children's interaction with their family is crucial for their learning and development since their first teacher is the family. Also, Vygotsky (1896-1934) emphasises that parents are partners in their children's lives; thus, they have a central role in supporting their children's growth. He also believed everything a child learns is through interactions with "knowledgeable partners such as the parents" (Brooks 2011). While Reggio Emilia's (1860-1963) approach under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) values parental engagement by stating that families should be given every opportunity to participate in their children's early education. He also argues that parental engagement contributes to the school by creating opportunities for stakeholders to network and share information (French 2008; Domina 2005). Exploring

the theoretical perspectives of parental engagement provided the basis for this research and reinforced the idea of parental engagement in ECCE (Tekin 2019; 2011).

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an interrogative process rooted in comprehending a social or human problem (Creswell 2009). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study as it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Flick 2018). Qualitative research is used to study a phenomenon with limited available information as its nature is exploratory (Taherdoost 2022). Using a qualitative approach for this study permits the inclusion of Nigerian minorities and enables the voice of Nigerian mothers whose voices are not currently heard within Irish research (Liamputtong 2006). It also helps to better understand how Nigerian mothers perceive and engage with their children's ECCE.

In qualitative research, meaning is socially constructed by people interacting with their world (Creswell 2009). A qualitative approach enables the concepts of relationships between the researcher and the Nigerian mothers about their engagement with their children's ECCE (Cooper and Endacott 2007; Orb et al. 2000; Milne n.d.). Subscribing to a qualitative approach allows for investigating the Nigerian mothers' perspectives on the benefits and barriers to parental engagement in ECCE.

Qualitative research examines life experiences in an effort to understand and give them meaning; thus, it facilitates the investigation of what was the experience of the Nigerian mothers like relocating from Nigeria to Ireland (Byrne 2001). With the use of a qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to examine the Nigerian mothers' perspective on how their race or class influences their engagement in their children's ECCE and gather experiences from different viewpoints to see if the data are interconnected (Walliman 2021).

It is evident that height and weight are easy to measure or quantify, whereas what people think or feel is difficult to measure or quantify (Watson 2015; Byrne 2001). Instead of testing a preconceived hypothesis, the researcher seeks to explore the views of Nigerian mothers on the social and cultural factors that influence their engagement in their children's ECCE. This will be based on empirical data from the Nigerian mothers to provide evidence in the form of accounts of their experiences;

hence, a qualitative approach to this study (Polkinghorne 2005). Qualitative research is chosen for this study because the researcher aims to collect non-numeric data in the form of first-hand textual data from the participants, in this case, from the Nigerian mothers concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE and analyse it using specific interpretive methods (Taherdoost 2022; Jackson et al. 2007). Also, because the researcher wants to investigate the Nigerian mothers' experiences of things in the outer world, i.e., their experiences of their engagement with their children's ECCE, which cannot be measured in a statistical sense, thus, it requires a qualitative approach (Percy et al. 2015).

Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that emphasises how people make sense of their experiences and seeks to understand them through investigating human experiences, views, perceptions, motivations, intentions, and actions. Thus, it helps to discover new insights and ideas and generate new theories on the reasons why Nigerian mothers moved to Ireland and the challenges Nigerian mothers face in Ireland due to their immigrant status (Taherdoost 2022; Paley 2017). A qualitative approach is chosen for this study to emphasise the individual experience of each Nigerian mother regarding how they engage with their children's ECCE. One of the disadvantages of qualitative research is that data are subjectively generated by the method of coding or rating. However, to avoid this, the researcher ensured that the data generated in this study were rich, focused, and relevant to the Nigerian mothers' lived experiences of their engagement with their children's ECCE (Taylor 2005).

Qualitative research is intended to approach the world 'out there' by unpacking how people construct the world around them to offer meaningful and rich insight into a social phenomenon from the inside (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018). A qualitative approach offers a richer opportunity than the quantitative approach by enabling in-depth study about the engagement of Nigerian mothers with their children's ECCE, as this group are under-researched by researchers and policymakers. In this way, it adds to the knowledge in this area (Bako and Syed 2018).

Qualitative research is subjective and pays attention to a few things to which others ordinarily give only passing attention (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). For example, in this study, the Nigerian mothers' engagement with their young children and the early years educators varied; thus, the researcher obtained a more in-depth understanding of their

various modes of engagement, better understood the facilitators and barriers to parental engagement in ECCE and how Nigerian mothers engagement with their children in ECCE could be enhanced and extended for the benefit of parents, children and ECCE settings.

Taking a qualitative approach to this study, the non-verbal and verbal data are also considered to interpret the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers in terms of their engagement with their children's ECCE. Non-verbal data is considered in this study because facial expressions communicate 93% of people's feelings and attitudes and recognise cultural gestures and clues, which are important in interacting with Nigerian mothers (Denham and Onwuegbuzie 2013).

A qualitative approach is suitable for this study because it is the best to explore the ways in which Nigerian mothers perceive their engagement with their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood which might be difficult to explore using a quantitative approach.

Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology and Methods

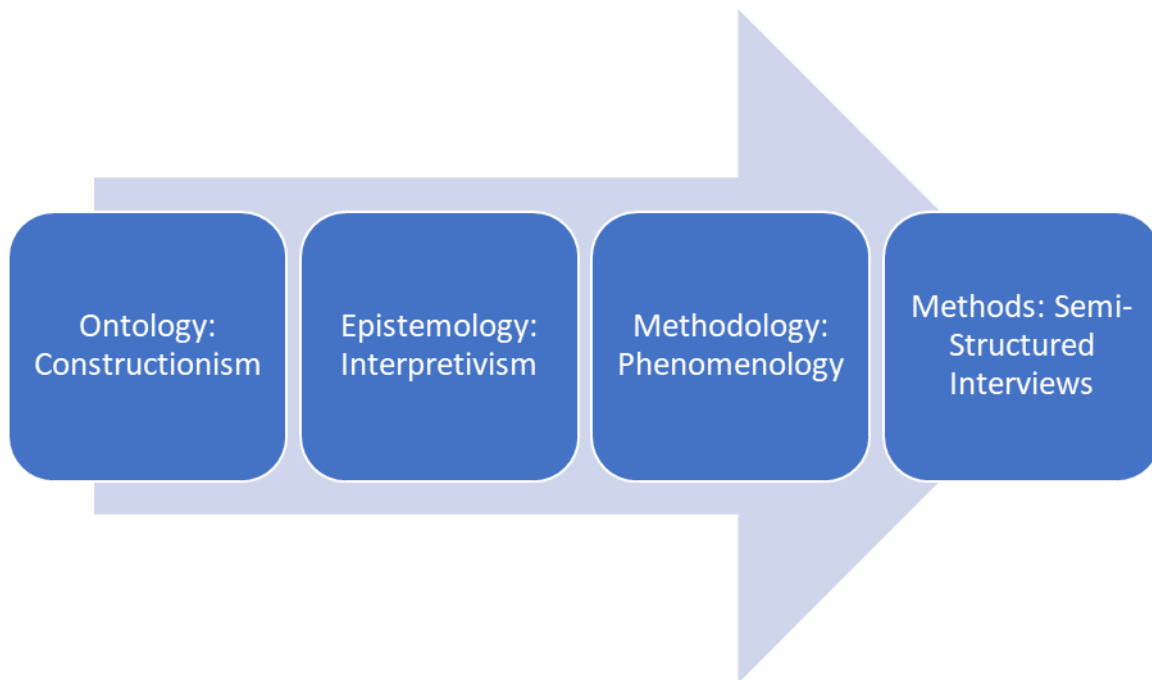


Figure 7: Research Design Diagram.

Ontology

A constructivist ontological perspective underpinned this research. A constructivist ontological stance aids in the co-construction of knowledge with Nigerian mothers concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE, as they are at the centre of this experience.

According to Crotty (1998), ontology is the philosophical stance behind a chosen methodology. Ontology is looking at the beliefs or worldviews of the world around us and how this impacts a piece of research. It examines what is true and how existing things are categorised (Killam 2013). The researcher believes that human beings are active participants in the researched world; thus, the constructivist ontological perspective underpins this research, which means that knowledge is and should be co-constructed between people. The researcher's ontological position is informed based on the fact that different people experience the world differently because of the culture in which they live and their encounters with the world.

All human experiences are different; therefore, phenomena must be viewed from the perspectives of those who experienced them. The constructivist ontological assumption gives voices to Nigerian mothers, highlights the lived experiences and worldview of these mothers, and inspires them to express their thoughts on their engagement with their children's ECCE, as they are the people affected by the phenomenon under investigation.

Constructionism assumes that reality is the product of social processes, hence the construction of the researcher's understanding of the world through her interactions with Nigerian mothers on the benefits and factors impacting parental engagement in the early years (Tuli 2010). To understand the views of Nigerian mothers, their experiences are perceived from their point of view. By taking a constructivist stance, the researcher seeks to understand Nigerian mothers' internal experiences from their perspective (Denicolo et al. 2016).

Constructivists believe that individuals search for an understanding of the world in which they live; hence, their goal is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell 2014). Through a constructivist stance, the researcher actively engaged in discussions with Nigerian mothers on how they engaged with their children's ECCE to bring diverse participants from different perspectives to the study, thereby gaining accurate information as they arose from the event.

Constructivists believe knowledge is constructed jointly in interaction by the researcher and the researched through consensus and that knowledge is subjective, constructed and grounded on the shared signs and symbols recognised by members of a culture (Grbich 2012). A constructivist stance allows the researcher to gain rich and deep insights into Nigerian mothers' inner experiences and comprehend their views and perspectives on how Nigerian mothers' engagement with children in ECCE could be enhanced and extended for the benefit of parents, children and ECCE settings (Denicolo et al. 2016; Grbich 2012).

Through this stance, the researcher explored Nigerian mothers' views, interpreted data from their inner experiences, and could not make assumptions but put aside her personal views, beliefs, or biases. The researcher was also open-minded as she asked Nigerian mothers questions, such as if they asked for feedback from early years

educators about their children's ECCE, which challenged her beliefs on the topic to gain a wide range of possibilities from the research (Denicolo et al. 2016). For instance, when the researcher spoke to some early years educators before embarking on this study, there was the perception that Nigerian immigrant parents tend to refrain from asking for feedback from the early years educators on their children's ECCE and do not regularly attend preschool events. However, this only offers a partial picture as it was mainly some early years educators' perceptions. Since very little is written on Nigerian immigrant parent engagement in ECCE, a constructivist stance addressed these concerns from the perspectives of those (Nigerian mothers) who were directly related to the topic.

Epistemology

Epistemology examines the relationship between knowledge and the researcher during discovery, thus driven by ontological beliefs (Killam 2013). Epistemology explains a research decision and the beliefs regarding the connection between the knower and the known, in other words, between the researcher and those to be empowered (Hiller 2016; Tuli 2010). An interpretivist epistemology perspective underpins this research. Interpretivism believes that the social world is approached through understanding human behaviour and that knowledge is constructed through interpreting their experiences in the world (Hiller 2016; Al-Saadi 2014).

Interpretivism aims to bring into consciousness unseen social forces and structures (Scotland 2012). The researcher is of the epistemological view that knowledge needs to be interpreted to discover the underlying meaning, thus placing strong importance on a better understanding of the world through first-hand experience, accurate reporting, and quotations of actual conversations from insiders' viewpoints instead of testing the laws of human behaviour (Al-Saadi 2014; Tuli 2010).

Interpretivist researchers explicitly include an explanation of their ontological, epistemological, cultural, professional, and personal positions and values regarding the research topic at hand. This research highlights all this information to support the integrity, motives and potential biases related to the research project (Hiller 2016). As interpretative research is rooted in phenomenology, this gives the researcher an understanding of how to study a particular phenomenon (Nigerian mothers who reside

in Ireland concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE) and not generalise the population of Nigerian mothers of young children living in Ireland (Tuli 2010).

From an interpretive perspective, the researcher believes that knowledge is rooted in our specific experiences; it is subjective and tied to the natural circumstances in which we enact our lives. The researcher is of the opinion that knowledge is created by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied by focusing on their meaning and interpretation; hence, she constructs meanings and interpretations based on those of the participants, in this case, the Nigerian mothers (Hiller 2016; Al-Saadi 2014). Taking an interpretive and constructivist approach to this study made the researcher see the world as being constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with one another and the wider social systems thus made the researcher value the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland (Tuli 2010).

Methodology

Qualitative methodology is underpinned by constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, hence the assumption that meaning is rooted in the participants' experiences and that this meaning is negotiated through the researcher's perceptions (Tuli 2010).

This study used phenomenological research as its qualitative approach. Phenomenology is one of many types of qualitative research that explore the lived experiences of humans (Byrne 2001). Phenomenology emphasises the importance of personal perspective and interpretation of a specific phenomenon (Pathak 2017; Percy et al. 2015).

Phenomenology could be traced back to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) but was later developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Husserl believed a scientific approach should be used to investigate human experiences and that preconceived notions and assumptions must be set aside before exploring human experiences so as to be able to objectively describe the phenomena under study (Suddick et al. 2020; Bryne 2001). Throughout the research process, the researcher ensured that she bracketed her biases about Nigerian mothers' engagement in ECCE and being a Nigerian mother of three children in Ireland to be

able to gain the perspectives of those who experience the phenomenon and thus identify the essence of Nigerian mothers' engagement in ECCE (Byrne 2001).

Phenomenological approach employs individual's perspectives to understand an experience and aims to answer research questions using the individual's understanding of events (Taherdoost 2022). This approach was used to understand the meaning of Nigerian mothers' experiences from their perspectives concerning how they engaged with their children's ECCE and allows for the examination of the researcher's perception of the topic to generate an understanding of what it is like to experience the event (Paley 2017).

Phenomenology sets out to discover and understand the essence of lived experiences (Creswell 2005; Byrne 2001). A phenomenological approach to this study provided a deep, comprehensive understanding of different perspectives on a shared phenomenon, hence aiding the understanding of Nigerian mothers' perception of their experience engaging with their children's ECCE in Ireland. The main explanation of phenomenology is to seek in-depth insight into the everyday experience of such phenomena or to introduce a key concept of classical phenomenology, in this case, the lifeworld of the immigrant participants in which the experience of ECCE is already rooted (Szanto 2020; Paley 2017).

Phenomenology is a philosophy that puts essences back into reality, and its main idea is to integrate subjectivism and objectivism into its notion of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2005). It is also the study of any human experience, lifeworld, and how things present themselves to us in not-so-unusual experience (Gallagher 2012; Given 2008; Sokolowski 2000). This approach gave a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers who had children availing of a free preschool programme between the years of 2020 and 2022 and the meaning these mothers made of their experiences. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher interviewed Nigerian mothers who moved to Ireland for different reasons and had lived in Ireland for various years to find commonalities regarding their perceptions of parental engagement in ECCE and the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland. Phenomenology was adopted in this study to give individuals from minority populations a voice, in this case, Nigerian mothers, the opportunity to share their experiences about their engagement in their children's ECCE (Noon 2018).

Phenomenology was also chosen to research Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE in an Irish context, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood, which lacks exploration.

Intentionality is closely associated with phenomenology, as every experience we have is intentional (Sokolowski 2000). One of the characteristics of the phenomenology belief is that it studies lifeworld as we immediately experience it (Given 2008). In phenomenology, participants are purposively selected based on the experiences under study as well as their verbal proficiency in the research language (Mescht 2004). A phenomenological approach to this study allowed the researcher to choose people who were directly related to the study (Nigerian mothers) and structurally placed them at the centre of the discovery, thus facilitating the interviewing of participants regarding their lived experiences and the meaning they made of their experiences as regarding a particular phenomenon of interest which is their engagement in their children's ECCE.

There are diverse ways to gain knowledge. One way is through examining the literature. The literature review conducted as part of this study gave the researcher insights into other people's work on parental engagement in ECCE. It informed the researcher on issues of immigrant engagement in ECCE and Nigerian mothers, providing a background for this research.

A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study after considering other qualitative research designs. Researchers often use ethnography design to describe the culture of a group of people. Ethnography design draws on a family of methods involving direct and sustained contact with human agents within their daily lives and cultures (O'Reilly 2009). The emphasis on culture in ethnographic design made the researcher consider this research design. However, this would result in the researcher focusing on the culture of the Nigerian mothers in this study rather than their lived experiences concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE.

Another qualitative research design, such as narrative research, was also considered. Narrative research, sometimes called narrative inquiry, involves working with narrative materials of various kinds that sometimes already exist to categorise or interpret them (Squire et al. 2014). Narrative research is the study of both the living of storied

experience, the stories one tells of their lived experience and places inquirers amid living and the telling of the stories (Clandinin 2007). However, because the researcher wanted the Nigerian mothers to describe their engagement with their children's ECCE from their point of view, the narrative design was not as appropriate as phenomenology for this study. Researchers use grounded theory to develop interpretive theories from data (Scott 2009). The goal of this study was not to build theories but to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE. With limited participants in the researcher's reach, grounded theory was unsuitable for this study.

Phenomenology sometimes involves interviewing a small number of people, inviting them to talk about their experience of a particular phenomenon and analysing the interview transcripts (Paley 2017). This approach gave the researcher the opportunity to interview a small number of Nigerian mothers of young children living in Ireland to share their experiences of how they engaged with their children's ECCE.

In summary, phenomenology involves describing the lived experiences of people (Somekh and Lewin 2005). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE, and because a phenomenological design was used for this study, individual interviews with participants were used as the source of data.

Method

This study implemented the methods of semi-structured interviews to inquire about Nigerian mothers' understanding of the term parental engagement in ECCE. Methods try to find an explanation of questions of current interest by rigorous study of the past (Kumar 2010). This study adopted the method of semi-structured interviews to understand how Nigerian mothers engage with their children's ECCE (*See Appendix H and I for Interview Questions*).

Social constructivist interviews claimed that language does not only define the external social world and people's inner mental states, but it actively constructs them through discourse in interaction (Cassell and Symon 2004). An in-depth semi-structured interview which aligned with the researcher's epistemological view enabled the researcher to engage in dialogue with Nigerian mothers on the subject matter. An in-

depth semi-structured interview using open-ended questions was used as the data collection instrument for this study to facilitate dialogue between the Nigerian mothers and the researcher, offering rich and in-depth insight into the study. It also allowed Nigerian mothers to elaborate on issues around the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland (Alsaawi 2014).

Semi-structured interviews assisted in gaining access to the lifeworld of the Nigerian mothers who participated in this study (Pathak 2017). Fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen Nigerian mothers. Open-ended questionnaires, which are the most common structured means of gathering primary data. This method could have been used as the data collection instrument for this study, but it could have limited Nigerian mothers' responses concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE. Also, open-ended questionnaires do not give room for Nigerian mothers to ask for clarifications on questions they do not understand, thereby making it hard to seek the views of Nigerian mothers on the research topic (Beiske 2007; Pershing 2006; Milne n.d.).

Using open-ended questionnaires as the data collection instrument for this study could make Nigerian mothers choose not to answer some questions (Nayak and Narayan 2019). Qualitative research interviews gathered accounts of the lifeworld of the Nigerian mothers' concerning the explanation of the meaning of their described phenomena. It tries to comprehend the world from their point of view and explain the meaning of their experiences to uncover their lived world before scientific explanations (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018; Cassell and Symon 2004).

Interviews are one of the major approaches to collecting data in qualitative research; in this case, they are ideal for gaining insight into the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers around the research topic (Alsaawi 2014). Interviews, which align with the researcher's ontological view, are a specific form of dialogue where knowledge is produced through the interaction between the interviewer (the researcher) and the interviewees (Nigerian mothers). It was a basic mode of inquiry which explored the experiences of Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018).

The researcher was interested in the Nigerian mothers' experiences regarding their engagement with their children's ECCE, and interviewing allowed the researcher to

access this perspective (Seidman 2006). Interviews are exceptionally suitable for research into sensitive matters, so it was employed to encourage Nigerian mothers to raise issues such as thumb sucking and potty training pertinent to them and the Nigerian culture and gave clues to their subjective view of the world (Fahie 2014).

In-depth interviews are co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee, and it is often relaxed, open, honest, and based on mutual interest (Morris 2015). In-depth interviews enabled the co-construct of knowledge with the Nigerian mothers in a relaxed atmosphere on the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE. In-depth semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection instrument for this study to dig out new knowledge on Nigerian immigrant mothers and the Irish ECCE system (Galletta and Cross 2013).

Social constructionists view the text of an interview as an interaction constructed in the context of the interview (Cassell and Symon 2004). In-depth semi-structured interviews, which align with the researcher's ontological view, gave meaning to specific phenomena from the participants of this study (Nigerian mothers) and allowed the researcher to discuss her area of interest with people going through the experience (Pasian 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two phases. Phase 1 (January 2022 to February 2022) and Phase 2 (November 2022) to mitigate any impact COVID-19 might have on the study. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom and face-to-face in places participants felt comfortable and safe; however, participants' preferences about where to conduct the interviews were accommodated (Liamputtong 2006). Due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 at the time of data collection (January-February and November 2022), many of the participants preferred to do the interviews online. The interview times and dates were determined by the participants to best suit their availability. The interviews were clear and straightforward, without jargon words, and contained question areas such as the participant's journey to Ireland, their understanding of parental engagement in ECCE, their mode of engagement in their children's ECCE and many more (*See Appendix H and I for Interview Questions*). The interviews lasted for about 40 to 60 minutes and, with the consent of the participants, were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes (*See Appendix B and C for Information Letter*). The literature review and the theoretical framework for this

study shaped the interview questions. Interview procedures were followed before the interviews began (see *Appendix F and G for Interview Procedure*). For the face-to-face interviews, social distancing was maintained, and face coverings were worn in line with the HSE public health guidelines on COVID-19. The researcher began the interviews by introducing herself to the participants and welcoming and thanking them for participating in the study (See *Appendix F and G*).

Sampling and Participants

The first stage in the sampling process is to define the target population in relation to the study of the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE (Taherdoost 2016). To generate a national sample, the participants of this study were selected from the population of Nigerian mothers living within the provinces of Ireland. The participants of this study were sourced from the Munster, Leinster, Ulster, and Connacht regions of Ireland.

The validity of a piece of research not only stands by the appropriateness of methodology but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy adopted (Cohen et al. 2018). The participants of this study were purposefully selected. Purposeful sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. It was chosen deliberately for this study because it was the best sampling criteria relevant to the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE (Pathak 2017; Sharma 2017; Emmel 2013). Purposive sampling, as its name suggests, was chosen to intentionally select Nigerian mothers to provide important information on factors influencing how they engage with their children's ECCE, which cannot be obtained from other choices (Cohen et al. 2018; Taherdoost 2016).

According to Cohen et al. (2005, p.103), "in purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on their judgment of their typicality"; in this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs'. Purposive sampling enhances the accuracy and reliability of the data and findings of this study as samples are matched to the aims and objectives of the study (Campbell et al. 2020).

Participants of this study were purposefully selected based on the following three criteria:

- (1) Participants were immigrant mothers of Nigerian descent living in Ireland,
- (2) Participants had children enrolled in the Universal ECCE Programmes/free-preschool year scheme in the provinces of Ireland for at least three months,
- (3) Participants could communicate in English or Pidgin English.

Purposive sampling was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore how race, background, and culture influenced parental engagement in ECCE; hence, it was ideal for exploratory research design (Sharma 2017; Taherdoost 2016; Emmel 2013). Nigerian mothers are different in terms of their race, background, and culture; hence, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to explore if these differences influence how they engage with their children's ECCE.

Nigerian mothers whose children were availing of the universal ECCE programme were selected as the sample group for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, when it comes to parental engagement, mothers are often referred to as parents (Alharthi 2023; Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Dooley et al. 2004; Moreno and Lopez 1999). According to Nigerian culture, mothers are critical actors in their children's ECCE (Adams 2016; Adams and Jenyo 2016; Nwoke 2013; Okorie 2013). Ireland is one of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries with the highest cost of childcare, and to eliminate cost as a potential factor influencing the data gathered in this study, only Nigerian mothers whose children were availing of the universal ECCE programme were asked to participate (Russell et al. 2018). Participants' children were enrolled in the universal ECCE programme for at least three months to offer the participants the opportunities to engage with the early years educators regarding their children's ECCE.

In addition, participants could communicate in English and/or Pidgin English, the two main common means of communication used by Nigerians. English language, the official means of communication used by Nigerians (Aligbe 2017), and Pidgin English, also known as 'Brokin English' is a national but informal language spoken across Nigeria (Ajibade et al. 2012). Pidgin English is a mixed English language with Yoruba and Igbo grammar structure and is often used to communicate and interact and it is widely spoken in Nigeria (Ajibade et al. 2012; Chigozie n.d.). The researcher acknowledged that Nigerians use Pidgin English as a means of communication; hence, in this study, Nigerian mothers had the choice to either do the interviews in

English or Pidgin English (See *Appendix B and C*). As a Nigerian born and raised in Nigeria and one who speaks both English and Pidgin English fluently, the researcher translated the interview questions from English to Pidgin English herself without the help of a translator (See *Appendix I for Interview Questions in Pidgin English*) designed by the researcher. Although the participants had the choice to either do the interview in English or Pidgin English, all participants did the interviews in English.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by The Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) on the 13th of December 2021. It was further approved to extend participants to outside Limerick on the 20th of January 2022 due to difficulty recruiting enough participants in Limerick (See *Appendix V and W*). After ethical approval from MIREC, the researcher searched the City and County Childcare Committees and Tusla-Child and Family Agency websites for a list of preschools in all provinces of Ireland offering universal ECCE programmes. She viewed this list by County. The researcher then wrote/mailed sixty preschool owners/managers in the provinces of Ireland, informing them of her research and asking if they would be interested in passing on information letters to Nigerian mothers. The researcher also visited six preschool managers/owners in the Munster region, telling them about her research and asking if they would be interested in distributing the information letters to Nigerian mothers in their settings. The preschool settings selected for this study were based in Ireland's urban regions with substantial Nigerian populations (CSO 2022; 2016; 2012). After this process, the researcher was then asked by the preschool owners/managers to either email or drop the information letters to them for distribution to Nigerian mothers whose children were availing of the universal ECCE programme. The extent of the preschool owners'/managers' role was to pass on the information letters in English and Pidgin English to Nigerian mothers, and these mothers then contacted the researcher directly (See *Appendix A, B and C*).

The researcher went through the criteria to participate in this study with them over the phone, and if the participants met the criteria, an interview date was scheduled. More than 15 participants contacted the researcher directly via phone calls, but she selected the first fifteen Nigerian mothers to participate in the study due to time constraints during the fieldwork for this study. However, these participants were from Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Galway (See *Appendix J for Field Work Timeline Table*). Three (n=3) of

the participants were from Dublin, four (n=4) from Galway, three (n=3) from Cork and five (n=5) from Limerick. The study participants were selected from these geographical areas to help ensure the reliability and validity of the study. 15 Nigerian mothers were chosen because this study uses a qualitative phenomenology approach to explore the participants' experiences. Thus, it requires a small number of research participants (Creswell and Poth 2018; Creswell 1998).

Participants Demographics

Ogheneme

Ogheneme, 29 years lived, with her husband and three children aged 10, 4 and 1. Ogheneme was a teenager when she joined her mother in Ireland 15 years ago, and she works as a registered nurse with the Health Service Executive. Ogheneme's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past fifteen months, and one of her other children has availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Blessing

Blessing, 36 years lived, with her husband and four children aged 14, 11, 4 and 1. Blessing was a teenager when she moved to Ireland 19 years ago with her parents, and she works as a clinical trial project manager. Blessing's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past five months, and two of her other children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Sarah

Sarah, 47 years, married with four children aged 17, twins 7 and 4. Sarah moved to Ireland 17 years ago to seek asylum due to family reasons. Sarah has been granted leave to remain in Ireland and works as a health care assistant. Sarah's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past five months, and two of her other children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Adeola

Adeola, 29 years, lived with her husband and three children aged 13, 11 and 4. Adeola has lived in Ireland for over 10 years and works as a social worker. Adeola's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past five

months, and two of her other children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Jane

Jane, 34 years, relocated to the United Kingdom from Nigeria in her teenage years. She then moved to Ireland over 15 years ago. Jane lived with her husband and five children aged 15, 13, 9, 6 and 4. Presently Jane is a student, but she used to work as a health care assistant. Jane's son has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past fifteen months, and two of her other children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Anuoluwapo

Anuoluwapo, 50 years lived, with her husband and six children aged 22, 21, 17, 16, 13 and 4. Anuoluwapo moved to Ireland 22 years ago to seek asylum in a quest for greener pastures, and she is self-employed. Anuoluwapo's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past five months, and three of her other children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Omotola

Omotola, 41, single, lived with her two children, aged 7 and 4. Omotola came to Ireland 5 years ago to bury her late husband and later decided not to return to Nigeria but to seek Asylum. She has been granted leave to remain in the state and now works as a health care assistant. Omotola's son has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past six months, and her other child has availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Adunola

Adunola is a 39-year lady who moved to Ireland 6 years ago to seek asylum due to her search for a better life. She has been granted leave to remain in the state and lived with her boyfriend and two children aged 4 and 1.4. Adunola works as a health care assistant, and her daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the last six months. It is Adunola's first encounter with the universal ECCE programme.

Merit

Merit is a 40-year single lady who lived with her two children, aged 17 and 4. She moved to Ireland 17 years ago to seek asylum in the quest for a better future for herself and her children. Merit has been granted leave to remain and works as a

social care worker. Her daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past six months, and it is her first encounter with the universal ECCE programme.

Isoke

Isoke, 35, lived with her husband and three children aged 7, 4 and 2. Isoke moved to Ireland five years ago because her family wanted to relocate to an English-speaking country. Isoke is a stay-at-home mum and has never worked in Ireland. Isoke's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past sixteen months, and one of her children has availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Omolara

Omolara, 41, lived with her husband and four children aged 9, 7, 3 and 4 months. She moved to Ireland 4 years ago to seek asylum in a quest for a good life for her children, and she awaits her leave to remain in Ireland. Omolara works as a health care assistant, and her daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past six months. Two of Omolara's children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in past years.

Favour

Favour, 36, lived with her husband and two children aged 3.4 and 2.7 months. She moved to Ireland 4.6 years ago to join her husband and works as a healthcare assistant. Favour's son has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past nine months, and it is her first encounter with the universal ECCE programme.

Aminah

Aminah, 35, lived with her husband and two children, aged 3.3 and 2. She moved to Ireland 5 years ago to join her husband and works as a healthcare assistant. Aminah's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past six months, and this is her first encounter with the universal ECCE programme.

Habibah

Habibah, 34, single, lived with her five children aged 15, 13, 9, 8 and 4. She was a teenager when she joined her mother in Ireland 22 years ago and works as a health care assistant. Habibah's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past sixteen months. Four of her children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in the past years.

Chidinma

Chidinma, 32 years lived, with her husband and two children aged 3.2 and 5 months. She moved to Ireland 6 years ago to study nursing and now works as a registered nurse with the Health Service Executive. Chidinma's daughter has been availing of the universal ECCE programme for the past six months, and this is her first encounter with the universal ECCE programme.

Figure 8: Participants Demographics

All the names of the participants detailed above are common Nigerian names but are not their real names. The participants' real names are changed to conceal their identity and enhance the anonymity pledged to them.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews of this study were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach. Reflexive thematic analysis is used to describe the lived experiences of a particular social group, thus is applicable to phenomenology studies. It stresses participants' perceptions, thoughts, and experiences subjectively (Chang and Wang 2021; Brulé and Finnigan 2020). Reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretive method positioned within a qualitative paradigm and, as such, a feasible analytic option for qualitative researchers. It is an approach to the researcher's reflective and thorough engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process (Drinkwater et al. 2022; Byrne 2022; Campbell et al. 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretivist paradigm that emphasises comprehending individuals' subjective experiences (Drinkwater et al. 2022). The researcher chooses this analysis approach given the nature of her research (qualitative) and her commitment to interpretivism. Since the researcher examined the meanings that participants generated and attributed to how they engaged with their children's ECCE, reflexive thematic analysis was a suitable analytical approach. Using a reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher was able to immerse herself in the data and move from being overly descriptive to interpretive. Reflexive thematic analysis was also employed to make sense of essential meanings communicated by the Nigerian mothers by coding and organising thematic patterns or

essences found in the Nigerian mothers' descriptions of their lived experiences to state and describe the essence of the lived experience (Braun and Clarke 2012).

Reflexive thematic analysis aided the researcher in examining and reflecting on the commonalities of the Nigerian mothers' experiences about how they engaged with their children's ECCE and allowed the researcher to choose what counts as a theme as well as the type, approach, and level of analysis (Campbell et al. 2021; Chang and Wang 2021). Although what counts as themes were determined by the researcher, however, they described what was essential to the research question. As the researcher chose to give a rich description of the entire data set, an inductive approach was used as the themes originated from the data (Drinkwater et al. 2022; Campbell et al. 2021).

The data analysis process for this research is mainly inductive as a theory was generated from the data gathered from the Nigerian mothers rather than using the data gathered to test an already existing theory (Al-Saadi 2014; Scotland 2012). Inductive analysis is data-driven, free from any pre-conceived theory, aligns with the researcher's ontological position of 'constructionist' and was adopted to derive codes from meanings generated from interacting with the Nigerian mothers who participated in this study (Bryne 2022). This process began by the researcher collecting data from the 15 Nigerian mothers who had children availing of a free preschool programme between the years of 2020 and 2022, transcribing the semi-structured interviews and then immersing herself in the data to make sense of it.

Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis followed these six phases:

- Familiarisation with the data
- Generating initial codes
- Generating initial themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming the themes and
- Writing the report

Phase 1: Familiarising with the Data Set. Before familiarising herself with the data set, the researcher engaged in the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of

becoming self-aware and conveying, recognising, and dissecting the implicit knowledge of research (D'Cruz et al. 2007). The researcher is aware of her role in the research procedure and the outcomes of this process. During this phase, the researcher engaged in a reflection process about her biases and assumptions concerning the research topic as well as the analytic process. Through this action, the researcher identified and documented her personal biases to recognise her positionalities when analysing the transcripts (Campbell et al. 2021) (*See Appendix T*). After the reflective exercise, the researcher began familiarising herself with the data set. To immerse herself in the data, the researcher manually transcribed the audio interviews collected from the participants into a Microsoft Word document, (*See Appendix K for a sample of a transcribed interview*) as manual transcription can be an extremely helpful activity in this regard (Bryne 2022).

To avoid the problem of the audio recording being selective because it neglects the visual and non-verbal aspects of interviews, non-verbal interactions such as laughing, smiling, giggling, and many more that were important in the Nigerian culture were included in the transcribed interviews. Also, how and in what ways things were said were documented in the reflective journal (Bailey 2008; Cohen et al. 2005). Capturing the non-verbal communication during the interviews gave the researcher more information on what the participants were trying to share (Cohel et al. 2005). Next, the researcher thoroughly read and reread the transcribed interviews to identify with the data and acquire a sense of each participant's experience. Throughout this procedure, the researcher continued the reflexive process by reflecting on her comprehension of the data set in the reflective journal. The researcher read each interview transcript line by line and began to give meaning to each sentence. She noted initial impressions in the reflective journal from the transcribed interviews and started the coding process.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. According to Saldana (2021), a code is an interpretation that represents or translates data generated by a researcher. Having familiarised herself with the transcribed data set, the researcher could detect patterns solely reflective of the data (Bryne 2022; Cohel et al. 2005). Coding assisted the researcher in translating respondent responses (Nigerian mothers' responses) into specific categories for analysis (Cohel et al. 2005). After systematically coding interesting features of the data, the researcher generated initial codes that interpreted meaning in the text by looking for patterns repeated in the transcribed interviews

(Saldana 2015). These codes were generated by the researcher looking through the text to comprehend what each sentence was trying to represent (Charmaz 2006). While analysing the data, the researcher used different highlight and font colours to highlight the text in the word processor documents (*See Appendix M*). Then, she put a comment beside each sentence to signify its meaning using the comment features in the Word documents (*See Appendix L for a sample of a code-transcribed interview*).

As argued by Saldana (2015), the quality of research lies hugely in the excellence of coding. To become skilful at doing qualitative analysis, the researcher watched YouTube videos on coding and took a module on coding as part of her Structured PhD programme. According to Saldana (2015), it is rare for researchers to code the first time correctly, so the researcher went back and forth multiple times to re-read the text to ensure the names given to each initial code signify meanings in the data. The initial codes were data-driven to decrease bias in the analysis, as the researcher did not apply her preconceived ideas to generate pre-existing codes (Braun and Clarke 2006). After completing this process, the researcher listed the 292 initial codes she generated from all the 15 transcribed interviews in a Word document (*See Appendix N*).

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes. In this stage, the researcher actively generates themes, not passively waiting for the data to be found (Campbell et al. 2021). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that a theme represents meaning within the data set. Also, a theme usually captures something important about the data and is often used to synthesise and explain a larger segment of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Charmaz 2006). After the initial codes were generated from the text, the researcher looked at them thoroughly to see what meanings originated from them. She then identified and grouped similar codes together. Afterwards, the researcher came up with overarching words, the focused codes representing meanings from the initial codes that she grouped together (*See Appendix P and Q*). Baxter (2011) highlights that initial and focused codes should be combined together to form themes that are a statement for discussion. After generating the focused codes, the researcher listed them in a Word document. After that, she looked at the focused codes thoroughly and grouped similarly focused codes together, which then informed the potential themes of this study (*See Appendix R*).

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes: In this stage, the researcher cross-checked that the themes generated related to the code extracted from the data. While reviewing the themes, the researcher also collated illustrative quotes and codes that demonstrated the themes.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming the Themes: During this stage, the researcher makes sure she uses captivating names for themes that depict the essence of the study. The researcher then created a theme table to assist with the analysis (*See Appendix S*).

Phase 6: Writing the Report. The finding section is the last stage of the reflective thematic analytic process. According to Relacion (2011), data collected from qualitative research must be organised and interpreted accurately to extract the key findings for research. To create findings that transformed raw data into new knowledge in this study, the researcher engaged in active and demanding analytic processes throughout all phases of the research (Thorne 2000). In writing the report, the researcher is active in the process as she converted the data analysis into writing by using extracts that relate to the themes, the research questions, and her interpretation of the reflexive journaling she kept throughout the research process.

Other data analysis techniques, such as theoretical and computer-assisted data analysis were also considered by the researcher. Theoretical analysis wasn't appropriate because the researcher did not have predetermined categories or themes that she wanted to examine during the data analysis state, and likewise, she did not want to use her pre-conceived ideas to generate pre-existing codes; hence, this data analysis technique wasn't appropriate (Percy et al. 2015). The researcher equally considered computer-assisted data analysis (NVivo), but because the researcher did not want to rush the data analytical process, i.e., the process of coding, collating and interpreting the data hence this analysis technique was inappropriate (Mabuza et al. 2014).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are vital keys to effective research. Evaluating the quality of research is essential if findings are to be utilised in practice; hence, throughout the research process, the researcher carried out validity checks to validate her study (Noble and Smith 2015). This section outlines the integrity with which this study was

conducted. According to Taylor (2013), validity is defined as the scrutiny of logical and empirical arguments to determine whether they support theoretical claims. Validity is also defined as the accuracy with which the findings reflect the data. Thus, it is an internal verification measure followed through in a study (Noble and Smith 2015; Creswell and Miller 2000). According to Cohel et al. (2005), reliability is concerned with accuracy over groups of respondents. Reliability is the degree to which measures are free from error and yield consistent results (Lakshni and Mohideen 2013).

Member checking and a reflective journal were utilised to ensure credibility in this study. Member checking is also known as participant verification. It is a quality control measure that allows participants to correct errors, challenge interpretations and assess the results of a study to improve its accuracy, credibility, and validity (Reilly 2013; Harper and Cole 2012). Carlson suggests that member checking should be an individual process (Carlson 2010). A soft copy of the transcribed data and findings was emailed to all participants to facilitate member checking in this study for accuracy and clarification. Initially, when the researcher told the participants of this study that she wanted to email the interview transcripts and findings to them, they said the researcher should not bother because they believed she couldn't make things up. The researcher had to explain why this process was essential for her research, which the participants eventually consented to.

This qualitative phenomenology study involved participants answering questions that relate directly to their lived experiences; therefore, through member checking, participants could review statements to ensure they accurately represent their lives and experiences (Harper and Cole 2012). Participants were emailed the transcribed interviews to go through at their earliest convenience, and no corrections were made.

To validate research procedures, a reflective diary must be utilised (Mortari 2015). To ensure validity in this study, a research diary was used to document the research processes and practices (Ortlipp 2008). Detailed planning of the research was included in the reflective diary, which enabled the researcher to recapture her experience of the study and think about and evaluate it (Boud et al. 1985). In addition, a reflective diary was used to document the researcher's thoughts throughout the research journey and what she observed from the participants during the interview process (*See Appendix T and U*). Also, the assumptions of this study were stated in

the reflective diary before data was sourced and were reflected on throughout the research process. The following were adopted to ensure quality, meaningful data in this study: interviews were transcribed manually to give room for the familiarity of the data, and quotes from the data extracts and field notes from the reflective diary were used to present the findings (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018).

Ethical Considerations

According to Lyons and Coyle (2021), ethics is the study of morals and how we should live. In addition, Hammersley and Trainou (2012) defined ethics as researching to ensure integrity, quality, and transparency. Due to the focus of social research on people, ethical issues are important in this type of research (Somekh and Lewin 2005). Under the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018), the following ethical factors were adhered to in this study: Approval for the field research was sought from The Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) in consultation with the researcher supervisors (Ref. no: A21-043). Information letters explaining the research and the process involved were sent to preschool owners/managers/participants beforehand (*See Appendix A, B and C for Letters to Preschool Owners/Managers/Participants*).

Informed consent was sourced from participants before the interview stage. According to Cohen et al. (2005, p. 51), "informed consent is the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would likely influence their decisions". Informed consent, both verbal and written, was obtained from participants before the interviewing stage (*See Appendix D and E for Informed Consent Form*). To gain informed consent from the participants, the researcher read out the informed consent forms, which stated that they understood what the study was all about, the implications for the Nigerian mothers, how data would be stored and utilised and many more to participants. The researcher then proceeded with the interviews when the participants asked her to do so. Pseudonyms were used to enhance anonymity, and a critical friend vetted the interview questions before the researcher ran them through her supervisors (Kember et al. 1997). To reduce the harm done to the participants of this study, participants were offered the opportunity to decide the location of the interviews. Also, the consequences of the study were made known to the participants. During the interviews, the researcher carefully observed the

participants to assess if the study affected them emotionally. The researcher offered emotional support to those participants that the study affected emotionally by reassuring them that all they had experienced in the past was over and that they should focus on the present.

To ensure participants of this study were not exploited, only recordings and analyses that focus on the experiential account of participants concerning their engagement with their children's ECCE and that they feel comfortable sharing were considered. In line with The Data Protection Act (2018) and MIREC, data from this study were kept safely and securely for the duration of the research plus an additional five years, and they will then be destroyed afterwards. The researcher is aware that research plays a role in marginalisation, and to avoid this, the participants' voices were captured to empower and render their perspectives heard (Czerniawski and Kidd 2011).

Participants' voices were captured in the following ways: Participants' words were used to generate meaning and knowledge of the study. Direct quotes and data extracts from the semi-structured interviews were used to represent participants' voices (Chandler et al. 2015). Field notes from the reflective diary, which includes the descriptions of participants' verbal and non-verbal communication, such as smiles, laughs, gestures, and facial expressions, were used to represent participants' voices in this study (Philpin et al. 2005).

According to Salazar (2017), many migrant women in Ireland are experiencing discrimination even amid much-supposed campaigns and legislation on equality. Therefore, in this study, the researcher ensured participants' personal information and identity were protected by asking the preschool owners/managers to only hand out the information letters to Nigerian mothers whose children were availing of the universal ECCE programme in their setting for at least three months. Then, those Nigerian mothers willing to participate in the study contacted the researcher directly.

In dealing with sensitive issues in the research, the researcher adopted the following techniques: The researcher reiterated to the participants that they had the right not to answer any sensitive questions or queries that might put them under duress and that they could decide what they wanted to share. The researcher told the participants they could withdraw from the study without penalty (*See Appendix B and C for details*). The researcher was patient and listened carefully to the participants when they shared their

experiences, even though some did not relate directly to the research. The researcher allowed the participants to take a break from the interview to attend to their children and continued when they were ready to do so. Lastly, the researcher had a list of organisations, such as Doras Lumni, that support migrants to hand out to Nigerian mothers for additional support should they be needed (*See Appendix F and G for interview procedures in English and Pidgin English*).

Positionality

Gary and Holmes (2020) described positionality as an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about a research task. Also, Jacobson and Mustapa (2019) defined positioning as how we see and interpret the world around us. Seidman (2013) argued the lives of researchers often influence the 'what' and 'why' of their study. Part of the researcher's life influenced this research. The researcher is a Nigerian immigrant mother of three who has lived in Ireland for over 18 years, and two of her children have availed of the universal ECCE programme in previous years. Initially, when one of her children was availing of the universal ECCE programme, the researcher was not keen on building the parent-early years educators' relationship between herself and the early years educators due to time constraints and cultural differences. However, the researcher's thinking changed after enrolling on the B.A programme in early childhood care and education at Mary Immaculate College Limerick, and she saw the importance of parental engagement in the early years. Since then, the researcher committed to her children's preschool education and developed a key interest in parental engagement in the early years.

The researcher knows that her background played a role in the way she made sense of the data. As a Nigerian mother living in Ireland, the researcher believes she could comprehend the experiences of these Nigerian mothers, having grown up in the same background and shared similar experiences with them. As a Nigerian mother residing in Ireland for more than 18 years, the researcher has an inside knowledge of Nigerian culture as well as what it was like to be an immigrant parent of young children, coupled with her experience as a lecturer in the area of early childhood studies and also from speaking to her students about the issue of immigrant parental engagement in Irish ECCE. These influenced this study and shaped the interview questions to address the researcher's biases and other areas pertinent to Nigerian mothers of young children

in Ireland. Two of the researcher's assumptions based on her experiences are that Nigerian mothers tend not to ask for feedback on their children's ECCE and do not regularly attend their children's preschool events. The researcher addressed these biases by asking the participants some questions based on her assumptions.

During the data interpretation stage, a reflexive approach involving a reflective diary was utilised. A reflective diary is a potential tool for reflexive analysis and is often used to validate research procedures (Mortari 2015; Nadin and Cassell 2006). The use of a reflective diary in this study was grounded in the researcher's ontological stance on social constructionism and the need for reflectivity in research. The researcher's research diary was simply an A4 notebook. The research diary was used to reflect on each interview experience by recording how each interview went, what the researcher felt throughout the interviews, and issues that came up during the interviews. It was also used to record what the researcher observed, i.e., both verbal and non-verbal observations during the interviews, her assumptions and how these could impact the research.

Using a research diary provided a structured way for the researcher to reflect on events she had experienced growing up as an African girl child, migrating to Ireland and concerning immigrant parental engagement in her role as a Nigerian mother and lecturer, as well as a past worker and student on placements in Irish ECCE settings. The research diary was used to express the researcher's personal feelings on the study and develop solutions for improving Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in Irish ECCE. Using a reflective diary in this study aided the researcher in gaining an awake stance on the Nigerian mothers' lived experiences about their engagement with their children's ECCE.

According to Fahie (2014), interviewing must be a mutually participatory event; hence, the researcher was an active participant in this study. The researcher acknowledged that she significantly impacted the data gathered in this study, as the interviews were co-constructed between herself and the 15 Nigerian mothers. However, this was the case to only promote an interactional research style and treat the interviews as conversations rather than an act to force Nigerian mothers to share their lived experiences on how they engaged with their children's ECCE (Knapik 2006).

Limitations of the study

Every research has its limitations. This study does not omit the various limitations peculiar to qualitative phenomenology research. Therefore, this section discusses the limitations of the study.

The first limitation of this study was related to the sample size. Sampling was drawn from 15 Nigerian mothers whose children availed of the universal ECCE programme between the years of 2020 and 2022 from Limerick, Galway, Cork, and Dublin. This does not represent the whole view of all Nigerian mothers whose children availed of the universal ECCE programme in Ireland between the years of 2020 and 2022. Therefore, this study may not apply to all Nigerian mothers whose children availed of the universal ECCE programme in Ireland between the years of 2020 and 2022.

In addition, this study only focused on a specific immigrant group in Ireland (Nigerian mothers); hence, the findings might not apply to other immigrant groups in Ireland as each immigrant group's experiences differ. Although the information from this study can be used to influence parental engagement among immigrants in Irish ECCE settings, the findings should not be generally applied to all ECCE settings in Ireland.

The second limitation of this study is that it was subjective. This study focused on each Nigerian mother's experience and engagement with her child's ECCE, her subjective understanding of this experience, and the researcher's understanding and interpretation of these experiences.

The third limitation was the use of a qualitative research design, which limited the number of interviews that were facilitated. This study was qualitative; hence, there was a limit to the number of interviewees accommodated. In addition, the interviewees' responses to the interview questions might make it difficult to apply the result of the study to a larger population in Ireland.

The fourth limitation of this study was a lack of prior research on the topic. While reviewing the literature on the topic, there was little research specific to the topic.

The fifth limitation was that most interviews were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a limitation because the researcher could not capture most face-to-face in-person interactions. The researcher's initial plan was to conduct all the interviews face-to-face, but during the interviewing scheduling process, most

participants preferred to do the interviews online due to the risk associated with meeting people because of the pandemic. The researcher then had to modify her data collection mode to online via Zoom as requested by the participants.

The sixth limitation was that during the second phase of the data collection of this study, only four out of the fifteen participants who participated in the first phase of the interviews were interviewed in this phase. This was the case because the children of the other eleven participants had moved on to primary school. Hence, their children were not availing of the universal ECCE scheme during that period. This limited the amount of data gathered in phase two of the data collection stage of this study.

The Researcher's Reflections on the Study

For a qualitative study, it is essential that the researcher reflects on their experiences throughout the whole process of the study. Therefore, this section reflects on the researcher's experiences during this study. At some stage during the interview recruitment process for this study, the researcher had difficulty sourcing 15 participants from Limerick to participate. Her initial plan was to collect data from Nigerian mothers in Limerick. However, after sending out information letters to preschool owners/managers in Limerick, the researcher only got 5 participants from Limerick who participated in the study. The researcher was disappointed because she thought there were more Nigerian mothers of young children in Limerick, as Limerick is one of the Irish cities with a significant population of Nigerians (Knox 2016). Due to time constraints, after the researcher waited for a few weeks and had no calls from any Nigerian mothers in Limerick interested in participating in her study, the researcher had to email The Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee administrator, informing her that she would like to extend the participants of her study to outside Limerick due to difficulty sourcing enough participants. The researcher was told to fill out a MIREC amendment application, giving reasons for why she wanted to extend the participants of her study outside Limerick, which the researcher did promptly.

Fortunately, the application was approved in two days, and then the researcher began the journey of sourcing participants for her study outside Limerick. It was a challenging task to look through the City and County Childcare committees and Tusla websites for a list of preschool settings in Ireland participating in the universal ECCE programmes. While contacting preschool settings to source participants for her study, some

managers bluntly told the researcher their settings don't participate in research. It was a bit disappointing. However, the researcher was not bothered by this, as she went further to reach out to more preschool settings. Fortunately, they were interested and asked the researcher to email or drop the information letters to them for distribution to Nigerian mothers whose children were availing of the universal ECCE programmes in their settings. The researcher was so delighted when she started receiving calls from Nigerian mothers outside Limerick who were interested in participating in her research. The researcher went through the criteria with them and made sure they met them before fixing a date for an interview with them.

Another dilemma the researcher experienced during the data collection process for this study was that some Nigerian mothers, after fixing the interview dates with them, later said that they were not comfortable doing the interviews with the researcher anymore due to confidentiality issues. The researcher explained to them what the research was about and assured them of anonymity, but they were reluctant to proceed with the interviews, and the researcher allowed them to withdraw from the study. This taught the researcher that people are entitled to privacy and that no one should be coerced to participate in research.

Also, when the researcher started receiving calls from participants who met the criteria to participate in her study, finding a suitable time to conduct the interviews was difficult due to the work schedules of some of the participants. Therefore, the researcher had to conduct some of the interviews late at night to suit the needs of the participants who were unavailable during the day due to their work schedules. This taught the researcher to be flexible when working with people.

Likewise, the process of arriving at the themes for this study was demanding. After each interview, the researcher manually transcribed it within a day or two to familiarise herself with the data. After manually transcribing the fifteen interviews, the next stage was coding. Going through each interview line by line and giving meaning to each sentence was stressful and time-consuming. At one point, it was overwhelming due to the amount of data the researcher had; hence, she had to take a break. After generating the initial codes, the next step was categorising the codes to form themes, which took ages as the researcher had to go back and forth to the coded data to ensure that the themes came from what the participants said. The process of extracting

quotes related to the themes was exciting because the researcher had many interesting quotes related to each theme and subthemes. The researcher was then left with the option to decide which quotes to present in chapter 5, the findings and the discussion chapter. What the researcher did was to ensure that the view of each participant about their engagement in their children's ECCE was represented.

During the interviews, as the researcher listened to the Nigerian mothers sharing their stories, she felt their pains, particularly when they shared their stories about why they moved to Ireland and what they went through navigating the new Irish systems and rearing their children in Ireland without any family and childcare support. It was like the researcher seeing herself because she had passed through the same experience when she moved to Ireland over 18 years ago. However, the researcher had to bracket her experiences and not be controlled by her emotions, but rather to focus on the phenomenon she is investigating, which is the lived experiences of the participant's engagement with their children's ECCE and not hers. Also, when the researcher needed to conduct the second phase of the interviews for this study to mitigate as far as possible any impact COVID-19 might have on the study, she was worried that all the children of the participants might have moved on to primary school. The reason is that the participants of this study had the choice to avail of the universal ECCE programme for their children for only one year instead of two years if they felt their children were ready to move on to primary school the following year. The researcher reached out to all fifteen participants to inquire if their children were still availing of the universal ECCE programme, and luckily for her, four of the participant's children were still availing of the programme. Interview dates were set up, and the researcher interviewed the four participants.

One of the experiences the researcher found very challenging during this study was while drafting the findings and discussion chapter, she mistakenly pressed a key on her laptop, and ten pages got deleted. All efforts to retrieve these pages were abortive. This was overwhelming as the deadline for submission of the draft of this chapter to the researcher supervisors was first approaching. However, the researcher had no choice but to brace up and continue with the draft of this chapter. It wasn't an easy task, but it taught the researcher always to have a backup file of any document she was working on. Assuming the researcher had a backup file, she would have been able to retrieve the ten pages that were deleted. Overall, this study changed the

researcher's perceptions about Nigerian immigrant parents of young children in Ireland as they are often faced with the challenges of parenting alone in a country different from theirs without family and childcare support, which can be very difficult.

Conclusion

This chapter included an account of the research design and methodology used to conduct this study. The qualitative phenomenology approach was chosen as it allowed the researcher to study lived experiences within a social and cultural context. The researcher's ontological and epistemology framework was established by drawing on social constructivism and interpretivism. The validity and reliability, sampling and participants, the researcher's positionality and reflection on the process of the study, ethical considerations, method of analysis and limitations of the study were outlined. Chapter 4 presents a brief overview of the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: Brief Overview of Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents a brief overview of the findings from this study. This study collected qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with fifteen Nigerian mothers. The data was collected to capture their lived experiences, particularly how they engaged with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE), the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood. The 15 Nigerian mothers who participated in this study had children availing of a free preschool programme between the years of 2020 and 2022.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of a series of questions based on the three research questions explored in this study, which are: *How do Nigerian mothers in Ireland, perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education; What social and cultural factors influence the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's early childhood care and education; and How could Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education be enhanced and extended for the benefits of parents, children and early childhood care and education settings?*

Following thorough thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) framework, four key themes were identified that provide rich insights into how Nigerian mothers engaged with their children ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood. Themes identified were:

- (1) Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.
- (2) Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education.
- (3) Benefits and Factors Impacting Parental Engagement in the Early Years.
- (4) Scope for Enhancing Nigerian Mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education.

Theme 1 captured the Nigerian mothers' perceptions of the universal ECCE programme, including the challenges they face in Ireland due to their immigrant status. Themes 2, 3 and 4 captured the Nigerian mothers' perceptions of parental engagement in Irish ECCE, the benefits and factors that impacted their engagement in their children's ECCE and the scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland engagement in their children's ECCE. These themes and sub-themes are arranged in order of how the interview questions were asked of the participants and presented in a table format (see Appendix S). These will be discussed further in detail in chapter 5.

Participants Background

This section provides insights into why the participants in this study moved to Ireland and their experiences of navigating new systems when they newly arrived in Ireland.

Participants provided multiple reasons for moving to Ireland these are set out in Figure 9.

Reasons for moving to Ireland	Numbers of participants that stated these reasons
Asylum	6
Better life for me and my kids	7
Moved with my parents during my teenage years	3
Marriage	2
English-Speaking Country	2
Personal Safety	2
Study	2
Social and Economic reasons	2
Stable and secure country to raise kids	2

Figure 9: Reasons why the participants in this study moved to Ireland.

The participants in this study also reported on navigating new systems, such as the housing, asylum, and labour market systems, when they arrived in Ireland. Ten (n 10) of the fifteen participants reported that during their early years in Ireland, they experienced the challenges of navigating these Irish systems as things were entirely new. The participants stated that they had difficulty fitting in and adapting to the Irish ways of life and had to start their lives all over again in a foreign country. For example, the participants spoke of how they had to struggle for survival and depend on the Irish government when they moved to Ireland, having come from a place where they were independent.

The following section presents a brief overview of the findings of this study.

Themes identified from the data are:

- (1) Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal Early Childhood Care and Education Programme
- (2) Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education
- (3) Benefits and Factors Impacting Parental Engagement in the Early Years
- (4) Scope for Enhancing Nigerian mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education.

Theme 1: Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal Early Childhood Care and Education Programme

All participants reported positive experiences with the universal ECCE programme. The universal ECCE programme benefited them and their young children. The participants also suggested a need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE programme to ease childcare burdens, especially for working mothers and children closer to the age stipulated by the government for the universal ECCE programme. These responses were self-reported by the participants when asked to share their experiences of parenting a child availing of the universal ECCE programme.

Subthemes emerging under this heading are:

1. Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for the Nigerian Mothers;
2. Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for their Children;
3. The need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE Programme.

- **Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for the Nigerian Mothers**

The findings from the two main points emerging from this subtheme are: 1) Free preschool education, and 2) Realisation my child is learning from knowledgeable others.

- **Free preschool education**

Fourteen (n 14) of the fifteen participants reported that due to the introduction of the universal ECCE programme, they could avail of free childcare for three hours a day during the school year. The participants acknowledged that childcare could be expensive in Ireland; hence, the universal ECCE programme granted them access to childcare for three hours a day, allowing them to save money while working, engaging in training, or other necessary tasks such as shopping for their basic household essentials. For example, one participant spoke of how she could return to work after staying off work for two years due to the universal ECCE programme.

- **Realisation my child is learning from knowledgeable others**

Nine (n 9) of the fifteen participants reported that they realised their children learnt from knowledgeable others in the preschool through the support from the early years educators, which is a tradition in their culture. The participants recognised that their children were learning from others in the preschool because they saw improvement in their children's growth and development since availing of the universal ECCE programme. The participants also stated that because of the satisfaction that their children were learning from knowledgeable others such as the early years educators, reduces their mothering stress or worries about their children's development. For example, the participants spoke of not being anxious about their children's growth and development since availing of the universal ECCE programme.

- **Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for their Children**

The findings from the three main points emerging from this subtheme are: 1) Socialisation, 2) Language development, and 3) Preparation for primary school.

- **Socialisation**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants reported that the universal ECCE programme created opportunities for their young children to interact with their peers, which they found helpful for social and language development. The participants reported differences in their children's ability to socialise and make friends since availing of the universal ECCE programme. For example, the participants spoke of how their children could make friends easily since availing of the universal ECCE programme.

- **Language development**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants stated that their children are more vocal and expressive since availing of the universal ECCE programme. The participants believed it was because their children related with people in the preschool, which boosted their communication skills. For example, the participants spoke of how they observed that their children were outspoken and expressive since availing of the universal ECCE programme.

- **Preparation for primary school**

Six (n 6) of the fifteen participants also reported that the universal ECCE programme's timing and learning experiences and the preschool's classroom-like structure prepare their children for primary school. The participants believed that since their children were already used to the routine of the universal ECCE programme and the preschool set-up, this prepared them for primary school. For example, the participants spoke of how they felt their children were ready for primary school since they are used to the structure of the universal ECCE programme.

- **The need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE Programme**

Although the participants in this study reported that the universal ECCE programme gave them access to free preschool education for three hours a day during the school year, they also reported on the need for greater flexibility with the programme. The findings from the three main points from this subtheme are: 1) More flexibility within the programme, 2) Extended hours, and 3) Lack of family and childcare support.

➤ **More flexibility within the programme**

Six (n 6) of the fifteen participants reported that there should be more flexibility within the ECCE programme, such as 5 to 15-minute allowances for late pick-up without charges and an opportunity for working parents to avail of three longer days of the scheme. The participants also reported that the Irish government should reduce the age entry to the universal ECCE programme from two years and eight months to either two years or two years and five months because childcare is expensive in Ireland, which may prevent some Nigerian parents from sending their children to preschool. The participants further stated that children should start availing of the programme immediately after they turn two years and eight months to offer free early childhood care and education to young children in Ireland and eliminate childcare costs for their parents.

➤ **Extended hours**

Nine (n 9) of the fifteen participants stated that the ECCE hours should be extended, especially for working mums, to help reduce childcare burdens.

➤ **Lack of family and childcare support**

Ten (n 10) of the fifteen participants reported a lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland, which they perceived as still a dilemma. The participants stated that Nigerian mothers received little support from the Irish government with child-rearing in Ireland such as child benefit; hence, there is a need for childcare support to help reduce childcare burdens for working Nigerian mothers in Ireland. The participants compared their lives in Nigeria, where they had affordable childcare and friends and family members to support them with childrearing while working. The participants further expressed that they found this very tough because they are rearing their children without family support and only a little support from the Irish government; hence, an increase in the universal ECCE hours would help to reduce childcare burdens for them and other working mums in Ireland.

Conclusion

The first theme, the 'Nigerian mothers' understanding of the Universal ECCE programme', detailed the benefits of the universal ECCE programme for the participants and their children, the need for greater flexibility with the programme and the challenges the participants face due to their immigrant status in Ireland.

Theme 2: Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education

Subthemes emerging under this heading are:

1. Defining Parental Engagement
2. Nigerian mothers' Perception of Engagement with their children's Early Childhood Care and Education

- **Defining Parental Engagement**

The findings from the five main points emerging from this subtheme are: 1) Active Involvement, 2) Liaising with Early Years Educators, 3) Interaction between the mothers and their children, 4) Supporting my child, and 5) Holistic development.

- **Active Involvement**

Twelve (n 12) of the fifteen participants defined parental engagement as when they are actively involved in their preschool children's everyday lives. For example, finding out what their children are doing in preschool, monitoring their children's progress in preschool and being more hands-on in their children's lives.

- **Liaising with Early Years Educators**

Ten (n 10) of the fifteen participants discussed parental engagement as including: liaising with early years educators on matters relating to their children's ECCE. The participants reported that parental engagement is how they engage in a one-on-one conversation with the early years educators on how their children are getting on within the preschool settings and how they follow up on issues relating to their preschool children.

➤ **Interaction between mother and child**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants stated that parental engagement is the interaction between the mothers and their children. They further highlighted that parental engagement is how they bond with their children by spending quality time with them, playing with them at home, and getting to know their children's likes, dislikes, and personalities.

➤ **Supporting my child**

Six (n 6) of the fifteen participants reported that parental engagement is creating a supportive learning environment for their children. For example, how they support their children to explore their environment and how they are being part of their children's lives.

➤ **Holistic development**

Five (n 5) of the fifteen participants defined parental engagement as the way they foster their children's holistic development. In other words, how they devoted their time to nurturing their preschool children's physical, mental, emotional, educational, social and language growth and development. For example, the participants spoke of how they focused on their children's growth and overall development, which they believed was parental engagement.

• **Nigerian mothers' Perception of Engagement with their children's Early Childhood Care and Education**

The findings from the 7 main points emerging from these subthemes are: 1) Questioning and talking to my child on preschool matters, 2) Dropping off and picking up my child from preschool, 3) Virtual Engagement with Early Years Educators, 4) Engaging in play-based learning activities with my child, 5) Providing Financial Support, 6) Asking for Feedback from Early Years Educators, and 7) Attending Preschool Events.

➤ **Questioning and talking to my child on preschool matters**

All participants (n 15) in this study ascertained that as a way of engaging with their children's ECCE, they asked their children questions on how they got on daily in preschool and went over what their children learnt in preschool with them. For example, the participants spoke of asking their children questions on how they got on daily in preschool during pick-up time.

➤ **Dropping off and picking up my child from preschool**

All participants (n 15) in this study stated that they dropped-off and picked-up their children from preschool as part of their engagement with their children's ECCE. For example, the participants spoke of how they made sure their children were in preschool on time and how they picked up their children from preschool on time.

➤ **Virtual Engagement with Early Years Educators**

Thirteen (n 13) of the fifteen participants reported that they engaged in virtual discussions with the early years' educators on issues relating to their children's learning and development. The participants established that they contacted the early years' educators via phone calls, text messages, and emails about their children's ECCE. For example, some participants spoke of how they made phone calls to the early years educators when there were issues pertaining to their children. The participants also reported engaging with Apps such as WhatsApp, Teach Kloud and Aladdin to share and receive information from the early years' educators about their children's care and development.

➤ **Engaging in play-based learning activities with my child**

Nine (n 9) of the fifteen participants reported engaging in play-based learning activities, such as dancing, singing, colouring, painting, and many more, with their children to stimulate their brains and build on what they learned in preschool. For example, some participants spoke of engaging in circle time and songs with their children at home.

➤ **Providing Financial Support**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants reported that as a way of engaging with their children's ECCE, they provided financial support by buying their children educational and general resources required for home and preschool. For example, some participants spoke of how they went the extra mile to buy their children books and educational toys to boost their learning at home. Also, two (n 2) participants reported buying their children pyjamas and a red t-shirt for a Valentine's and pyjamas day celebration in the preschool.

➤ **Asking for Feedback from Early Years Educators**

The fifteen participants in this study also engaged with their children's ECCE by asking the early year educators for feedback concerning their children's ECCE.

Regarding asking for feedback from early years educators, only one of the fifteen participants stated that she asked for feedback on a weekly basis. Three of the fifteen participants said they did ask for feedback fortnightly, while five of the fifteen participants stated that they rarely ask for feedback except in exceptional cases where, there were behavioural or feeding issues. Also, four of the fifteen participants said they asked for feedback daily, and two of the fifteen participants said they were not keen on asking for feedback because they just wanted their children to have fun in the preschool.

The Nigerian mothers that asked for feedback said they needed to know how their children got on in the preschool and loved to follow up if there were any issues. While the Nigerian mothers who were not keen on asking for feedback indicated that if there were issues relating to their children, they believed the early years' educators would have contacted them; hence they saw no reason to ask for feedback.

➤ **Attending Preschool Events**

Regarding attending preschool events, eleven of the fifteen participants stated that they had attended preschool events such as meet and greet sessions, Christmas and graduation parties, and parent-teacher meetings pre-COVID-19 pandemic closures. However, during the interview, only two of the fifteen participants reported attending preschool events during the COVID-19 pandemic. One such event was a zoom meeting targeted at parents whose children were transitioning to primary school in September 2022. The other thirteen participants reported not attending preschool events during the COVID-19 pandemic because there were no events organised by the preschools due to the restrictive measures that were in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Conclusion

The second theme described the 'Nigerian mothers' perceptions of parental engagement in early childhood education', highlighting the definition of parental

engagement by the fifteen participants and the various ways they perceived their engagement with their children's ECCE.

Theme 3: Benefits and Factors Impacting Parental Engagement in the Early Years

Subthemes emerging under this heading are:

1. Benefits of parental engagement in early childhood care and education
2. Factors impacting parental engagement

- **Benefits of parental engagement in early childhood care and education**

The findings from the four main points emerging from this subtheme are: 1) Bonding with my child, 2) Understanding my child's capabilities and needs, 3) Improved development for the child, and 4) Boost the child's self-esteem and confidence.

- **Bonding with my child**

Seven (n 7) of the fifteen participants stated that engaging with their children's ECCE created opportunities for them to bond with their children. The participants ascertained that engaging with their children's ECCE allowed them to connect, communicate and do things with their children. They also reported that engaging with their ECCE built friendships and trust between them and their children.

- **Understanding my child's capabilities and Needs**

Five (n 5) of the fifteen participants reported that they get to know their children better when they engage in their ECCE. The participants stated that engaging with their children's ECCE gave them opportunities to understand and know their children's abilities, capacities and needs, easing parental stress as they were confident about what their children could do. For example, the participants reported knowing their children's strengths because they were involved in their ECCE.

- **Improved development for the child**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants reported that engaging with their children's ECCE aids in improved development for their children. The participants stated that engaging with their children's ECCE made their children independent and better prepared for society.

➤ **Boost the child's self-esteem and confidence**

Six (n 6) of the fifteen participants reported that engaging in their children's ECCE boosted their children's self-esteem and confidence. The participants stated that engaging with their children's ECCE boosted their children's confidence and self-esteem to relate freely with them and others. For example, the participants spoke of how their children were confident to relate with them because they were actively involved in their ECCE.

• **Factors impacting parental engagement**

The findings from the three main points emerging from these subthemes are: 1) Cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland, 2) Restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19 pandemic, and 3) Employment.

➤ **Cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland**

Thirteen (n 13) of the fifteen participants found cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland. The participants stated that they observed differences between childrearing practices in Nigeria and Ireland upon moving to Ireland, such as how children greet and speak to their parents. The participants also reported that although the Nigerian culture permitted certain discipline practices, such as corporal punishment, this is illegal in Ireland. The participants reported that they struggled with this because the law in Ireland restricted this type of discipline.

Although the participants spoke of how challenging it was to raise their children in Ireland due to cultural differences, they also emphasised that the Nigerian culture has a role in how they rear and engage in their children's ECCE. For example, the participants spoke of how the Nigerian culture on gender roles influences how they took active roles in their children's ECCE.

Also, seven (n 7) of the fifteen participants perceived that because their culture differed from the early years' educators, it affected how they related to them on matters concerning their children's ECCE. The participants felt that if they were of the same background as the early years' educators, they presume they would have supported and related better with them on issues that they did not understand as they were not part of the Nigerian culture. For example, some participants felt that if the preschool

teachers were Nigerians, they would have understood that thumb sucking, and potty training should not be taken lightly.

➤ **Restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19 pandemic**

Thirteen (n 13) of the fifteen participants reported that due to the pandemic, there were restricted face-to-face in-person interactions between themselves and the preschool teachers as they were not physically allowed on the preschool premises. For example, the participants reported that they were not permitted to speak face-to-face with the early years educators when they had issues relating to their children and were not allowed to go into their children's classrooms during the pandemic.

➤ **Employment**

In respect of employment, seven (n 7) of the fifteen participants reported that their employment prevented them from engaging with their children's ECCE, such as supporting their children's preschool learning at home, liaising with the preschool teachers on matters relating to their preschool children and attending preschool events. For example, some participants spoke of how they could not converse with the preschool teachers during drop-off and pick-up because they either rushing to work in the morning or rushed when collecting their children in the afternoon.

Conclusion

The third theme highlighted the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE for the fifteen participants in this study and their children and the factors that impacted their engagement in their children's ECCE.

Theme 4: Scope for Enhancing Nigerian mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education

Subthemes emerging under this heading are:

1. Return to face-to-face in-person interactions post-COVID-19 pandemic
2. More culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19 pandemic
3. Support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement

- **Return to face-to-face in-person interactions post-COVID-19 pandemic**

The findings from the two main points emerging from these subthemes are: 1) Opportunities to take a more active role in my child's ECCE, and 2) Parent-Teacher Meetings.

- **Opportunities to take a more active role in my child's ECCE**

Ten (n 10) of the fifteen participants reported that there should be opportunities for Nigerian mothers to visit their children's preschool settings post-COVID-19 to observe what their children are doing and extend these to their home settings. Also, three (n 3) of the fifteen participants reported that early years educators should offer opportunities to Nigerian mothers, such as activities they can do with their children at home to enhance their engagement in their children's ECCE within the home settings.

- **Parent-Teacher Meetings**

Eleven (n 11) of the fifteen participants suggested that there should be parent-teacher meetings where Nigerian mothers can periodically meet with early years educators face-to-face to discuss their children's growth and development, areas for development and issues around cultural differences that might impact their children's ECCE. The participants affirmed that since there were restricted face-to-face interactions within the preschool settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, parent-teacher meetings will encourage Nigerian mothers to take on active roles in their children's ECCE within the preschool settings.

- **More culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19 pandemic**

The findings from the two main points emerging from these subthemes are: 1) More culturally inclusive preschool events to showcase the Nigerian culture, and 2) More culturally inclusive preschool events organised by Early Years Educators.

- **More culturally inclusive preschool events to showcase the Nigerian culture**

Nine (n 9) of the fifteen participants reported that there should be more culturally inclusive preschool events such as cultural day celebrations post-COVID-19 pandemic to raise cultural awareness in preschool settings. This would facilitate Nigerian mothers a celebration of Nigerian culture, in addition to showcasing and promoting Nigerian culture within the preschool settings. The participants felt these preschool events would also be avenues for the early years educators to be enlightened about

the Nigerian culture and opportunities for Nigerian parents to bond with their children and interact with others within the Irish ECCE settings.

➤ **More culturally inclusive preschool events organised by Early Years Educators**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants suggested that early years educators should organise events such as a day in the life, coffee mornings, meet and greet sessions, and programmes that children and parents can do together post-COVID-19 to offer Nigerian parents the opportunities to interact with other parents, the early years educators and their children's peers within the Irish ECCE settings.

• **Support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement**

The findings from the two main points emerging from these subthemes are: 1) Seminar, and 2) Parenting classes.

➤ **Seminar**

Four (n 4) of the fifteen participants suggested that seminars should be organised for Nigerian mothers to help them understand parenting in Ireland, avert issues with social workers, teach them how to take on active roles in their children's lives and develop strategies they could implement to engage in their children's ECCE.

➤ **Parenting classes**

Eight (n 8) of the fifteen participants suggested that there should be parenting courses for African immigrant parents of young children in Ireland to foster parental engagement in early childhood, help Nigerian mothers build social networks with other immigrant mothers, benefit some Nigerian mothers struggling to engage with their children's ECCE and reinforce the need for parental engagement in ECCE. Some participants also felt these parenting classes and groups should be run by Africans whom African parents of young children might feel comfortable relating with about issues they faced while rearing their children in Ireland as they share the same culture.

The fourth theme gave insight into how to improve Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education from the perspectives of the fifteen participants in this study.

Conclusion

The brief overview of the findings of this study gave an insight into the journey of the fifteen participants in this study into Ireland, the challenges they faced due to their immigrant status, the benefits of parental engagement in early childhood education, how the fifteen participants engaged with their children's ECCE and factors that influence the engagement of the participants in their children's ECCE. The participants also highlighted the benefits of the universal ECCE Programme for them and their preschool children and how to improve Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this study in detail and an interpretation of the findings.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE). Categorically, this study explored how Nigerian mothers in Ireland engaged with their ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood. To accomplish that purpose, a phenomenological research design, drawing on social constructivism and interpretivism paradigms, was chosen. The research design supported the creation of a rich account of the phenomenon of Nigerian immigrant mothers' perceptions about their engagement in their children's ECCE. When conducting a literature review on this topic and absence of research in this area was evident. This current research also wanted to explore how Nigerian mothers can be encouraged and motivated to take on active roles in their children's preschool education. Likewise, it wanted to illuminate the voices of Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland, as they are often not heard in Irish educational research.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen Nigerian mothers who had children availing of the universal Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme during the period of 2020 to 2022. The semi-structured interviews explored a series of themes based on the three research questions explored in this study, which are:

1. *How do Nigerian mothers in Ireland, perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education?*
2. *What social and cultural factors influence the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's early childhood care and education?*
3. *How could Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education be enhanced and extended for the benefits of parents, children and ECCE settings?*

Employing thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2019; 2022) framework, the research identified insights across four main themes.

1. Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.
2. Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education.
3. Benefits and Factors Impacting Parental Engagement in the Early Years.
4. Scope for Enhancing Nigerian Mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education.

This chapter will examine in detail the brief overview of the findings of each theme presented in Chapter 4, with reference to relevant literature from Chapter 2, reflective diary extracts, the researcher's perspective as a Nigerian mother, as well as that of the participants and the theoretical framework of this study. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (EST) (1979), which emphasises the role of parents in their children's lives and the interconnections between two microsystems (the parents and the educators), and Joyce Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement which focuses on the interconnected relationships between the child's family, school, and the community to enhance the child's learning and development. In discussing the findings of this study, the quotes used were not altered from the original transcripts, so there are instances of grammatical errors. This was the case to capture the authentic voices of the participants' perspectives on the study (Czerniawski and Kidd 2011).

This chapter begins by discussing the motives behind the participants' migration to Ireland. This study establishes that Nigerian mothers migrated to Ireland for many reasons, such as Asylum, better lives for themselves and their children, marriage, Ireland being an English-speaking country, personal safety, study, social and economic reasons, and a stable and secure country to raise kids. However, Asylum and better lives for themselves and their children were the main modes of entry of the participants in this study to Ireland. This is similar to a study by White (2009), who affirmed that asylum is the most viable means of gaining access to opportunities in Ireland by Nigerians. These findings are supported by

Kómoláfé (2008; 2005) and Iroh (2010), who found that Nigerians were among the first African immigrants who came to Ireland to seek Asylum and economic prospects. Reports by McGreevy (2024), Conneely (2023) and the Department of Justice (2023) found that Nigerians were among Ireland's top international protection applicants in 2022, 2023 and 2024. These findings affirmed the report of the Central Statistics Office of Ireland (2012), that Nigerians are the largest African immigrant group in Ireland.

These were echoed in the statements made by the participants in this study. For example, Sarah moved to Ireland 17 years ago to seek Asylum:

Umm to be honest that one is just it has to do with family reasons, so I just had to leave Africa to umm you know just to, it's just for my child's sake then he was, I mean he was the only one I was pregnant with. I left Nigeria and it has to do with family issues, so I left Nigeria and came here so it was here I had my remaining children, but I was pregnant with my son when I left Nigeria it has to do with family issues. I had to run for my life then that's why am here. (Sarah).

Sarah was a bit emotional sharing her story about how she came to seek Asylum in Ireland whilst pregnant. The move was unexpected but was done for the safety of her unborn child. The pain was evident in her voice when she was sharing the circumstances behind why she migrated to Ireland. (Reflective Diary, 22-01-2022, Appendix U). Sarah's reason for moving to Ireland is similar to why the researcher migrated to Ireland. The researcher moved to Ireland over 18 years ago from Nigeria for safety reasons and to secure the future of her unborn children.

Ogheneme also disclosed moving to Ireland 15 years ago as a teenager, “*Umm Well, my parents moved me here umm I guess in search of (laugh) a better life.*” (Ogheneme).

While Jane revealed moving from Nigeria to the United Kingdom and later to Ireland 15 years ago because it is safer for her to raise her children in Ireland:

Going from Nigeria to London was umm a great experience because you know [...]. My family were already in London, so I was the only one left behind in Nigeria. So, [...] I was happy to move to London, because then, you know, my siblings were all there and that just gives me opportunity to be around my family and yeah. Umm I've been to Ireland, like couple of times, umm when I was in

secondary school, even when I was in college. I've been to Ireland, and I've seen the difference from London to Ireland. Ireland is much calmer. It's umm safer to raise kids, unlike London is too crowded, and it's just too much going on in London. So, I just wanted that peace, quiet, that quiet life for myself and to be able to bring umm up my kids in a quiet environment, in environments that I will be able to umm nurture them properly. (Jane).

Likewise, Isoke stated moving to Ireland 5 years ago because *“it is an English-speaking country.”* (Isoke). In contrast, Favour disclosed moving to Ireland 4 years and 6 months to join her husband, *“Umm marriage, My husband is an Irish citizen, and so I had to relocate due to marriage.”* (Favour).

However, Adeola emphasised moving to Ireland over 10 years ago for social and economic reasons:

Umm, I just believe that life might take you to several places, people migrate for several reasons so back to my reason why I move here for social and economic reasons. That umm although this is actually still in progress, I could actually say I am achieving my aims, my initial aims of moving to Ireland so for social and economic reasons. (Adeola).

Whereas Chidinma stated moving to Ireland 6 years ago to study, and afterwards, she got a job component:

Well, I came to study. I came as a student nurse. First, I got admission to study at St. Angela College in Sligo. So, umm that's where I got my BSC and umm after which I got my nursing license in Ireland. So, from there, I started working as a nurse. So basically, I came to study and afterwards I got a job component. (Chidinma).

Based on these findings, it could be concluded that the participants in this study migrated to Ireland in quest of a secure future for their children and to improve their own lives. The participants affirmed that Ireland is a promised land and a better country where they can thrive and their children flourish in a stable, secure, and nurturing environment, which is impossible in Nigeria due to poor governance (Akinsola 2014; Coakley and Mac Einri 2007; Kómoláfé 2005). In this study, Nigerian mothers' stated reasons for moving to Ireland align with the findings of Kómoláfé (2008; 2005), Ruhs and Quinn (2009) and Iroh (2010), whose research reported that asylum, economic pursuits, safety, education, and Irish-born child

law³ are the main reasons why Nigerians moved to Ireland. Also, the participants in this study stated reasons for moving to Ireland align with the works of Ryan and Lannin (2021), who affirmed that people migrate to Ireland primarily for work, study, and to seek asylum. In support, Coakley and Mac Einri (2007) and Garrity and McGrath (2011) also claimed that African women migrate to Ireland hoping to gain employment and start businesses and also because it is perceived as a safe country for children.

As the researcher is someone with first-hand experience of how challenging it is to survive in Nigeria due to the lack of basic social amenities such as quality education, health care, insecurity, and high unemployment rate, the reason why many Nigerians like the researcher often seek greener pastures in developed countries such as Ireland (Kómoláfé 2005). Overall, the data from this study suggest that Nigerian mothers migrated to Ireland because it is perceived as a safer country with many opportunities for them and their children than can be provided in their country of origin.

Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme

The findings from this study indicate that there are many benefits of the universal ECCE programme for Nigerian mothers and their children. The data from this study affirm that the participants availed of free preschool education for three hours each day during the school year due to the free universal ECCE programme provided by the Irish government. This gave their children an opportunity to learn from knowledgeable others in the preschool, such as the early years educators. Participants' children were also able to express themselves, make friends and socialise with their peers outside their homes. The data also suggests that the children of the participants were better prepared for primary school because of the universal ECCE programme. These benefits were highlighted by the participants when asked to share their experiences parenting a child availing of the universal ECCE programme.

³ The Irish-born child law is based on Articles 40, 41 and 42 of the Irish constitution, which states that parents of children born in Ireland have the right to remain in the country due to their parentage to an Irish born child (Iroh 2010; Kómoláfé 2008).

Merit and Adeola, whose children had availed of the universal ECCE programme for six months and five months, respectively, highlighted the benefit of saving money due to the free universal ECCE programme:

I'm not paying any money in the preschool or to get her to the Montessori, so it's totally free, and I really do appreciate that because it is saving me money, yeah. (Merit).

She's going away from home, you can actually, you know, save some money, her being in school while you are working. (Adeola).

Favour, who is a healthcare assistant, explained that she could return to work because of the free universal ECCE programme hours after staying off work for a while:

It did give me an opportunity to go back to work. [...]. I had to stay off work for two years because, umm, I had both of them just in a space of one year, [...] but with a free preschool coming into play, I was able to go back to work. (Favour).

While Omolara, Chidinma whose children had both availed of the universal ECCE programme for six months respectively, and Isoke, whose child had availed of the universal ECCE programme for sixteen months, reported on how the early years educators were a support system to them regarding their children's early education:

Yeah, the benefit there is that at least, it gives me rest of mind and it gives me less of stress. You know, what I would have been stressing myself to put in her, they already did part of it. So, I'm just brushing it off. (Omolara).

Sometimes there are some things you as a parent can't teach the child, but the preschool itself has made it available, you know, has made some teachings easier. (Chidinma).

Sometimes when you try to teach your own children as a mother, they tend to like I don't want to do it, [...] and you can't really put much pressure on them, but the preschool is there to help. (Isoke).

Jane, a student, and Chidinma, who is a registered nurse, reported that their children were not secluded as they could interact with their peers because of the universal ECCE programme:

It gives children that are born after a certain period of the year, not to just stay at home for a whole year and then not being able to do anything, the opportunity to be around their peers, people of their age. (Jane).

I would say it's been helpful, not just to me, but also to the child, you know, socially, so sometimes the child might not be socially inclined, but then the preschool has kind of availed, [...], that opportunity for the child to be socially inclined and to be open to voice out, you know their thoughts. (Chidinma).

While Sarah, Adeola and Habibah, who have had more than one child who previously availed of the universal ECCE programme, stated how they observed improvement in their children's language development when they started availing of the universal ECCE programme:

Her speech and everything had really improved. (Sarah).

She's much more outspoken in terms of language development than she was before, and I just believe that, that's just an influence she got from being around her peers and knowledgeable others, especially with her teachers. (Adeola).

She's learning; she's communicating more, it really helped them in their talking. (Habibah).

Blessing, a clinical trial project manager, and Habibah, a health care assistant who both moved to Ireland as teenagers, claimed that the universal ECCE programme timing, structure and learning experiences prepared their children for primary school:

I think the preschool, [...], it kind of set them up for things to come in the proper school, the main school [...] have to kind of like get them into that routine which is good. (Blessing).

It helps them more, [...], in going to school [...]. So, it gives them that sense that they are graduating from one step to another, and they are graduating to big school. So, they are ready to go into big school. (Habibah).

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that the benefits of the universal ECCE programme for Nigerian mothers are varied. For example, the universal ECCE programme affords the participants in this study free childcare opportunities for three hours a day during the school year. This, in turn, allows them to save money. Ireland is one of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) countries with the highest cost of childcare (OECD 2021; Russell et al. 2018); hence, the universal ECCE programme afforded the participants in this study access to free childcare for three hours a day during the school year. Without the universal ECCE programme, they probably would not be able to afford childcare due to the high costs in Ireland. Although this is not unique to Nigerian mothers, it is a consideration for the participants in this study. Moreover, because of the free childcare hours available through the universal ECCE programme, participants were able to take up work and training. Without the availability of the free childcare place, they may not have been able to take these opportunities due to the high cost of childcare in Ireland (Creed 2023; Curristan et al. 2023; Kealy and Devaney 2023). The free childcare, in part, compensated for the lack of family support in Ireland that could have assisted them with child-rearing while they work or take up training. This was echoed by Chidinma during the interview:

I would say a bit of load has been lifted off my shoulder to some extent, [...]. I mean, seeing that as a working parent, okay, seeing that umm you have your work to do and also you have family to take care of, I mean, sometimes you want to, you know, have that bit of rest, [....] am not saying umm running away from your responsibility as a parent, but umm it's been helpful, you know, seeing that the child doesn't just stay at home and do nothing. (Chidinma).

The views of Nigerian mothers in this study in relation to the benefits of the universal ECCE programme are interesting because they are similar to Oke et al. (2019), which found that children availing of the ECCE Scheme are able to acquire social skills and foundational learning experiences before primary school. Additionally, this study affirms that the ECCE Scheme affords parents the opportunity to avail of free preschool education, therefore eliminating childcare costs (Sloan et al. 2022; Ring et al. 2016; Hayes et al. 2013). Similarly, this study established that children from black backgrounds were often well-represented in participation in the ECCE programme because it is universal and free (Curristan et al. 2023).

These findings are also similar to the benefits of the universal ECCE Scheme, highlighted in the Irish media reports over the last few years. Preschool owners and the Irish Preschool Association have reported that the universal ECCE

programme helps children to develop emotionally, socially, and intellectually, make friends, and develop life skills such as confidence and creativity (Gunning 2010). It was also reported that the universal ECCE programme prepares children for primary school and affords families the opportunity to receive free preschool education, which they might not have been able to afford (McConnell 2010).

These findings further align with Ring et al. (2016) study, which found that the universal ECCE programme supports children's holistic development, such as social development, independence to structure, literacy and numeracy skills and prepares children for primary school. These findings established that the universal ECCE programme learning experiences supported the children's holistic development and prepared them for what was to come in primary school (Sloan et al. 2022). Also, Horgan et al. (2014), Barnardos (2018), and Sloan et al. (2022) affirmed that the ECCE Scheme is child-centred access to early childhood care and education for all children between the ages of 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months, irrespective of their parents' income or employment. This echoes the views of Nigerian mothers in the current study:

From where I was coming from there is difference, is different because you have to pay for that but umm the system here is different, they have to go through, the kids you know I think it is like a requirement for every child to go into preschool. (Sarah).

Sarah's statement above shows that while preschool education is free and universal for children aged two years and eight months and above in Ireland, it is not in Nigeria. However, the Nigerian government must provide free and universal one-year pre-primary education for children between the ages of five and six (NERDC 2013). This is not the case due to a lack of limited access and funding of the sector by the Nigerian government (Sasu 2022; Omeje 2017; Rentzou and Ekine 2017).

Data from this study suggest that the universal ECCE programme promotes educational opportunities and positive outcomes for young children in Ireland between the ages of 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months before primary school, regardless of their cultural origin.

In this study, Nigerian mothers indicate their understanding of how their children's environment can influence their development. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009), which shows that a child's development is influenced by their environment. It also showed that the interactions at the children's micro-environment (preschool) thus shaped their well-being and development. In this case, the interactions that took place within the preschool setting between the children, their peers and the early years educators impacted the children's growth and development (Yngvesson and Garvis 2019). For example, participants highlighted that being in a preschool setting had a positive effect on the children's social and language development as they were able to socialise and interact with their peers, which in return improved the children's vocabulary.

Also, the findings from this study are similar to one of Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement, parenting. Under the theme of parenting, Epstein (2019) states that educators must create a conducive environment that supports children's learning and development. It was evident in this study that the early years educators, through their actions, created a warm and conducive learning environment for the participants' children, resulting in their holistic development (Anthony-Newman et al. 2019; Epstein 2007).

Whilst the findings of this study concur with previous research, they also highlighted key issues such as lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland, navigating new Irish systems, the need for extended ECCE hours and more flexibility within the universal ECCE programme.

Data from this study suggest that the lack of family support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland has a negative impact on their lives. For example, whilst Nigerian mothers are happy with their new life in Ireland, they find the lack of family support difficult as this support would be readily available to them in Nigeria. For instance, Omotola, a mother of two, spoke of how it was a struggle rearing her children in Ireland, unlike in Nigeria, where she can quickly call on her mum, friends, and family members for help:

Umm, it wasn't that easy because my son was just two years old and then I came alone with him, no families, no friends, nothing you know, you have come into a country that you don't know anybody. You know, you want to come and start afresh. You don't have any families. [...] it was scary a bit but umm we thank God. Yeah, my son was still like a baby, he was just two, the next day, we came to Ireland, so he was still like a baby. So, umm umm it wasn't that easy, to be honest but thank God, thank God for where we are. So, like in Nigeria, you have a lot of people that can, you know, help you with the childcare and everything. Like in Nigeria, my mom, if I call my mom like, oh, Mom, I need your help, she will come like quickly, but here you have to do your own thing by yourself. You know, it's your own problem. (Omotola).

Omotola's statement above affirms that it is common for family members to help raise children in Nigeria due to the Nigerian culture that strongly emphasises communal living (Leaticia 2024). This finding also shows that immigrant parents often experience social stress in their host country due to a lack of familiar support systems of family and friends and the comfort of their culture of origin (Fleck and Fleck 2013). In support, Onwujuba et al. (2015) also affirmed that immigration is stressful due to the process of adjusting to a new culture. Likewise, this study established that the absence of family support for African parents in Ireland often negatively affects them and that Africans often experience difficulty settling into Ireland due to separation from their friends and family (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007).

This study also shows that Nigerian mothers had difficulty navigating Irish systems, such as housing, asylum, and labour market systems, when they arrived in Ireland. For example, Aminah spoke of her struggle to get an accommodation and a job in Ireland with her Nigerian qualifications when she moved to Ireland:

It was really, really challenging because coming from an independent, you know, you're okay, you're okay. And coming to another place, then you have to start looking for a house, housing was very difficult, very, very difficult to get a place, then you have to start from having your own car, to walking and taking a bus to everywhere, you know. Then just that's the first six months was really challenging because then looking for a job, even with your qualification, even with everything, I couldn't get a job. (Aminah).

Aminah's statement above affirms an issue common among migrants as they often find it challenging to get good jobs in their host country due to the non-recognition of their academic achievements from their countries of origin (Al-deen and Windle 2015). This is supported by an Irish study by Garrity and McGrath (2011), who found that African immigrant women find it hard to gain employment in Ireland. Also, Mutwarasibo (2002) and Coakley and Mac Einri (2007) affirmed that the search process for accommodation and jobs for Africans in Ireland is frustrating as they are often disadvantaged when it comes to securing employment and accommodation in Ireland. This is due to factors such as non-recognition of their academic achievements, language difficulties, cultural differences, lack of Irish language, and lack of work experience in Ireland.

Furthermore, Aminah's statement shows that immigrants in Ireland need extra support to navigate different Irish systems and to gain access to appropriate services in Ireland (Hickey and Leckey 2021). This is a result of immigration affecting social contexts as it comes with the challenges of fitting into a new system due to a lack of social connections (Mostoway 2020). In support, Osuofa (2021) also reported that immigration involves emotional pains and challenges because it uproots people from a familiar social and cultural context to an unfamiliar one.

Likewise, data from this study affirm that Nigerian mothers received little support from the Irish government with child-rearing in Ireland, such as child benefits; hence, there is a need for extended ECCE hours to help reduce childcare burdens for working Nigerian mothers in Ireland. While this is not unique to Nigerian mothers, it is an additional barrier for the participants in this study. The lack of affordable childcare is one of the biggest barriers to women's equality in Ireland; thus, there is a need for the Irish government to deliver a universal public childcare model that will enable all women in Ireland to have access to public and affordable childcare irrespective of their financial situations to allow them to return to work, education, or participate in community and political life (Creed 2023).

This was echoed by Ogheneme and Adunola during the interview:

Here you are kind of pretty much on your own and you are really depending on like umm childcare services and it is a lot more expensive obviously than back home where you can get someone for cheaper. (Ogheneme).

140 is no good or good enough, because I spent over 140, on a child a month. So, if the government can just, I'm not saying the government are not trying, after all, where I'm coming from, we don't even have that in my country. Okay, just the government should just try to help mothers, like I said, if they can even take children, and like maybe from starting from maybe even from 8.30am to like 2 o'clock or even 9 o'clock till that 2 it would be fine. (Adunola).

The data from this study further suggest extended ECCE hours to aid Nigerian mothers in rearing their children in Ireland, a tradition in Nigerian culture. According to Nigerian culture, childrearing is a shared responsibility of all members of the community, as children are often reared by relatives other than their biological parents. Also, all members of the Nigerian community have a stake in the upbringing of a child regardless of whether they are biologically related (Leaticia 2024; Onwujuba et al. 2015; Okafor 2003). Likewise, in the Nigerian culture, working-class and first-time mums often resort to fostering⁴ through their lineage network to combat childcare issues (Onwujuba et al. 2015).

The researcher experienced the Nigerian culture of childcare as a community effort, providing childcare support to her mother and aunties during her teenage years. Growing up as an African adolescent girl, the researcher remembered taking up the responsibility of looking after her younger brother and two of her cousins when her mother had to return to work shortly after giving birth to him. It was a role the researcher was socialised to accept by her parents with a duty of care as the only girl child in the family as this is a tradition in the Nigerian culture as grown-up girls are trained to perform child-rearing tasks and care for the home (Nwoke 2013; Ajayi 2006).

The data from this study reaffirmed that since Nigerian mothers in Ireland had no family to assist them with childrearing, extended ECCE hours would probably

⁴ Fostering is a process whereby Nigerian mothers receive childrearing support from extended families and grown-up daughters (Onwujuba et al. 2015; Ajayi 2006).

substitute for the childcare support they received from family and friends in Nigeria. This was echoed by the following participants:

Favour, who moved to Ireland based on her marriage to an Irish citizen, gave an account of how she had a challenging birth for her two children with no childcare support and no family members to assist her with rearing her children in Ireland, which she found different compared to the tradition and custom she was used to in Nigeria, where there is always family and childcare support for mothers of young children:

It's been very tough and challenging [...] you don't have family around to support you, especially for myself. I had a very challenging birth for both of my kids, and I had to have a classical and transverse section for both of my kids. [...] compared to home where you're coming from where you have family and friends support you when you have children. (Favour).

While Adunola, who is a healthcare assistant, reported on the lack of family support for Nigerian immigrant mothers in Ireland and how she had to raise her children on her own in Ireland, which she compared to Nigeria, where the whole village helps to raise a child:

Ah, having child in Ireland is great, but it's just there is no enough support, like family support because I don't have family here in Ireland [...]. Back in Nigeria, if you have a child like every individual, even the neighbour help you to raise a child but here [...], you have to raise the child by yourself. (Adunola).

Likewise, Adeola also spoke about how, as an immigrant mother, the lack of family support made life difficult for her in Ireland:

Well would, I say social culture supports that like, you know, back home, you have your families, like the family would stand by you, they take the baby while you get some sleep, they would, you know, do everything, make your food, just to try and make sure that you were comfortable, like in your own way. But so that part of family support system was not there. So that actually make things like not so easy for me. (Adeola)

Favour, Adunola and Adeola's statements above reaffirm the Nigerian traditions of how childrearing is never left in the hands of the child's parent and how young children are cared for by their extended relatives and older siblings (Onwujuba et al. 2015; Ajayi 2006; Okafor 2003). In support, Garrity and McGrath (2011) affirmed that African immigrant mothers placed so much value on family support, and they love to seek childcare support from other members of their group. Likewise, Dalikeni's (2021) study affirmed that communal parenting is a norm in the African culture. These findings show that parenting is a communal effort in the Nigerian culture and that Nigerian mothers depend solely on their family network for support when it comes to rearing their children (Leaticia 2024).

The data from this study further suggest that the Irish government should extend the ECCE hours for working mums. This was echoed by some of the participants in this study, who viewed the universal ECCE hours as childcare support for working mums; hence, they solicited extended hours to offer working mums extra childcare support:

If they offer the children more hours in preschool it's gonna help me plan my day better and am not going to be rushing when things like that come in to play you are rushing, you are trying to see who is gonna help pick up the child 2 hours after you have dropped. (Ogheneme).

But for when it's actually has to do with working-class mom is not enough, [...], it doesn't create enough time for you to actually manage your workload. You know, you go to work and not be bothered that you still have to organise minders for your kids. (Adeola).

I would say that time is just too short [...], I work night shift. Sometimes I am not able to sleep, you know, I'll just sleep for 3 hours, [...]. If the government can increase it, it's fine, you know, for mothers that are working full time. (Omotola).

The findings from this study also suggest that there should be more flexibility within the ECCE programme, such as 5 to 15-minute allowances for late pick-up without charges and an opportunity for working parents to avail of three longer days of the scheme. Likewise, the findings from this study further suggest that the Irish government should reduce the age entry to the universal ECCE programme from two years and eight months to either two years or two years and five months and that children should start availing of the programme immediately after they turn two years

and eight months to offer free early childhood care and education to young children in Ireland and eliminate childcare costs for their parents. This would imply that more younger children could avail of high-quality and inclusive preschool education in Ireland as not all parents can afford the cost of sending their young children to preschool. At the same time, their mothers would be able to receive childcare support similar to the support mothers receive in Nigeria from family and friends after childbirth. These were echoed by the following participants:

So, if they can at least give us like, okay, if you have to collect your child at least 1 o'clock, they should give us grace of 15 minutes. You know, like, okay, 15 minutes, maybe something happen before they start calling and ringing and you know. (Omotola).

I personally wouldn't like need my child to go there every day. What I would prefer is you know if she could do three days and have like longer hours those 3 days it would help me kind of plan my day better meaning like even the days am home, I can engage with her because you know I am more relaxed and not rushing to kind of take her there and then umm (laugh) go there to pick her. (Ogheneme).

If they could maybe make amendments to it, maybe if the child is two years and eight months today, the child can start that day, instead of waiting for the next umm section to start in September before the child can get enrolled. (Favour).

Umm I would appreciate if the government can look into it and do something for all mothers out there you know just to make it easier for every mother out there and like I said not until they are 2 and 8 months if they can even start early from 2 years. (Adunola).

Similarly, Jane commented on the high cost of preschool in Ireland, which a lot of parents might not afford:

It can be very expensive paying that money. I think it would be really nice if the government can look into this because it will help the parents, and the child too would not miss out because a lot of parents might think oh, I have to pay maybe 50 euros or 70 euros for that early morning session every week. 70 euros is a lot if you go shopping you know how much you can buy, but your child's

education is also important but not everybody can afford that 70 euros every week. (Jane).

The views of Nigerian mothers in this study in relation to the need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE Programme such as the Irish government extending the ECCE hours to provide child-rearing and childcare support to working and non-working Nigerian mothers in Ireland and reducing the age entry to the universal ECCE to either two years or two years and five months are interesting because they are similar to the works of Hayes et al. (2013), Oke et al. (2019) and Curristan et al. (2023), who indicated that the universal ECCE programme is not feasible for working parents and the need for the Irish government to revisit the programme and consider the childcare needs of working parents. They affirm that the hours of the universal ECCE programme were not designed to facilitate working parents; hence, it should be revisited to consider the needs of working parents in Ireland. Also, these findings affirmed the Barnardos (2018) report on expanding the early childhood care and education scheme that suggested that the universal ECCE programme should be offered from an earlier age to benefit more children, especially those from disadvantaged areas and the need for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to increase access to the programme. Likewise, Curristan et al. (2023) reported a need for additional hours above the ECCE hours for young children in Ireland, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, these findings complement the sixth national Early Childhood Ireland (2023) Barometer on Public Attitudes to Early Years and School-Age Care findings, which indicated that every child in Ireland should have access to free, high-quality and inclusive early years education. These findings show that working parents in Ireland need greater parenting support provisions in the form of childcare support (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

In conclusion, the findings on Nigerian mothers' understanding of the Universal ECCE programme show that the Universal ECCE programme benefited the participants and their children, as pointed out in their responses. The participants noted availing of free childcare hours for three hours a day during the school year and, at the same time, saving money while availing of either work or training and the early years educators scaffolding their children's learning while they are in preschool. While for their young children, they noted that they could express themselves confidently, were better prepared for primary school and socialises well with their peers. It was also pointed

out in the participants' responses the need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE Programme such as the need for extended ECCE hours as extra childcare support for working mums in Ireland and age reduction to the universal ECCE programme to provide quality early care and education to young children in Ireland and child-rearing support to Nigerian mothers in Ireland. To the Nigerian mothers in this study, the universal ECCE programme is financial support towards childcare costs, while they viewed it as quality early childhood care and education for their children before they enter primary school. Overall, the universal ECCE programme has significantly changed the lives of young children in Ireland and their families.

Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Education

The data analysis from this study shows that parental engagement in early childhood education is a complex and broadly undefined term. It also indicates that Nigerian mothers have a comprehensive knowledge of parental engagement in early childhood education by identifying five distinct definitions. Parental engagement in early childhood education is described by the participants in this study based on their experiences as active involvement in their children's lives, liaising with the early years educators on matters relating to their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE), and the interaction between them and their children. Nigerian mothers also regard parental engagement in early childhood education as supporting their children and fostering and nurturing their children's holistic growth and development. These definitions given by the participants in this study are fascinating because they indicate that parental engagement in early childhood education is multifaceted. It also affirms the Nigerian culture that places mothers in charge of their children's ECCE to nurture them to be responsible adults (Adams and Jenyo 2016; Makama 2013; Salami 2007). In support, Aja-Okorie (2013) agrees with these definitions by stating that women are critical actors in their children's education process because of their natural love and ability to teach and nurture their children. Also, Tobin et al. (2022) and Alharthi (2023) affirm these definitions by stating that mothers are active participants in their children's learning.

The data from this study revealed that parental engagement is when Nigerian mothers are actively involved in their preschool children's everyday lives. However, it appears

that 'active engagement' has a different meaning among the participants in this study. For example, Ogheneme, Blessing and Isoke, who have multiple children, described parental engagement, using the word active involvement by stating that:

I (a deep sigh) think that's just umm being pretty much involved in your child's umm everyday life, [...] being actively involved basically in her growing up stage. (Ogheneme).

It is just being actually involved in their lives, in every area of their lives [...] taking interest in their lives like whatever they are doing. Generally, I try to be more hands-on and more involved in my kid's life. (Blessing).

Being involved in your child, day to day activity, not only about his school, but about everything that has to do with your child. (Isoke).

Also, the data from this study shows that parental engagement is when Nigerian mothers liaise with the early years educators on matters relating to their children's preschool education, such as inquiring from the preschool teachers about their children's abilities and weaknesses. These were echoed by the following participants:

If there is anything, I think I need umm a clarification, when I get to school the next day, I just engage the teacher one on one that oh what I saw on the group yesterday, how is she going on with that, then she would just explain to me. (Omolara).

What I understand by parental engagement is being involved in your child's education. So, you want to know how your child is doing in the school, your child's ability, your child's strengths, your child's weakness. So, you want to ask the teachers. (Favour).

The findings from this study further revealed that parental engagement is the interaction between Nigerian mothers and their children. For example, Jane, who has five children, stated the following on the interaction between the mothers and their children:

Parental engagement, I think it's all about interaction, how you engage with your children, umm getting to know what they like, who they are, their personalities and you know, what their day is like. (Jane).

Isoke and Adeola, both mothers of three, also emphasised how parents should use play as a medium to interact with their children:

Helping your child to play and sometimes when they play, we tend to like oh they are playing, let them be alone, but that is another time where you get to engage with your child, to see the kind of play your child, because a child should learn from every play, and when you are there playing with the child, it's engages the child when you are also communicating with the child. (Isoke).

Trying to actually get them out to learn how to play, you know, in the play, you know, in your communication to them, umm and it's actually vital. (Adeola).

Habibah, a single mother of five children, discussed how she gathered information from her youngest daughter through interactions and later passed this on to the early years educators to help them plan for her child's learning and development:

It's so by spending time with your kids, communicating well with them, getting to know them, their likes, and their dislikes. So, when you're doing this, you'll be able to explain to others as well, like, you know, your child's creche. (Habibah).

The data from this study show that parental engagement is when Nigerian mothers create a supportive environment for their children to explore their environment. This was echoed in the following participants' statements:

He wants to just explore the world at his tender age. So, guiding him to explore the world in a more educated way. And also learning all the other things. (Favour).

I understand that learning starts from home, supporting environment for the child, so this is actually stated in child development, Vygotsky and Piaget so, and the support that kids get from exploring environments, like from the adults around them goes a long way. (Adeola).

Sarah, who has multiple children, spoke of the support parents must give their children regarding homework from school:

Like you know with their schoolwork, they go to school; you don't just allow them drop their bags and believing that there is a teacher out there taking care of every need, you as a parent should engage you know, it is called parenting. (Sarah).

Likewise, the data from this study also revealed that parental engagement is when Nigerian mothers foster and nurture their children's holistic growth and development. Merit, Favour, Omolara and Chidinma, who are all working-class mothers, defined parental engagement, which centres on holistic development, as:

To the best of my knowledge, I understand parental engagement to be [...], how he or she is growing and developing umm mentally, physically, and emotionally. (Merit).

Umm, to my ability, [...], I think parental engagement just has to do with the parents being involved in the child's daily activity, the child's physical ability, education ability, and every aspect of the child's life. (Favour).

Yeah, the term parental engagement is how you as a parent engage in your children's growths, educationally, mentally. (Omolara).

So, I would say it's a holistic thing; you have to be involved in your child's needs, in your child's care. (Chidinma).

These findings are intriguing as they suggest five diverse ways Nigerian mothers define parental engagement in early childhood education. The participants in this study described parental engagement in early childhood education as creating a supportive environment for their children, fostering, and nurturing their children's holistic growth and development, active involvement in their children's lives, liaising with the early years educators on matters relating to their children's early care and education and the interaction between them and their children. However, these definitions place the responsibility for parental engagement on the participants rather than a collective responsibility of Nigerian mothers and early years educators. This is unique to Nigerian mothers because motherhood is significant in the Nigerian culture, as mothers are responsible for bearing, raising, nurturing, and supporting their children, primarily when they are young (Azubuike and Aina 2020; Adams and Jenyo 2016; Dein and Dimka 2013; Salami 2007).

The definitions of parental engagement given by Nigerian mothers in this study are fascinating because they align with previous research reviewed as part of this study. For example, Menon (2013) and Kurtulmuş (2016) define parental engagement as the participation of parents in their child's schooling, day-to-day activities, and educational processes. Additionally, Ntekane (2018) defines

parental engagement as the way parents are consistently and directly involved in their children's education. Furthermore, it concurs with Devarakonda's (2012), Menon's (2013) and Goodall and Editor's (2018) definition of parental engagement as to how parents consult with educators on issues relating to their child's early childhood education. Likewise, these findings affirmed the Harvard Family Research Project's definition of parental engagement as how parents support their children's early childhood care and learning (Peck 2018). It concurs with Bierman et al. (2017) definition of parental engagement as parents' effort to promote their child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Bruce et al. (2010), Mohammed and Mohammed (2017), and Singh and Banerjee (2019) also agree with these definitions by stating that parental engagement is the influence of parents on their child's holistic development. According to Oke et al. (2021), parental engagement in ECCE positively impacts children's holistic development, which affirms the view of Nigerian mothers in this study.

In addition, these findings concur with the theoretical framework for this study. Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement, which focuses on the family, school, and the community with the child at the centre. Epstein proposed that collaboration between the family, school, and the community should exist to realise quality reform in the education sector (Sapungan and Sapungan 2014; Epstein 2001). Epstein stressed the parents' responsibility to establish home environments that support their children's development and learning (Epstein 2019). For example, it was evident in this study through the participants' responses to the definition of parental engagement how they created a warm, loving, and supportive environment for their children at home, which was in line with Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement. Epstein emphasised two-way communication between parents and early years educators about the child's growth and development (Epstein 2019; Tekin 2011). Also, the definition of parental engagement given by the participants, which centres on liaising with the early years educators on matters relating to their children's preschool education, aligns with Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement. Tobin et al. (2022) affirm these definitions by stating that mothers generally love to develop quality connections with their children's preschool settings. Overall, these

definitions show that Nigerian mothers are proactive in engaging with their children's ECCE.

These definitions given by the participants in this study are similar to the researcher's definition of parental engagement in ECCE. Based on previous studies on parental engagement in ECCE, the researcher defines parental engagement in Chapter 2 as the support parents receive from educators to engage in their children's ECCE, inclusive strategies employed by ECCE settings to foster parental engagement in ECCE, and the development of the holistic child. Support is when parents partner with early years educators to provide quality early childhood experiences for their children (Devarakonda 2012). While inclusion is parent engagement in preschool activities and holistic development, which is parent commitment and influence on their children's overall development (Singh and Banerjee 2019; Mohammed and Mohammed 2017; Devarakonda 2012).

Furthermore, the data from this study shows seven different ways Nigerian mothers engaged with their children's ECCE. Their mode of engagement with their children's ECCE was questioning and talking to their children on preschool matters, dropping off and picking up their children from preschool, virtual engagement with early years educators, engagement in play-based learning activities with their children, providing financial support towards their children's early care and education, seeking feedback from the early years educators with regards to their children's ECCE and attendance at preschool events.

The findings from this study revealed that Nigerian mothers see their engagement in their children's ECCE as asking their children questions on how they got on daily in the preschool and going over what their children learnt in preschool with them. The following statements were made on questioning and talking by some of the participants during the interview:

For example, when she goes to school, comes back, you know, whenever she has stuffs that she brings, you know, I stick it up on the wall. I encouraged her, you know, I asked questions, I asked her what did you do today in school, what did you learn today. (Habibah).

Especially when he brings his paper home, I look at what he brings, and we'll do a little practice on it just to further him more. (Isoke).

Merit, a social care worker and a mother of two, commented that sometimes when she asks her daughter how she got on in preschool, it might be an unpleasant experience, but she does encourage her child on the subject matter:

Okay for example, when my child came back, came home, and we're into the culture of when I pick her up oh how was preschool today, what happened? She will tell me what happened. Blah, blah, blah. Sometimes it could be a bad one. I'll just try to encourage her. (Merit).

The data from this study also shows that Nigerian mothers dropped off and picked up their children from preschool as part of their engagement with their children's ECCE. This was echoed by the following participants during the interview:

In the morning, I have to drop my son to the creche and then come back and then pick him up at 12. (Jane).

I make sure she is in 5 days a week and complete all the hours and not being absent. So, I make sure she is in on time and complete all the hours. (Merit).

I make sure she goes to school every day so that she's always there to learn. I'm ready to take her every day to be there, bring her back. (Omolara).

Also, the findings from this study establish that Nigerian mothers engaged in virtual discussions with the early years' educators on matters relating to their children's early learning and development. The data revealed that Nigerian mothers engaged with Apps such as WhatsApp, TeachKloud, Aladdin and many more to share and receive information from the early years' educators about their children's care and development:

What goes on in the school you get to see through the child's App. Communicating through emails or sometimes through phone calls. (Habibah).

Adunola reported going through an App with her boyfriend to see what her child does in the preschool:

We go through the app, this app now they show us what they did in school. (Adunola).

Interestingly, Adeola mentioned seeing photo evidence of every activity her child did in and outside the preschool setting on the preschool mobile App:

They've started incorporating this portfolio system. So, whatever your child is doing in school, they are actually putting it in your child's portfolio on the mobile app. So, you can see with evidence, photo evidence, what your child has been up to. So, and this I get on a weekly basis, and it's actually very helpful to see what she has been doing, like the last time she went to the fire station, she went to the park. And it's nice to see that, you know, she's doing these things.
(Adeola).

Ogheneme and Omotola, both working in the healthcare sector, reported calling the early years educators when there were issues relating to their children's ECCE:

Umm, if I have any issues, I could always ring umm yeah. (Ogheneme).

Sometimes I have to call them on the phone if I need any information from them.
(Omotola).

Ogheneme and Omotola's statements about calling the early years educators when there were issues relating to their children's early care and education are interesting and unique to Nigerian mothers as most of the participants in this study affirmed liaising with the early years educators when there were issues relating to their children's ECCE, such as potty training, thumb sucking, feeding, attendance and many more. This shows that Nigerian mothers love to consult with early years educators on matters relating to their children's ECCE to give their children the best quality care and early education. This reflects findings in research by Quaye (2016), who found that Nigerian parents communicated with their children's teachers through emails, text messages and phone calls on matters relating to their children's education as part of their involvement in their children's education.

The data from this study further revealed that as part of the Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE, they played with their children to stimulate their brains and reinforce what they learned in preschool. Favour, who has two children under four, spoke of how she and her husband engaged their children in play-like activities to stimulate their brains and continued what they learned in preschool:

So, we do a lot of umm writing, a lot of colouring, a lot of painting, umm sometimes dancing, and just a lot of things that could stimulate their brain. And you know, while stimulating their brain, you are getting them educated, and all of that. (Favour).

Habibah, a healthcare assistant, and Chidinma, a registered nurse, mentioned how they play with their children to enhance the learning that takes place in preschool:

If she has any songs she learned, she sings to me, we sing it together, you know, things like that I do. And also, you know, I have like, different kinds of things like colours and colouring shapes, things that she can do at home as well to keep her busy as well, you know, especially during the weekends. (Habibah).

I would also engage her in some few activities like, let's say, circle time. So, I like to, okay, what did you guys talked about in circle time. So maybe if they did ABC, or you know, if the teacher tells a story to them. So, I would always like her to repeat what maybe is ABCD. (Chidinma).

These findings show that Favour, Habibah and Chidinma engaged with their children's ECCE by providing stimulating activities for their children to enhance their growth and development (Sutherland 2015).

The data from this study indicates that Nigerian mothers gave financial support in the form of buying their children educational and general resources required for home and preschool as part of their engagement with their children ECCE:

Whatever is being requested, I make sure, like on Monday, they were asked to wear red shirts for Valentine. I provided it, and he was happy with his red Valentine shirt. (Isoke).

Whatever thing that umm the school needs just to learn, maybe for arts and crafts, or whatever, I make sure I provides it so that the learning is, you know, easy and sweet. [...], so, the little that is being asked off, I make sure I provide that. (Omolara).

Ogheneme spoke of both her and her husband buying their daughter toys for use at home to complement her early learning in preschool:

We'll also get like umm a lot of toys, which would be more umm educational kind of to just help her and give her that extra boost to what she is learning. (Ogheneme).

Additionally, the findings from this study revealed the frequency with which Nigerian mothers seek feedback from early years educators regarding their children's ECCE. Their responses varied from seeking daily, weekly, and fortnightly feedback to some rarely or never asking for feedback.

Jane reported asking for feedback daily:

Okay, umm, I do every day. I just asked his teacher how is he today? and you know, she asked me in the morning, how is he this morning and I do the same thing. How is he today? Any changes, do I need to know anything? Well, how was his day today. (Jane).

Ogheneme stated that she and her husband asked for feedback on a weekly basis from the early years educators to inquire how her daughter was in the preschool:

Oh yeah, we would so umm maybe at the end of the week I would always ask oh how she was umm during the week, and you know if they feel like she is umm having any difficulties that I can help with at home or if they feel like she is developing you know along with her peers yeah. I do this weekly. (Ogheneme).

Interestingly, Adeola, who has lived in Ireland for over 10 years and has three children, mentioned that she is not keen on asking for feedback at the preschool level because she believes her daughter is doing well in preschool and wants her to have fun at that stage, but does ask for feedback at the primary school level because she felt it is essential:

But in my own way, like in previous times with my other kids, I've had to, like, ask from time to time when I'm taking them to school, oh how is he getting on, or she getting on, just to get a feedback to know what areas I should be working on more, and what areas my child is excelling at, so I think is very vital. I believe so much in that but at the preschool level, I just believe that like my child should

be given the opportunity to express their personality and that's when you start knowing who they are and what they are not. So currently, I won't be so keen on asking about her because I just want her to go to school and have fun, and at present am not really keen, because I haven't gotten any call from the teacher that she is doing badly in school. (Adeola).

This finding establishes that parents' childrearing beliefs often influence the dynamics and communication between home and preschool. This finding is also supported by Oke et al. (2021) study, which found that early years educators might struggle to communicate with parents from diverse backgrounds about their children's ECCE due to their expectations for their children's ECCE. Before the researcher started her degree in ECCE, she had the same mindset as Adeola. Moving from Nigeria to Ireland, the researcher thought preschool is for children to have fun; hence, parents should let their children have fun and not be involved as no learning occurs during this period. However, the researcher's perception of early childhood education changed a few months into her degree course. The researcher saw the need for parents to be involved in their children's early learning and care and to liaise with the early years' educators regularly on how to complement their children's early learning at home, as learning starts from early childhood.

Chidinma, a mother of two children under the age of four, mentioned that she rarely asked for feedback except in exceptional cases when she needs to follow up on something that happens:

Okay, now that you mention this, I think, I would say, to be honest, I don't really think I've asked for, you know, feedback on how she's doing unless there are some cases where something happened [...] then I get to you know, push or try to, you know, find out how she's faring at school in that regard. (Chidinma).

The data from this study also revealed the frequency with which Nigerian mothers attend preschool events pre-COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the participants stated attending preschool events pre-COVID-19 pandemic, while only a few reported attending preschool events during the COVID-19 pandemic because there were no events organised by the preschools due to the restrictive measures that were in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The participants expressed their disappointment about no preschool events being organised because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which they stated they would have

loved to attend. While this is not unique to Nigerian mothers, it is a barrier for the participants in this study.

Sarah spoke of how she does attend events in the preschool setting pre-COVID-19 pandemic and how she was looking forward to attending her daughter's Christmas show, for which she took a day off work but was later cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Yes, I always attend but unfortunately with the pandemic right now we are not allowed to go in so I remember [...], we were invited for a Christmas presentation and all that and we were all looking forward to it and I took a day off work just to be there because I believe my presence there will make a lot different [...] but unfortunately, we couldn't attend because it was later cancelled so because of the pandemic they've not had so many events that the presence of parents are actually needed. (Sarah).

Aminah, a mother of two, reported attending preschool events pre-COVID-19 pandemic and none during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the restrictive measures that were in place:

Pre COVID there used to be activities, [...], let's say just meet and greet, [...], and if there is any new room that they're going to open, they call parents to come in and see. You know, with COVID, things have changed, so it's more restrictive, which is understandably so. (Aminah).

Merit indicated that she would have loved to attend preschool events, but none were organised because of the COVID-19 pandemic:

I think the COVID pandemic has really affected many things because since she started last year (2021), I haven't been at any event, [...]. So, if I was invited, of course, I would attend, so nothing has really happened. (Merit).

While Isoke reported attending an online meeting via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic for parents whose children were transitioning to primary school:

Yes, I do the last one was about umm September, I was at the meeting. Last year November, December, I would say the meeting was for parents whose children will be going to primary this September. It was an online, online zoom". (Isoke).

These findings are interesting as they showed how Nigerian mothers engaged with their children's ECCE, which they initiated as part of their responsibility for their children's early care and education. The participants revealed the seven different ways they engaged with their children's ECCE, which were questioning and talking to their children on preschool matters, dropping off and picking up their children from preschool, virtual engagement with early years educators, engagement in play-based learning activities with their children, providing financial support towards their children's early care and education, seeking feedback from the early years educators with regards to their children's early care and education and attendance at preschool events.

The ways the Nigerian mothers in this study engaged in their children's ECCE are similar to the researcher's engagement with her children's ECCE. When the researcher's two boys were availing of the universal ECCE programme, she remembers asking the early years educators for daily feedback on how they got on in preschool and how she could support their learning at home. The researcher also recalls attending her children's preschool events, such as graduation parties, playing with them in the local park, buying them toys and providing materials they needed for preschool, dropping them off and picking them up from preschool and reading bedtime stories to them.

These findings are intriguing as they are in line with previous studies on how Nigerians engaged with their children's education. Two studies on how Nigerian parents engaged in their preschool children's education in Greece and Nigeria found that they read to their children, provided them with school provisions and supported them with assignments, home projects, and virtual learning (Azubuike and Aina 2020; Rentzou and Ekine 2017). Other research carried out in the United States found that Nigerian parents dropped off and picked up their children from school, provided financial support for their children's education, supported their children with homework and communicated with their children's teachers through emails, text messages and phone calls on matters relating to their children's education (Ekpe 2019; Quaye 2016). In addition, another study on parental involvement in education amongst Nigerian parents in Sweden found that Nigerian parents provided learning aids to their children and supported their children with their schoolwork (Chukwu 2018). Furthermore, these findings

concur with studies in the United Kingdom on black mothers who found that black mothers assisted their children with their schoolwork (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008; Moreno and Lopez 1999). It also reiterates the work of Jabar (2015) and Lirio et al. (2022), who affirm the maternal roles of immigrant mothers in their children's education.

These findings show that the Nigerian mothers in this study were partners in their children's ECCE as ascribed to them by the Nigerian culture on gender roles, which assign the roles of childbearing and childrearing to women (Adams 2016; Adams and Jenyo 2016; Makama 2013; Nwoke 2013; Aja-Okorie 2013; Salami 2007). It also shows the participants' central role in supporting their children's growth and development, as stated by Vygotsky (Tobin et al. 2022; Aja-Okorie 2013; Brooks 2011).

In connection with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, these findings showed the interactions between the children and their parents and the early years educators and the parents (Bronfenbrenner 1979). For example, the Nigerian mothers reinforcing the learning that took place in the preschool at home and asking their children questions on how they got on daily in preschool did expand the children's learning and made the children see the connections between the home and the preschool. This illuminates the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children to enhance the children's growth and development (Barnardos 2023).

Also, the participants asking the early years educators for feedback about their children's progress in the preschool did make them improve their children's holistic learning and development. Equally, the Nigerian mothers' engagement in visual discussions with the early years' educators on matters relating to their children's early learning and development decreases barriers to parental engagement in ECCE as these mothers were able to access their children's learning online via Apps such as TeachKloud, Aladdin and also communicate with the early years' educators outside the preschool settings through phone calls, WhatsApp calls and text messages. This showed that parental engagement in ECCE is not confined to the preschool settings' walls. These findings show that the use of technology such as emails, phone calls, and text messages does

support positive home-school communication and strengthens the connections across home and school (Kiely et al. 2021; Willis and Exley 2018). Also, these findings illuminate the importance of the mesosystem level of interaction between early years educators and Nigerian mothers (Schor and Bernhard 2003; Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Likewise, the results of this study are in line with five of Epstein's (2019) framework of six types of involvement, parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home and collaboration. Parenting is one of the aspects of Epstein's model of involvement that is supported by the results of the study. When the participants were asked how they engage with their children's ECCE, they reported that they ensured that their children attended preschool every day by getting them ready and dropping them in preschool, which is the parenting aspect of Epstein's model of involvement. Also, the participants reported that the early years educators were supportive regarding their children's ECCE as things they could not teach their children at home; the early years educators taught them in preschool, which is the collaboration aspect of Epstein's model of parental involvement. Likewise, the participants were asked if they asked for feedback from the early years educators about their children's early childhood education, they reported that they received feedback from the early years educators about how their children are progressing in the preschool and areas for improvement, which is the communication aspect of Epstein's model of involvement. Also, the participants stated that as part of their engagement in their children's ECCE, they engaged in virtual discussions with the early years' educators via phone calls, text messages, emails, and Apps such as WhatsApp, Teach Kloud and Aladdin about issues relating to their children's learning and development, which is similarly the communication aspect of Epstein's model of involvement. Likewise, the participants stated that as part of their engagement in their children's ECCE, they provided a conducive home learning environment for their children by buying their children educational resources for use at home and reinforcing what occurred in the preschool at home, which is the parenting and learning at home aspects of Epstein's model of involvement. Volunteering is another aspect of Epstein's model of involvement that is supported by the results of this study since most of the participants reported engaging in their children's ECCE by attending

preschool events such as parent-teacher meetings, meet and greet sessions, Christmas and graduation parties organised by the early years educators pre-COVID 19 pandemic and only a few reported attending preschool events during the COVID-19 pandemic when asked if they do attend their children's early childhood events.

In conclusion, these findings demonstrate that Nigerian mothers place value on parental engagement during the early years. It also shows that Nigerian mothers are critical actors in their children's ECCE as attributed to them by the Nigerian culture on gender roles, which influences crucial decisions in the family and assigns the roles of childbearing and childrearing to women (Adams 2016; Adams and Jenyo 2016; Makama 2013; Nwoke 2013; Aja-Okorie 2013; Salami 2007). These findings indicate that Nigerian mothers are not passive regarding their children's ECCE, as this study shows the numerous ways they are committed to their children's ECCE. It also shows that some participants worked collaboratively with their spouses to engage in their children's ECCE. For instance, some participants reported how either themselves or their husbands asked for feedback from the early years educators and how they played with their children at home. These findings further show that most of the participants in this study were interested in their children's ECCE, and some sought of feedback from the early years' educators about their children's learning and development and were willing to attend their children's preschool events. These contradict the researcher's assumptions about Nigerian mothers not being keen on asking for feedback and attending their children's preschool events and previous research, such as Ekpe (2019), which states that Nigerian parents have apathy when it comes to engaging in their children's ECCE thus making them less active in their children's ECCE and Denessen et al. (2007) and Turney and Kao (2009) whose studies affirm that when it comes to immigrant parents engagement in their children's education, they are less likely to be involved than native-born parents. However, this was not the case, as the findings from this study show that Nigerian mothers, in general, are active participants in their children's ECCE. This is similar to studies by Moreno and Lopez (1999), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) and Alharthi (2023), whose research affirmed that from a global perspective, mothers are more active when it comes to their children's education.

Likewise, these findings showed that Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE is more of home-based than preschool based. Regarding parental engagement in early childhood education, Nigerian mothers see it as more of the interactions between them and their children rather than their interactions with the early years educators. For example, when the participants were asked to highlight how they engaged with their children's ECCE, they highlighted more of what they do outside the preschool setting, such as playing with their children, asking their children questions on how they got on daily in preschool and so on rather than what they do within the preschool setting, such as attending preschool events and liaising with the early years' educators. These findings show a lack of preschool-based parental engagement in ECCE, which contradicts the ideas of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement of how parents and early years educators must work together to enhance the child's learning and development.

Likewise, these findings are similar to a study in the United States on international relocatee parents who found that immigrant parents viewed their role in their children's early learning and development as mainly at home and their home involvement practices, such as playing and talking to their children, reading, colouring, writing and teaching their children their cultural norms rather than preschool involvement (Raimbekova 2021). In support, a study by Zhou et al. (2020) on Chinese parents in Canada found that Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education is more outside of school. As well, Denessen et al. (2007), affirm that ethnic minority parents are inclined to hold the school fully responsible for their children's education.

Also, in terms of Nigerian mothers being active participants in their children's ECCE, this study established that they were more interested in following up when there were issues about their children's ECCE, such as feeding, attendance, potty training rather than generally asking how their children were getting on in preschool from the early years educators as a result of their beliefs about what is parental engagement in ECCE (Hu et al. 2021; Fitzpatrick 2012; Hornby and Lafaele 2011). These findings contradict previous research on parents' engagement in their children's ECCE in Irish preschool settings. An Irish report

compiled by the early years inspectorates in 2021 during their visits to ECCE settings in Ireland shows that parents were more interested in discussing their children's progress with the early years educators during drop-off and pick-up times. These parents also attended preschool events where they discussed their jobs and celebrated their family's cultural background (Department of Education 2021). However, this wasn't the case in this study, as the data analysis establishes that Nigerian mothers are mainly keen to follow up when there were issues relating to their children's ECCE than generally asking for feedback on how their children are getting on in preschool.

These findings show a lack of preschool-based parental engagement in ECCE, which contradicts the ideas of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement of how parents and early years educators must work together to enhance the child's learning and development.

This study also shows that Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE is influenced by their cultural norms and beliefs. This is common to all parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, as their involvement in their children's education is shaped by their cultural values (Zhou et al. 2020; Al-deen and Windle 2015). This is in line with Keane (2007) and Gonzales and Gabel (2017), who affirm that parents' cultural norms and beliefs influence how they view their roles in their children's education. Also, Schor and Bernhard (2003) affirmed that the perceptions, values and experiences of immigrants play a significant role in their interaction with professionals in their new country, even though they may have been in the new country for several years. Overall, this study showed that parental engagement in ECCE differs according to culture (Öztürk 2013; Turney and Kao 2009; Denessen et al. 2007).

Benefits and Factors Impacting Parental Engagement in the Early Years

The data from this study revealed the benefits of parental engagement in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Nigerian mothers indicated that the benefits of engaging in their children's ECCE 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.

Chidinma spoke of how parents being part of their children's lives from a younger age can make their children open up to them on any issues because of their bond:

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. (Chidinma).

Isoke, a stayed-at-home mum, spoke of how she had sufficient time to engage with her child's ECCE, which made her bond and do things with her child:

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. (Isoke).

Isoke also spoke of how getting to know her child better equipped her to know what activity to plan for her child:

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

Sarah, whose youngest child is four, spoke of knowing her child's abilities and needs because of her engagement in her child's ECCE:

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. (Sarah).

Favour placed value on the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE by stating how her engagement in her children's ECCE made them grow and become better people in society:

Getting yourself involved in the child's education, it helps the child to grow. It makes the child become a better person as he grows. The child gets to learn like my children; we cook together, they are very young, [...]. So just getting them to do all those things just makes them a better person. So, I think that parental involvement is very important; it helps the child become a better person in the society. (Favour).

Other participants also spoke of how engaging with their children's ECCE broadened their horizons and made them independent:

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. (Adunola).

The benefits are massive, [...]. It teaches the child independence, like now, 'T' can put on her jacket, she knows [...], she's going to the creche, carry your bag and all that, you know, independence. (Aminah).

Ogheneme, Merit and Favour spoke of how parental engagement in ECCE boosts children's self-esteem and confidence, stating that:

Umm, your child kind of grow up to be more secure, more confident. They have a more better self-esteem cause they are able to engage with you as a parent. When they go out, they have that confident again to engage with other people as well. (Ogheneme).

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. (Merit).

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

These findings are interesting as they suggest four benefits of parental engagement in ECCE. The participants in this study described the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE as bonding with their children, knowing their children's capabilities and needs, improving development for their children and boosting their children's self-esteem and confidence. These findings in relation to the benefits of parental engagement in ECCE are fascinating because they are

supported by the works of Domina (2005), Fagbeminiyi (2011), Mishra (2012), Peck (2018) and Spreewenberg (2022). These studies found that parental engagement in ECCE enhances social relationships and broadens children's horizons. They also affirm that parental engagement in ECCE develops the child's full potential, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Likewise, Utami (2022) argues that parental participation benefits student in terms of their self-confidence, self-worth, and social and emotional well-being. This study establishes that parental engagement has a positive impact on children's learning outcomes and holistic development (Oke et al. 2021; Oostdam and Hooge 2013; Menon 2013). It also demonstrates that the relationship between the child, their parents, and the early years educator at the micro level does impact the child's learning and development (Barnardos 2023; NCCA 2009; Bronfenbrenner 1979). In support, Ntekane (2018) and Fraser-Thill (2019) revealed that parental engagement in ECCE improves children's positive social behaviour and self-esteem. Also, these findings are supported by Peck (2018) and Spreewenberg (2019), who argue that parental engagement in education establishes a connection between home and school and brings to light children's needs and capabilities. Likewise, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) and O'Toole et al. (2019) studies affirm the findings of this study by stating that parental engagement in education bridges the gap between home and preschool, improves children's development, and enhances parents' relationships with educators.

The data from this study also revealed the factors that impacted the engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE. The participants expressed that cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland, as well as restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic and employment impacted their engagement with their children's ECCE.

The data from this study revealed how the Nigerian mothers' culture differs from the Irish culture, which affected how they reared and disciplined their young children in Ireland, engaged in their children's ECCE and how the early years educators dealt with childrearing issues related to their children's ECCE. This is unique to Nigerian mothers.

Oghnemene and Chidinma, both registered nurses, highlighted how the early years educators handled potty training and thumb-sucking issues. They believe the early years educators would have dealt with these issues seriously and supported them in dealing with the same if they were from the same background.

Ogheneme expressed that if there were staff of Nigerian descent in the preschool setting, they would have worked in collaboration with her to put a plan in place to assist her daughter in using the toilet, as they would have understood that potty training issues are not taken likely by the Nigerian community:

All of their staffs would be Irish [...]. For example, if there was a Nigerian person there like they would know that I am not happy with her using the pull-ups when she can go to the toilet at home, so they would know things like that, and they would help her go the toilet whereas they are more like oh it is fine you know she can learn at her own time. (Ogheneme).

Chidinma also expressed her disappointment with the early years educators in her child's preschool for not collaborating with her to put a measure in place to stop her daughter from thumb-sucking. She confirmed speaking face-to-face with the manager of the crèche and different early years educators on this matter several times. However, she felt that no action was taken based on her feedback. She also expressed that she noted her concern on her daughter's preschool form, and on one occasion, one of the early years educators told her not to be bothered about this issue and that her daughter would outgrow it, as that was the case with her. She compared this to Nigeria, where teachers would do their possible best to stop a child from thumb-sucking:

My 3-year-old, she sucks her thumb, [...] sometimes I noticed that when she come back from school, I see that place is a bit damp so that for me, it means that she has actually sucked that thumb at school. So well, I would have loved that, you know, they enable her to stop sucking the thumb at school, but umm, so to say from my own, you know, judgment, I don't think they're doing really anything about it. And then you know, seeing from where am coming from umm thumb sucking even at home or at school. I know that you know, teachers or even parents would definitely do everything they can to stop the child. But here oh, the child would definitely outgrow thumb sucking. (Chidinma).

Ogheneme and Chidinma's statement affirms the lack of diversity in the Irish teaching profession (Ryan and Lannin 2021). These findings show that Nigerian mothers' norms and values differ from those of the early years educators, making it difficult for them to collaborate or rub their minds on issues of potty training and thumb-sucking (Shor and Bernhard 2003). Likewise, these findings show that early years educators are unaware of specific cultural differences, which poses a barrier to building preschool-parent partnerships (Ryan and Lannin 2021). Similarly, these findings are similar to a study by Kidd et al. (2008), who reported on the influence culture has on parents' values, beliefs and child-rearing practices and how early childhood preservice teachers lack a general understanding of other cultures. Hence, they must engage in cultural and racial diversity training to equip them with the skills to work in diverse contexts (Kidd et al. 2008; Milner 2006). Likewise, these findings are supported by Shor and Bernhard's (2003) research, which found that immigrant parents have different expectations of teachers due to prior experiences in their country of origin. Overall, these findings show that Nigerian mothers' cultural beliefs and values impacted their parenting roles in their children's ECCE. This is similar to an Irish study that found that cultural traditions, practices, beliefs, and values often impact the parenting roles of parents from non-Irish backgrounds (Hickey and Lecky et al. 2021).

Favour added value to this theme by highlighting that children can be confrontational in Ireland, which is different from how she was raised in Nigeria to be respectful and not talk back at adults. She also highlights the fear of applying her own parenting style and how corporal punishment is not allowed in Ireland but accepted in Nigeria:

The way we were raised is different from the way we find things here. In Africa, we could scold children, but here children are not to be scolded. And in Africa, children cannot tell their parents No, but here, children can tell their parents.
(Favour).

While Blessing, a mother of four who moved to Ireland as a teenager, spoke of how the Nigerian culture influenced how she reared and engaged in her child's ECCE. However, she is aware of the cultural differences between Nigeria and Ireland:

Umm, the culture is different; the foundation is different. The Nigerian culture is totally different to like, say, the culture here [...]. Am still Nigerian; every decision that I make is always going to stem from be it am Nigeria. (Blessing).

Likewise, Adeola spoke of the influence her culture had on what she projected into her children here in Ireland:

So, my projection to them is from learning from things I saw as a young child, a growing child, [...]. I was seeing things from my mom's, you know, what my mom was doing and what my dad did that I think was good. I learnt from that and as I grew up, I learned some things like, you know, culturally, you know in the environments, based on education, what is actually needed for children's development as well. [...]. So those are all the things that has actually moulded me up to thinking, okay, the child has to do this, is what is acceptable. Socially this is right, conforming our children to social expectations. (Adeola).

As evident in the above quotations, Nigerian mothers believe their children must be obedient and respectful to them and other adults; hence, they consider it rude when their children talk back at them (Osuofa 2021; Onwujuba et al. 2015). This shows that Nigerian mothers are strict with their children regarding respectful behaviours toward adults (Leaticia 2024). This results from their culture not permitting disrespectful behaviours (Denessen et al. 2007). Also, Nigerian mothers love to keep their culture and pass it on to their young children. This shows the influence the culture of Nigerian mothers has on their children's development (Kidd et al. 2008). This is unique to all parents from culturally diverse backgrounds as they love maintaining their heritage and culture to connect their children to their roots (Raimbekova 2021). Likewise, these findings are supported by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2013), which emphasises the importance of teaching social norms to young children.

The findings from this study also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic was a major factor that affected Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE. While this is not unique to Nigerian mothers, it is a barrier for the participants in this study. The participants in this study expressed that because of the pandemic, they were not physically allowed on the preschool premises and could not speak face-to-face with the early years' educators when they had issues relating to their children's care and early education, which they were not happy about. The

participants stated that they loved and preferred their face-to-face engagement with the early years' educators pre-COVID-19 pandemic, but it was abolished due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants also spoke of how not being allowed on the preschool premises prevented them from visiting their children's classrooms to see how settled they were and the activities they were engaging in, which they could do pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

The fact that there is no physical engagement between the parent and the teacher you know, because I would say personally, if there is a support system, or like if there's something that is on board, that will kind of encourage, you know, parents to engage in their child's school. (Chidinma).

Anuoluwapo, a mother of six, mentioned that she was always told to leave her child at the preschool gate rather than follow her child to her classroom because of the COVID-19 pandemic rules in the preschool setting for families, which she was not happy about as she would have loved to visit her daughter's classroom:

Because of COVID, we are not allowed to enter the classroom, we don't know if our children are sitting on the floor, so the pandemic, it made a lot of damage because we cannot follow our children into the classroom, we have to bring them in the gate, the next minute bye bye mommy, bye darling. (Anuoluwapo).

Ogheneme, through her facial expression and words, expressed how unhappy she was that she could not engage in face-to-face in-person discussions with the early years' educators when her daughter had difficulty using the toilet in the preschool due to the COVID-19 restrictive measures that were in place. She expressed her disappointment that the early years' educators resulted in her daughter wearing pull-ups in the preschool after a few incidents of her wetting herself. However, she stated that she communicated with the early years' educators on this issue over the phone but would have preferred face-to-face engagement, where she could have offered in-person solutions. Ogheneme further expressed that she was not pleased with this decision but was compelled to abide by it due to the COVID-19 pandemic rules, which prevented face-to-face interactions in preschool settings (Reflective Diary, 19-01-2022, Appendix T). This finding reiterates the work of Alharthi (2023), whose research found that due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents were forced

to change the style and extent of their involvement in their children's education to online.

While Jane, whose son attended a rural preschool setting, interestingly stated that she was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as she was able to interact face-to-face with the early years' educators:

No, it hasn't affected me in any way you know we wear masks to go and pick our kids, umm and I would still ask my questions (laugh) anyways regardless of COVID. [...]. I have my mask on, the staffs also have their masks on so umm are we are not standing too close, so we can still interact you know with each other you know that shouldn't be a barrier. (Jane).

The data from this study also revealed that Nigerian mothers hardly had time to commit to their children's ECCE, meet with the early years educators or attend any preschool events due to their busy work schedule. However, this is not unique to Nigerian mothers but a barrier for the participants in this study.

The lack of time due to her busy work schedule was something that hindered Adunola, a healthcare assistant, from attending her daughter's preschool events:

The only thing preventing me to get involved with my daughter's preschool education is just work [...]. I have to work to pay bill, [...], I have to work to put food on their table, [...], I have to work to make sure they get anything in life [...]. That's the only thing, to be honest, that is preventing me from being in their school activities. (Adunola).

While Blessing spoke of how, due to her full-time job as a clinical trial project manager, it was not feasible for her to talk to the early years' educators during drop-off and pick-up:

Everyone is working from home before 9 o'clock or its 9 o'clock everyone is probably rushing to go to work, so you can't be there for like five minutes, having a chat with them regarding the kid when you come to collect them, [...], you are queuing to meet them at 12 o'clock, some are waiting there to pick them at 12 o'clock, so it's not conducive. (Blessing).

Merit also spoke of how she couldn't commit to her child's early care and education due to her full-time social care work schedule. She lamented about this being her concern/worry as she is a single mother who has to care and commit to her child's

care and education in Ireland; hence, her work is a barrier to her not committing to this:

Yes, I haven't been able to do as much as I would like with her in terms of education, you know, so because I'm not always here, and she's with people. [...]. You know, so yeah, me being absent and having to go to work. It has a big impact on how I am assisting or supporting her education. (Merit).

These findings are interesting as they suggest three factors that impacted Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children ECCE. The participants in this study described the factors that impacted their engagement in their children's ECCE as cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland, restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic and employment.

The findings on cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland show that Nigerian mothers love to practice their own beliefs and culture in Ireland. Also, due to the Nigerian culture's peculiar way of childrearing practices, Nigerian parents must train their children in specific ways that are accepted by their culture; hence, this influences how the Nigerian mothers in this study rear their children in Ireland (Nwoke 2013; Kidd et al. 2008). This is an example of a macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory of how a parent's culture shapes their child's development (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Also, in this study, it was evident that some participants could not train their children in the way their culture permits due to the clash in culture between Nigeria and Ireland; thus, this was a major factor in how they rear their children in Ireland. For instance, one participant spoke about how she could not spank her child because it is illegal in Ireland, thus limiting how she reared her child in Ireland. This is similar to an Irish study which found that immigrant parents might struggle to adopt appropriate discipline practices when confronted with their children's misbehaviours due to the ban on corporal punishment in Ireland (Hickey and Leckey 2021). These findings establish that when immigrant parents migrate to Western countries, they often find that the discipline in the educational systems differs from those with which they are familiar (Shor and Bernhard 2003). While corporal punishment is rooted in Nigerian socio-cultural beliefs, this is not acceptable in Irish cultural beliefs (Nwafor 2021; Dalikeni

2021; Edo 2021; Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). Hence, this was a significant factor in how the Nigerian mothers in this study rear their children in Ireland.

Likewise, the findings on cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland as a factor that impacted parental engagement in ECCE are fascinating because they concur with other research on barriers to parental engagement in education. Fitzpatrick (2012) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018) investigated the barriers to parental involvement in education. Results indicated that some educators might lack confidence and essential training to meet the needs of parents who are not from their background. Also, these findings are supported by Joshi et al. (2005), who reported that if parents and educators are from different backgrounds, this poses a barrier to parent-preschool relationships. Likewise, these findings establish that cultural differences are one of the barriers to parental engagement in ECCE (Donohue and Gaynor 2011).

These findings are also similar to Kats et al. (2007), Turney and Kao (2009), and the OECD reviews of migrant education in Ireland (Taguma et al. 2010), who highlighted that culture is a major barrier to immigrant parents' engagement in ECCE. For example, in this study, it was established that some of the early year's educators were not knowledgeable about child rearing practices such as potty training and thumb-sucking that were common to the Nigerian culture, which prevented them from meeting the needs of some of the participants with regards to their children's care while in the preschool settings.

Likewise, Kim (2009) found differences in child-rearing practices as a reason why minority parents in the United States are not involved in their children's education. For example, parents might believe they have to take on a less active role in their children's education and depend on the preschool to be fully responsible for their children's education (Denessen et al. 2007). In this study, some of the participants were not keen on asking for feedback about their children's early learning and development from the early years educators, which made them in some way less active in their children's ECCE as they depended on the early years educators to provide them with feedback on how their children got on in the preschool. This is due to their beliefs that it is the role of the early years educators to oversee their children's preschool education (Hu et al. 2021; Turney and Kao 2009; Denessen et al. 2007). In some ways, this limited

the Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE due to the cultural context and conceptualisation of engagement they hold.

Also, the findings on employment as a factor that impacted parental engagement in ECCE are interesting because they are consistent with Bronfenbrenner (1979), McMillan (2005), Barnardos (2006), and Savacool (2011), who indicated that parents who are in full-time employment find it challenging to commit to their children's preschool education as they have no time to visit their children's preschool settings and attend their children's preschool events. These findings show that Nigerian mothers struggle to engage in their children's ECCE and depend on early years educators to educate their children due to their busy work schedules (Kiely et al. 2021; Ryan 2021). However, this is not unique to Nigerian mothers, but a factor that impacted the engagement of the participants in this study in their children's ECCE. Similar to these findings, Ajayi (2006), Turney and Kao (2009), Fagbeminiyi (2010) and Menon (2013) found that parents have less time to liaise with the preschool teachers, play with their children or ask their children questions about how they got on in preschool due to their busy work schedule. In support, Kamouri et al. (2022) affirmed that a parent working long hours and shift work can limit their visits to preschool settings. Likewise, Fitzpatrick (2012) reported that lack of time and other personal and social pressures prevented parents from committing to their children's early years education. This study establishes that early years educators might find it challenging to communicate with parents from diverse backgrounds about their children's ECCE due to limited time as a result of their employment obligations (Oke et al. 2021). Hence, they must consider the needs of parents who are working full-time to enhance effective parental engagement in ECCE (Norheim and Moser 2020; Fitzpatrick 2012; Symeou 2006).

Ekpe (2019) in his study reported that Nigerian parents in the United States couldn't commit to their children's education due to a lack of planning their day and their work schedule and commitment; hence, they only drop off and pick up their children from school. For example, in this study, it was established that most participants could not commit to their children's ECCE, attend their children's preschool events, or meet with the early years educators periodically because their employment was a major factor in their engagement in their children's ECCE. These findings further illustrate Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory by showing how Nigerian

mothers' employment restricted parental engagement opportunities within and outside the preschool settings.

The finding on restricted face-to-face in-person interactions between the participants and the early year's educators and participants not physically allowed on the preschool premises due to the COVID-19 pandemic rules was a major factor in how Nigerian mothers engaged in their children's ECCE. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants in this study were less active as they were not allowed on the preschool premises, and they had restricted face-to-face in-person interactions with the early years educators about their children's early learning and development, which limited their engagement in their children's ECCE within the preschool settings. These findings are interesting because they are similar to a study by Levickis et al. (2022), who found that during the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria, Australia, mothers were not permitted in the preschool settings at any time and face-to-face interactions were eliminated. These findings are also supported by O'Toole and Dobutowitsch's (2020) study, which found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, early years educators in Ireland couldn't engage in face-to-face contact with parents due to the preventive measures implemented in preschool settings to curb the spread of the disease. Likewise, Kambouri et al. (2022) noted that the relationship between parents and early years educators was altered during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings further illustrate Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory by showing how social distancing policies that were put in place in preschool settings to slow the transmission of COVID-19 restricted parental engagement opportunities within the preschool settings (Browne et al. 2021). According to the participants' responses, the COVID-19 pandemic affected their engagement in their children's ECCE due to the health and safety measures that were put in place by the preschools, which prevented them from meeting face-to-face with the early years educators, attending preschool events and gaining access to their children's classroom. Overall, these findings show that there are social and cultural factors that impact Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE.

Scope for Enhancing Nigerian Mothers' Engagement in their children's Early Childhood Care and Education

The data from this study revealed the scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education. When the participants were asked if they think changes should be made to enhance parental engagement for Nigerian mothers of young children in Ireland, they suggested a return to face-to-face in-person interactions post-COVID-19 pandemic, more culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19 pandemic, and support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement.

The data from this study suggest that there should be opportunities for Nigerian mothers to visit their children's preschool settings post-COVID-19 to observe what their children are doing and extend these to their home settings. Likewise, the data from this study further suggest that early years educators should offer opportunities to Nigerian mothers, such as activities they can do with their children at home, to enhance their engagement in their children's ECCE within the home settings. Furthermore, the data from this study suggest that there should be Parent-Teacher meetings post-COVID-19 where Nigerian mothers will have the opportunities to meet face-to-face periodically with the early years educators to discuss their children's growth and development and issues around cultural differences that might impact their children's ECCE. The participants affirmed that since there were restricted face-to-face interactions within the preschool settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, these would encourage Nigerian mothers to take on active roles in their children's ECCE within the preschool settings. It would also enable Nigerian mothers to share information about their children with the early years educators and be familiar with the preschool and their children's actions in the preschool (Symeou 2006).

Omolara, a mother of four, spoke of how she would love to visit her child's classroom to see what she is doing:

Like for me, you know, I like at some point to just you know, kind of walk-in into the child's class and see all her actions, what she's doing. I like to do that.
(Omolara).

Habibah spoke of the early years educators offering activities that Nigerian mothers can do with their children at home to enhance their engagement in their children's ECCE.

And then maybe they (creche) can give them some stuff, you know, to make the parents do with the child at home and bring it back to school, something they can say, okay, I did this with my mother, and they have to do it. It is an assignment for the two of them to spend time together as a mother, so I feel that you know, African mothers, you know, they grew up in Nigeria, they came to Ireland, they are very busy with so many other lives that they forget that this child needs them. (Habibah).

Jane and Ogheneme reported the need for the early years educators to regularly invite parents to the preschool post-COVID-19 pandemic to update them on their children's progress and ways they could support their children's learning at home:

But I think what they can actually improve on is maybe having a meeting with the parents (PTA Meeting), [...]. So, I think that would be really helpful with communication back from the preschool to the parents every three months. So, from January to February, this is how your child is developed; it will really help the parents. (Jane).

But it would be nice to just even invite the parents over just to kind of see what the children are learning kind of, see where they are in the classroom. Umm, like for example maybe every day, the end of every week or something [...] things like how they've progressed, how we as parent could kind of at home just help revise or go over whatever they have learnt. (Ogheneme).

Jane and Ogheneme's statement shows that frequent communication and collaboration between early years educators and Nigerian mothers would intensify the Nigerian mothers-preschool relationships (Menon 2013; Marshall 2010; Symeou 2006). It also demonstrates that if there is effective communication between Nigerian mothers and the early years educators, this could serve as the basis for Nigerian mothers to engage in their children's learning at home and at preschool (Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020; Kurucz et al. 2020). Likewise, these findings establish that an environment where Nigerian mothers feel welcome can enhance their relationships with early years educators, which, in turn, will positively affect their children's early learning and development (Kiely et al. 2021; Ryan 2021; Kelty and Wakabayashi

2020). Equally, these findings also show that if Nigerian mothers understand what their children are working on at preschool, they will have a sense of their children's competency and areas they need to improve their children's confidence and ability and support their children's learning at home (Spreeuwenberg 2022; McMillan 2005).

Chidinma highlighted the need for the early years educators to discuss with the Nigerian mothers about their cultural background and differences, which would have implications for how they communicate or teach their children:

They might actually go to the extent like finding out about the Nigerian mothers, the backgrounds of the Nigerian mothers like what languages they speak at home, what kind of food they eat at home because it's different and sometimes the child might be eating something different at home and then the school might be preparing different thing at school. So sometimes the child might not want to eat that same thing at school, and you know for some people oh yeah, the child doesn't want to eat but because the child is not used to that kind of food that's why so. Umm you know getting to know the background of the mother or parents it's important and that would kind of help them on how to communicate or teach that child better. (Chidinma).

Merit also suggested that Irish early years educators need to pay closer attention to cultural differences:

I think the system here it's forgetting that there are cultural differences. And look what is happening in the world. And just maybe it's time some attention needs to be paid into cultural differences. (Merit).

The Nigerian mothers in this study affirmed their cultural role in instilling their families' values and cultural norms in their children (Edo 2021; Nwafor 2021; Nwoke 2013) and would like to extend this beyond the fall walls of their homes; hence, they suggested having discussions with early years educators about their cultural backgrounds. This corresponds with Fitzpatrick (2012), who states that to develop a partnership in ECCE settings, early years educators must have a general knowledge of each family's values, structures and traditions. In support, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, states that where there are specific needs in ECCE settings, such as cultural identity, the parent-early years educator partnership is primarily important (NCCA 2009).

Likewise, this study establishes that early years educators must widen their understanding of Nigerian mothers to include sensitivity to cultural forces hidden beneath their daily life activities (Payne 1996). In support, Ryan and Lannin (2021) affirmed that to build school-family partnerships, educators must be more knowledgeable and aware of specific cultural differences. Therefore, there must be an open, two-way communication channel between early year educators and Nigerian mothers so that early year educators can become familiar with the worldview and culture of Nigerian mothers, which would have implications for how they meet the needs of their children in their care (Shor and Bernhard 2003).

The findings on Parent-Teacher meetings where Nigerian mothers will have the opportunities to meet face-to-face periodically with the early years educators to discuss their children's growth and development and issues around cultural differences that might impact their children's ECCE shows that parental engagement in ECCE must be based on dialogue, and it requires work on both the Nigerian mothers and early years educators' side (Barnardos 2023). These findings are in line with Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland, which states that it is essential that early years educators keep parents informed of their children's performance through different means such as meetings, phone calls, emails, and notes (CECDE 2006). In addition, Siolta further states that early years educators must provide parents with opportunities to visit ECCE settings to observe their children play and give feedback on how they can support their children's growth and development (CECDE 2006). This affirms the views of the Nigerian mothers in this study. Furthermore, these findings are supported by the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA 2016), which states the need for early years educators to expand their knowledge on diversity issues. Also, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, states that early years educators can help parents support their children's learning and development by inviting them to share information about their culture and traditions, which will help support their children's learning and development (NCCA 2009). Similarly, these findings demonstrate that for preschools to promote effective engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE, there must be effective communication between the Nigerian mothers and the early years educators (Menon 2013; Marshall 2010). Likewise, these findings are supported by

O'Toole et al. (2019) who argue that early years educators must note that parents are essential to their children's learning and development; hence, they must design their preschool environments to create opportunities for open communication between them and the parents. Also, Galindo and Sheldon (2012) claim that educators can increase the frequency of parent engagement at preschool by extending invitations to and communicating with parents more frequently. This affirms the view of the Nigerian mothers in this study as stated in their responses. Overall, these findings establish that the responsibility to enhance parental engagement in ECCE within the preschool settings lies with the early year's educators (Norheim and Moser 2020; O'Toole et al. 2019; Donohue and Gaynor 2011; NCCA 2009; Siolta 2006). Although the responsibility to enhance parental engagement in ECCE within the preschool settings lies with the early year's educators, the Nigerian mothers in this study, through their responses, affirm their roles in working collaboratively with the early years educators to ensure that these engagements are effective and collective. For example, most of the participants spoke about their willingness to accept invitations from the early years educators to visit their children's preschool classrooms and discussed their children's progress in preschool with the early year's educators post-COVID-19 pandemic, which would affect how they support their children's learning at home. This shows that Nigerian mothers want to collaborate with early years educators to enhance their children's growth and development; hence, educators must make them feel welcome and work in partnership with them (Norheim and Moser 2020; Turney and Kao 2009; Sohn and Wang 2006). These findings affirmed that partnership must be formed between Nigerian mothers and early years educators to effectively meet the needs of the children (Epstein 2019; Bronfenbrenner 1979).

The data from this study also suggest the need for more culturally inclusive preschool events, such as cultural day celebrations to raise awareness about the Nigerian culture, celebrate the Nigerian culture and avenues for Nigerian mothers to be actively involved in their children's ECCE within the preschool setting. Likewise, the data from this study further suggest more culturally inclusive preschool events such as a day in the life, coffee mornings, meet and greet sessions, and many more organised by early years educators that children and parents can do together post-COVID-19 to offer Nigerian parents the opportunities to interact with other parents, the early years educators and their children's peers within the Irish ECCE settings.

Sarah spoke of how, as an African, she would love to share her Nigerian culture with her children and others in the preschool setting; hence, she suggests more cultural events in preschool settings post-COVID-19 pandemic:

We Africans because of where we are coming from, we love this cultural thing [...]. If they can actually include a day to showcase their culture [...]. We are in a foreign land, but at the end of the day, we still want to introduce our children to where they are coming from and also for our children to share their own culture with other nationalities, with other Irish children. (Sarah).

This finding shows that an effective way to ensure Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE within the preschool setting is that early years educators should ensure that the Nigerian culture is visible in the content of the preschool curriculum (Kiely et al. 2021). It also shows that there is a need for parenting support for Nigerian immigrant mothers in Ireland that acknowledges their cultural values and traditions within the preschool curriculum (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

Favour and Aminah reported on the need for more events that Nigerian parents and their children can do together in the preschool setting:

If, umm, programmes can be organised for the children and the parents to attend, and maybe do a little bit of seminar and get the children talking and playing with their parents at the events, maybe it could help. (Favour).

Also, Aminah reported on the need for preschool events that can bring parents together within the preschool settings:

I remember pre-COVID yeah, they were opening a room or so, and we all went and you know even amongst us parent we kind of stood, had a chat, that way you kind of interacts with other parent and really hear what they are also saying but now it is just you and the creche (Aminah).

During the interview, Habibah, having grown up in Ireland, spoke of how she had witnessed some Nigerian mothers in Ireland not engaging with their children's education and how an invitation to Nigerian parents to attend preschool events could help in this area:

I grew up here, I'm very relaxed with my kids, but I have seen some African mothers, coming from Nigeria, they don't understand how to communicate with their child. So, I do feel that even the creche can even maybe have, you know,

a day in the life, inviting the mothers in, or the fathers to spend more time with the child in school, to engage with them. (Habibah).

The Nigerian mothers in this study affirmed that they have a role in passing on their traditions to their children outside their homes; hence, they suggested more cultural events in the preschool so their children can familiarise themselves with their culture outside their home settings. Also, through these cultural events, Nigerian mothers can contribute to their children's learning and development by sharing their time, experiences, and talents within ECCE settings (Barnardos 2019). These findings are supported by Epstein (2019) which states that parents should serve as volunteers for preschool activities. Likewise, these findings concur with the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA 2016), which state the role of the early years educators in providing culturally based appropriate activities, inclusive early years settings where diversity and difference can be celebrated and the need for early years educators to partner with parents to meet the individual needs of their children. Similarly, these findings correspond with Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland, which states that it is essential that early years educators learn about the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the children in their care to contribute to successful parental engagement in ECCE (CECDE 2006). In support, Aistear states that when it comes to parental engagement in ECCE, different cultures and ethnic groups should be considered (NCCA 2009). Furthermore, these findings establish that early years educators must arrange social events to help Nigerian mothers develop support networks with other parents and themselves (Fitzpatrick 2012). This concurs with Turney and Kao (2009), who affirm that parental engagement keeps parents socially active, such as connecting with other parents and teachers. Overall, these findings show that if early years educators have a multicultural mindset and a shared understanding of how to promote cultural diversity in their ECCE settings, these could lead to positive engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE (Kurucz et al. 2020).

The data from this study further suggest the need for support in the form of seminars, parenting classes and parenting groups for African immigrant parents of young children in Ireland to help them understand parenting in Ireland, how they can take on active roles in their children's ECCE and build social networks with other African

parents. The participants acknowledged that as immigrants, they struggled with rearing their children in Ireland due to cultural differences; hence, parenting classes, parenting groups and seminars could help mitigate this challenge for African parents who arrived in Ireland. The participants believed that through the parenting classes, parenting groups and seminars, African parents would be able to connect with other African immigrant parents in Ireland, learn about the Irish ways of rearing children, strike a balance between the Irish and Nigerian forms of rearing children in Ireland and also develop strategies they could implement to engage in their children's ECCE. Some participants acknowledged that they are aware that there are parenting classes, parenting groups and seminars for parents of young children in the Irish communities but would prefer those targeted mainly at African parents of young children. These participants further stated that those parenting classes, parenting groups and seminars should be facilitated by Africans, whom the African parents of young children might feel comfortable relating to about issues they faced while rearing their children in Ireland as they share the same culture.

Favour spoke of the need for an online seminar to teach black immigrant mothers in Ireland how to be involved in their children's lives to avert issues with social workers:

They could also have, even if it's an online seminar, teaching mothers about how to parent, how to be involved in their children's life, [...]. So, if they do that, you see, mothers will be very involved in their children's life and the issue of having conflict with the children and having the government or the social welfare that may collect children from their mothers, which is kind of becoming something else, especially in the black community. (Favour).

Favour's statement corresponds with an Irish study by Dalikeni (2021), who affirms that black African asylum-seeking families in Ireland need to learn about appropriate child-rearing practices in Ireland to avoid being over-represented in the Irish child protection system. It also shows that easily accessible interventions can contribute to the successful engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's lives (Leitão 2023). This finding establishes that Nigerian immigrant mothers in Ireland must be supported in their parenting journey and aided in learning appropriate discipline practices as well as adjusting to the Irish parenting culture.

Chidinma emphasised the need for ongoing training for Nigerian mothers in Ireland to reinforce the need for them to engage with their children:

So, I would say if there are maybe a one of ongoing training you know just for Nigerian mothers to tell them that it is necessarily that you engage your child, so I would say that training is very key because you don't give what you don't have. (Chidinma).

While Aduola spoke about the need for parenting groups as a support network for African immigrant mothers to combat isolation and also connect with other mothers in the community:

Some mother, they feel lonely, you know, they feel lonely, like having to deal with one children at school and then being at home but if there is a community service or something that they can take mothers, just to do like maybe once a week, it might even just be dancing or something, just something to engage mothers, or learning how to read or maybe teaching them how to do something like maybe sewing class, something just to have mothers. That will be great. (Adunola).

Likewise, Blessing spoke about the need for representation from the African community to run parenting groups for African parents in Ireland:

Like a representative from like say an African not necessary Nigerian but an African person in there I don't know now like what am saying is I don't know what the resource can be, whatever resource is there needs to be like diversify in that group like there is no point in having a parent group being led by an Irish person you get me, there is no point in having like a point of contact for example for the ECCE scheme are they are non-Nigerian that they can relate to and ask question, it's really important that there can be someone there that looks like you because that is the only time, that is the only kind of way to relate. (Blessing).

The above quotations from Adunola and Blessing showed a lack of established community support for African mothers in Ireland. These correspond with Irish studies that found that Africans in Ireland lack community support due to a lack of resources and funding from the Irish government (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007; Mutwarasibo 2002). These findings also show a strong need for parent-parent networks, community

support for immigrant parents in Ireland, and group-based support programmes led by migrants in Ireland (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

The findings on support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement in ECCE correspond with Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, which stated that to build partnerships with parents in Irish ECCE settings, it is essential that early years educators organise information sessions on play and many more for parents to equip them with the skills to support their children's early learning and development (NCCA 2009). Galindo and Sheldon (2012) also affirm that preschool plays a crucial role in creating opportunities for family engagement in their children's learning and fostering connections with families. In support, Epstein (2019) states the need for educators to host workshops and parenting classes on parenting and childrearing to equip parents with the skills to support their children.

Overall, these findings are interesting as they suggest three ways to improve Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE. The participants suggested a return to face-to-face in-person interactions post-COVID-19 pandemic, more culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19 pandemic, and support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement in ECCE. These findings showed that early years educators must support parents in the early years to enhance their engagement in children's lives (Leitão 2023). It also establishes that to fully engage Nigerian mothers in their children's learning and development, early years educators must ensure that opportunities to facilitate this stem from the Nigerian mothers' interests and are planned and implemented with their support and feedback (Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020).

These findings are interesting as they are well illustrated by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. He argues that there must be interactions between two microsystems, the home and the preschool, to enhance the child's growth and development, as both are the most influential contexts in which learning and development occur (Galindo and Sheldon 2012). In support, Reggio Emilia and Steiner Waldorf's approach affirmed the role of parents as the child's primary figure and the need for educators to rub minds with parents about their children's early learning and development (Nicol and Taplin 2012; French 2008; Symeou 2007; Domina 2005).

These findings also fit in well with Epstein's (2019) Framework of Six Types of Involvement for comprehensive programs of partnership: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Under the theme of parenting, Epstein highlighted the need for educators to help and assist families with parenting, child-rearing skills, and creating an environment that supports their children's development and learning (Anthony-Newman et al. 2019; Epstein 2019). For example, early years educators hosting parenting classes and workshops on play, child rearing in Ireland and ways Nigerian immigrant parents can be actively engaged in their children's ECCE can help Nigerian mothers support their children's care and development at home and in preschool and be aware of child rearing practices in Ireland. Under the theme of communicating, Epstein states the need for early years educators to engage in open dialogue with parents through face-to-face meetings, to share their children's progress and for parents to take on active roles in the preschool setting. For example, early years educators can have periodic meetings with Nigerian mothers and host family events such as cultural day, where Nigerian mothers take on active roles to share and create awareness about their customs and traditions with everyone can create that link between home and preschool. The cultural day events could also be an avenue for early years educators, parents, and their children to learn about the different cultures that is represented in the preschool settings. These could further form a good relationship between Nigerian mothers and early years educators, thus creating an enabling environment for effective parental engagement in ECCE. Also, the parenting classes and groups could be an avenue for Nigerian mothers to build familiar support systems of friends and combat the social stress and isolation they might face due to the new cultural system they found themselves in Ireland (Hickey and Lickey 2021; Fleck and Fleck 2013; Onwujuba et al. 2015). Likewise, these findings support the work of Swick (2003), who states that cultural differences should be used to enhance relationships and that humans must be cultural learners. For instance, early years educators hosting cultural events to learn and be aware of the Nigerian culture would enhance the Nigerian mothers-preschool relationships and promote the Nigerian culture within the preschool curriculum. These findings show that in developing approaches to Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE, early years educators must acknowledge and respond to issues of diversity and inclusion and personal factors related to these mothers (Kiely et al. 2021; Kurucz et al. 2020). Overall, these findings suggest the

scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE, which requires the early years educators to work collaboratively with these mothers. Chapter 6 concludes the study and provides implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

Prior to this study, the research indicated was a paucity of research in relation to Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education (ECCE) within an Irish context. Consequently, this study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE.

This study explored real-life experiences with fifteen Nigerian mothers living in Ireland who had children availing of the universal ECCE programme between the years of 2020 and 2022. Data were collected and analysed in relation to their engagement in their children's ECCE, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status in Ireland, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood. The use of semi-structured interviews helped the researcher gain insight into Nigerian mothers' views and perceptions of parental engagement in ECCE and the challenges Nigerian mothers face in Ireland due to their culture and immigrant status. This study has, therefore, added to knowledge on parental engagement for culturally diverse families from an insider's perspective and sparked further research and discussion on Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in Irish ECCE settings. Likewise, it has also illuminated the voices of Nigerian mothers of preschool children in Ireland, who are often not heard in Irish educational research.

Summary of Findings

This study found that parental engagement in ECCE is complex; Nigerian mothers had a broad understanding of parental engagement in ECCE. It also indicated that the responsibility for parental engagement in ECCE lies on Nigerian mothers rather than a collective effort between Nigerian mothers and the early years educators.

This study identified five distinct definitions of parental engagement in ECCE given by Nigerian mothers, which were:

- involvement in their children's lives;
- Liaising with the early years educators on matters relating to their children's early childhood care and education;
- The interaction between the mother and the children;

- Supporting their children and;
- Fostering and nurturing their children's holistic growth and development.

Likewise, this study demonstrated that Nigerian mothers place value on parental engagement during the early years. It affirmed that Nigerian mothers are active participants in their children's ECCE (home and preschool) as it showed the different ways they engaged in their children's ECCE. Nigerian mothers engaged in their children's ECCE in seven different ways, including:

- Questioning and talking to their children on preschool matters;
- Dropping off and picking up their children from preschool;
- Virtual engagement with early years educators;
- Engagement in play-based learning activities with their children;
- Providing financial support towards their children's early childhood care and education;
- Seeking feedback from the early years educators with regard to their children's early childhood care and education and;
- Attendance at preschool events.

Similarly, this study showed that Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE is more home-based than preschool-based. It further showed that regarding parental engagement in ECCE, Nigerian mothers see it as more of the interactions between them and their children than with the early years' educators.

Likewise, this study ascertained the role of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE as ascribed to them by the Nigerian culture on gender roles, which influence crucial decisions in the family and assigns the roles of childbearing and childrearing to women. It showed that parental engagement in ECCE differs according to culture.

This study further revealed that parental engagement in ECCE improves children's development, boosts children's self-esteem and confidence, helps parents bond with their children, and knows their children's capabilities and needs. It demonstrated that factors such as cultural differences in childrearing practices, restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19, and employment impacted parental engagement in ECCE.

This study further indicated the scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE. It suggested that Nigerian mothers believed that early years

educators should address the needs of Nigerian immigrant mothers of young children in Ireland who are from different cultural backgrounds. Data suggests that these mothers often need additional support when engaging in their children's ECCE and adapting to the Irish system. Also, this study clearly showed that periodic face-to-face meetings between Nigerian mothers and early years educators, along with culturally inclusive preschool events, would enhance Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE.

Data indicated that Nigerian mothers value participation in cultural day events to boost their engagement in their children's ECCE and promote Nigerian culture within preschool settings. In relation to Nigerian mothers adapting to the Irish system, this study provides evidence that parenting classes, parenting groups and seminars on play and parenting in Ireland could equip Nigerian mothers with the skills to rear their children in Ireland, improve their engagement with their children's ECCE, and build support network with other African immigrant mothers in Ireland.

This study further revealed the many benefits of the universal ECCE programme for Nigerian mothers and their children and the need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE programme. Due to the universal ECCE programme, this study showed that Nigerian mothers availed of free childcare hours for three hours a day during the school year, and their children learnt from knowledgeable others in the preschool through the support from the early year's educators, which is a tradition in their culture. For their young children, participants reported that the universal ECCE programme boosted their communication skills, created opportunities for them to interact with people outside their home settings and prepared them for primary school.

This study suggested that parents would support a request for the Irish government to reduce the age entry to the universal ECCE programme from two years and eight months to either two years or two years and five months to provide accessible quality ECCE to more children in Ireland and an extension of the universal ECCE hours as childcare support for Nigerian mothers and working mother in Ireland.

Recommendations for Practice

As identified in this study, the lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland had a negative impact on the participants' lives in terms of their overall well-being and stress levels. This is a common challenge for immigrant parents (Mostoway 2020; Fleck and Fleck 2013; Shor and Bernhard 2003). Although the participants were happy with their new life in Ireland, they mentioned the challenges of rearing their children alone in Ireland with no family support and little support from the Irish government, which they found extremely stressful. They compared this to Nigeria, where childrearing is never left in the hands of the child's parents alone but includes the child's extended relatives and older siblings. This has implications for immigrant parents' mental health and well-being in Ireland, as immigration often leads to social stress and isolation for parents because of a lack of familiar support systems of family and friends (Fleck and Fleck 2013; Coakley and Mac Einri 2007). As findings from this study indicated that there is a lack of established community support for Africans in Ireland due to a lack of resources and funding from the Irish government (Coakley and Mac Einri 2007; Mutwarasibo 2002), it is therefore recommended that the Irish government put a system in place at every local level where immigrant parents can share their experiences parenting in Ireland, connect and support each other through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which provides social inclusion supports to individuals and community organisation. This is important so they can all feel that they are not alone in Ireland and have allies to support them in adapting to the Irish system. Bringing immigrant parents in Ireland together will also allow them to help each other form family support, which would benefit them in rearing their children in Ireland, as this is a norm in their country of origin. Also, the Irish government could implement a mentoring system where established local immigrant parents can help support newly arrived immigrant parents in Ireland in parenting and navigating the Irish systems. It is also recommended that local family resource centres offer support specific for migrant parents in areas such as parenting, how to navigate the Irish systems and many more. These will serve as a family support strategy for immigrant parents to adapt and navigate Irish systems when they arrive in Ireland. Likewise, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth could make childcare affordable and accessible to immigrant parents in Ireland to help eliminate the impact that lack of family and childcare support will have on their well-

being. As immigrant parents are used to the tradition of not rearing their children alone, affordable and accessible childcare support will help to reduce their stress levels while rearing their children in Ireland.

Similarly, this study established the need for the Irish government to make preschool affordable for Nigerian parents in Ireland, as the high cost of childcare might prevent them from sending their children to preschool. In response to this, the researcher recommends that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should increase the universal ECCE hours to at least 30 hours a week and also reduce the age entry to the programme to 1 year old to allow more children from ethnic minority backgrounds to have access to free, high-quality and inclusive early care and education in Ireland regardless of their parent's income which would help eliminate childcare costs for their parents and also give them opportunities to work longer hours and engage in training that requires longer duration. Due to the high cost of childcare in Ireland, this study recommends that young children in Ireland should have access to free quality ECCE, and all working mothers in Ireland should be provided with childcare support. Likewise, as the findings from this study indicated that the hours of the universal ECCE programme are not designed to facilitate working parents, the researcher suggests that it should be revisited to consider the needs of working parents in Ireland.

The researcher would also recommend that information be made available at the local and national levels through televisions, radios, billboards, notice boards in post offices, shops, bus stops, newspapers, and word of mouth to immigrant parents of young children in Ireland of all the schemes they can avail of for their children in terms of their early care and education in case of lack of awareness about these schemes. Where necessary, this information could be translated into other languages to suit the needs of immigrant parents for whom English is not their first language. Also, the City and County Childcare Committees could link up with community services and organisations such as Doras Luimní, an independent organisation working to promote and protect the rights of people from a migrant background in Ireland and new communities' partnerships, Ireland's largest independent migrant-led national network to target immigrant parents of young children when they arrive in the country to inform them of the different schemes they can avail of for their children. This is the case as

not many parents in Ireland are aware of available childcare support that they can avail of for their children (English 2024).

Likewise, it is recommended that the Irish government provide funds for professionally staffed Freephone parenting support lines specific for immigrant parents in Ireland to help them navigate their parenting journey in Ireland so they don't feel lonely and unsupported. These helplines should be confidential and available twenty-four hours a day to offer support, such as listening to immigrant parents' concerns about their children, offering advice on any parenting worries they might have in Ireland and giving them helpful information to help them make informed decisions about their children.

As identified in this study, there is a need for parenting groups, seminars and parenting classes for African immigrant parents in Ireland as a support network for them to connect with other African immigrant parents, understand how to parent in Ireland and take on active roles in their children's ECCE. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth could provide funds to the City and County Childcare Committees, The Area Based Childhood (ABC) programme initiatives and children's charity organisations such as Barnados to provide local and national parenting courses, parenting groups and parenting workshops for newly immigrant parents in Ireland to help them navigate their parenting journey in Ireland. Prior to these parenting courses, parenting groups and workshops, assessments could be done to ensure that the workshops, parenting groups and courses will meet the specific needs of the targeted parents. The researcher is aware that there are parenting courses, parenting groups and workshops for parents in the Irish communities. However, the researcher suggests those targeted mainly at newly immigrant parents in Ireland to help them connect with other immigrant parents in Ireland and mitigate concerns they might have related to disciplining their children and parenting in Ireland.

Funding could also be made available by Tusla the Child, family and Agency under the Area Based Childhood Programme for home visiting programmes specifically for immigrant parents of young children in Ireland to help them nurture and build positive relationships with their children. This would help prevent Nigerian parents from having issues with social workers, which was mentioned by some of the participants in this study. Also, the need for representation from the African community to run parenting

groups for African parents in Ireland was highlighted in this study. Therefore, the researcher recommends that these home visits, parenting helplines, parenting courses, parenting workshops and parenting groups be coordinated and facilitated by immigrants to whom immigrant parents can relate as they share similar experiences. This is the case to offer migrant-led peer or parent-parent network support for immigrants in Ireland which is a need presently (Hickey and Leckey 2021).

Preschool-based Engagement

The result of this study showed that home-based parental engagement in ECCE was more than preschool-based parental engagement in ECCE. This indicates that strategies could be implemented to enhance parental engagement within preschool settings to complement the engagement already taking place at home. During the interview, most of the participants indicated their desire for preschool-based parental engagement. According to Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, the responsibility to enhance parental involvement in ECCE lies with the early year's educators (NCCA 2009). Also, as stated in Barnardos (2019), early childhood educators should establish real dialogue with families to help bridge the gap between the home and ECCE settings. In response to this, it is recommended that early years educators could engage in discussions with Nigerian parents on how they can increase their engagement within the preschool settings by letting them know that the importance of this engagement is to further promote their children's learning by complementing the learning that takes place at home. Also, early years educators could implement strategies such as sending Nigerian parents invitations to attend upcoming preschool events, such as workshops on play and child development and how Nigerian parents can volunteer in preschool classrooms. Before early years educators send invitations to Nigerian parents to attend and participate in these preschool events, they could survey the Nigerian parents to know the best times to host these events. It is further recommended that early years educators follow up with Nigerian parents to ensure they attend these events and commit to volunteering in the preschool classrooms.

There could also be opportunities for ongoing face-to-face interactions between early years educators and Nigerian parents to share information about the children's strengths and needs, which could help inform the preschool curriculum and learning

at home. Also, in response to this, the researcher gave a presentation on how educators can promote diversity in the ECCE classroom using findings from this study at the Diversity and Intercultural Education Network event held on the 25th of March 2023 at Mary Immaculate College Limerick in collaboration with the Midwest Migrant Community Network (MMCN). Stakeholders such as researchers, lecturers, tutors, and early years educators were in attendance at this event. This event aimed to empower and share best practices in supporting inclusion and diversity in Irish preschools, schools and educational environments. During the researcher's presentation, she spoke about how the increasing diversity within Irish society, which has implications for inclusion in ECCE classrooms and how parents and families play a critical role in promoting diversity and inclusion. The researcher gave strategies such as how educators must understand and respect the children's and their parents' cultures and involve parents in activities promoting diversity in the ECCE classroom.

Cultural Differences

As identified in this study, culture played a significant role in how Nigerian mothers reared their children in Ireland. Most of the participants in this study stated that they struggled to rear their children in Ireland due to cultural differences in child-rearing practices, the fear of applying their own parenting style and the fear of not losing their children to social workers, which is becoming rampant among Nigerian families in Ireland (Dalikeni 2021). This has implications for how parents from culturally diverse backgrounds parent in Ireland. In response to this, it is recommended that the Irish government inform parents from culturally diverse backgrounds about their rights towards their children's early care and education and certain discipline practices permitted in Ireland, which would help eliminate their fear of being punished for reprimanding their children. This could be done by hosting events such as talks, webinars, training, and seminars on the rights parents of young children from culturally diverse backgrounds have in their children's early care and education and how parents of young children from culturally diverse backgrounds can parent successfully in Ireland without fear of the unknown.

As suggested by the participants in this study, there is a need for more culturally inclusive preschool events. In this study, some participants stated that they would love to raise awareness about Nigerian culture by being involved in and participating in

cultural celebrations in preschool settings. This has implications for promoting diversity and inclusion in ECCE settings and building partnerships with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds. In response to this, the researcher hosted a diversity day in Mary Immaculate College Limerick on the 15th of March 2023 with the support of colleagues and undergraduate students in the Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies and funding from the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism office. In this event, students and staff in the early childhood studies department at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, had the opportunity to share images of what represented diversity, i.e., books, attires from different nations, food, identity boxes and posters.

Also, resources such as books, puppets, puzzles and toys for different ages and abilities were made and showcased by some 1st-year students of the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) during this event. The purpose of this event was to celebrate and showcase the increasingly diverse nature of the ECCE in Ireland (children and early years educators) and to inform the professional practices of the students on the Bachelor of Arts in ECCE in Mary Immaculate College Limerick the importance of them acknowledging and celebrating diversity in their profession through diversity events and activities that parents and children can connect with (See *Appendix W for photo evidence of the Diversity Day event*).

Since ECCE settings in Ireland are becoming more diverse, activities that involve parents from diverse backgrounds must be incorporated into the preschool curriculum. This is important so that parents from diverse backgrounds are offered opportunities for engagement in ECCE that are relevant and meaningful to them so that they will perceive these opportunities more effectively. In response to this, it is recommended that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth could make funding available to ECCE settings specifically for hosting multicultural events to showcase and celebrate the cultural backgrounds of the parents and children in their settings. After the funding has been secured for these events, it is suggested that early years educators could consult with parents about their availability, what they want these events to look like and the kind of activities they would like during these events. This is important so that parents are not just told to attend these multicultural events but are allowed to be involved in the planning process. According to Barnardos (2019), parents can contribute to their children's learning and development by sharing their

time, experiences, and talents with ECCE settings. Therefore, parents should be given the opportunity to plan and take an active lead during these multicultural events, such as sharing about their culture, showcasing meals from their culture, dressing up in their countries' attires, etc. This aligns with the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA 2016), which state that early years educators must provide culturally inclusive early years settings where diversity and difference can be celebrated. Also, in this study, child-rearing practices, such as potty training and thumb-sucking, indicate cultural differences between Nigerian mothers and early years educators and create difficulties with engagement. This has implications for the well-being of children from culturally diverse backgrounds and practices in Irish ECCE settings involving parents from culturally diverse backgrounds. According to Payne (1996), educators must widen their understanding of families to include sensitivity to cultural forces hidden beneath daily life activities. Likewise, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, states that where there are specific needs in ECCE settings, such as cultural identity, the parent-early years educator partnership is primarily important (NCCA 2009). In response to this, it is recommended that early years educators could consult with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds on issues about their culture that might impact their children's well-being and early learning and care. They could discuss with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds areas where they have concerns about their culture that might adversely affect the well-being and development of the children in their care. When discussing issues around corporal punishment, potty training, thumb sucking and many more with parents, early years educators could discuss this in a culturally sensitive way without imposing on the parents what is good parenting in Ireland (Hickey and Leckey 2021; Mitchell and Bryan 2007). Also, early years educators must examine and challenge their cultural beliefs and stereotypes about parents from culturally diverse backgrounds in Ireland to facilitate successful communication between both parties (Mitchell and Bryan 2007).

According to Kambouri et al. (2022), an effective partnership between parents and early years educators requires time and dialogue. Hence, early years educators could also engage in discussions with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds whenever they raise issues about their culture that might impact their children's early learning and care. Furthermore, they could communicate openly and listen to the views and

concerns of parents from culturally diverse backgrounds on cultural differences to promote respect for diversity and inclusive practice in their early learning and care settings (Barnardos 2019; Shor and Bernhard 2003). By doing this, parents from culturally diverse backgrounds will see that they are being supported with regards to their young children's learning and development, their expertise is being considered and are given a say in matters that concern their children's early learning and care, as stated in Irish early childhood policies such as the First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 ((Government of Ireland 2018), and The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Government of Ireland 1999). In return, this will ensure collaborative practice in Irish ECCE settings to meet the cultural needs of parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and their children. This complements Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which states the interconnections between two microsystems, i.e., parents and early years educators, to enhance a child's growth and development. This will also boost the children's confidence and ensure their smooth transition from home to preschool.

Culturally Appropriate Continuing Professional Development

According to the OECD review of migrant education in Ireland, there is a need for initial and professional development (CPD) in cultural awareness for all teachers in Ireland (Taguma et al. 2010). It is therefore recommended that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should make funding available to the ECCE settings to engage their staff in culturally continuing professional development training. Training such as how early years educators can build inclusive ECCE settings that celebrate cultural diversity, how they can communicate effectively with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds, how they can raise concerns with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and how they can build partnerships with parents from culturally diverse backgrounds so that they can have awareness about different cultural values, beliefs, and practices. This will also equip them to be culturally competent and influence their approach when faced with childrearing issues relating to children of Nigerian descent in their ECCE settings. This is stated in CECDE (2006), NCCA (2009) and the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA 2016) that early years educators should expand their knowledge on cultural and diversity matters to promote successful parental engagement in ECCE. These trainings events could be facilitated by

individuals with experiences and expertise working with culturally diverse families, diversity and inclusion in ECCE. In response to this, the researcher presented the findings of this study to tutors of the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years programme on the 12th of October, 2023. The LINC programme is targeted at early years educators working in ECCE settings in Ireland. It is delivered by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College Limerick, Early Childhood Ireland and Maynooth University-Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The purpose of presenting the findings of this study to the LINC team is to create awareness of collaborative practice for the inclusion of African immigrant parents and their children in Irish ECCE settings.

Likewise, it is recommended that colleges that are running degree programs in ECCE in Ireland offer mandatory training and workshops on promoting interculturalism and cultural diversity in the early years and how to work with immigrant parents of young children to students to equip them with the skills to partner with immigrant parents with regarding their children's ECCE and to create an inclusive Irish preschool environment.

Employment for Mothers

It could be concluded from this study that some specific employment prevents mothers from committing to their children's early care and education. This has implications for effective parental engagement in ECCE. In this study, the nature of employment of some of the participants was reported as one of the barriers to their engagement in their children's ECCE. Some participants reported that due to the nature of their employment, they hardly had time to play with their children, commit to their children's early care and education, meet with the early years educators to discuss issues around their children's early care and education or attend any preschool events. According to Barnardos (2019), ECCE settings should determine what works best for parents, as parental engagement in early childhood should take many forms. Likewise, Fitzpatrick (2012) states that with regard to parental engagement in ECCE, the needs of parents who are working full-time must be considered. In response to this, it is recommended that early years educators should accommodate working parents by scheduling meetings that suit their working hours and needs. They should gather information from parents who are working about the best time to meet with them and

how they would like to meet, giving them the options of whether they would like to meet online or onsite. Doing this will help to address the barrier of employment as a factor impacting parental engagement in ECCE.

Post-COVID-19 Pandemic and Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Care and Education

According to the findings from this study, the COVID-19 pandemic was a major barrier to parental engagement in ECCE. The participants of this study reported that there were restricted face-to-face in-person interactions between them and the early years educators, that they couldn't attend preschool events or visit their child's early childhood classroom because of the restrictive measures in place in the preschool settings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has implications for enhancing parental engagement in ECCE.

Moving on post-COVID-19 pandemic, it is recommended that early years educators should engage in more formal and informal face-to-face discussions with parents during drop-off and pick-up time about their children's early care and education. Parents should also be allowed to visit their children's preschool room to observe the activities their children are engaging in, and there should be more opportunities for parents to attend face-to-face preschool events such as open days, parent-teacher meetings, multicultural events, and many more. Also, to enhance culturally diverse parents' engagement in their children's ECCE within the preschool settings, early years educators should engage these parents in individual face-to-face discussions about their role in their children's early care and education. It would be important for early years educators to help culturally diverse parents understand what is expected of them regarding their children's ECCE, as these mothers are from different cultures; hence, they might not fully understand such expectations.

Also, as stated by the participants, they found phone calls and preschool Apps such as TeachKloud, Aladdin and WhatsApp groups very effective during the COVID-19 pandemic in keeping up to date about their children's ECCE. In the future, this approach should continue to be adopted to complement preschool engagement and keep parents informed about their children's early learning and development. This approach might also benefit working parents, who may be unable to meet face-to-face

with early years educators or attend preschool events at specific times due to their work commitments.

Widening the Irish Early Childhood Care and Education Profession

According to the participants in this study, measures must be put in place to have a nationality balance in the Irish ECCE workforce. The participants in this study stated that there is a need for staff from other nationalities apart from Irish working in the ECCE profession in Ireland with whom non-Irish mothers could relate. In support, Ryan and Lannin (2021) affirmed the lack of diversity in the Irish teaching profession. This has implications for the diverse Irish society, how the needs of culturally diverse parents and their children are met and the provision of an inclusive ECCE sector. To widen the Irish ECCE profession, there should be opportunities for people from ethnic minority backgrounds to work in the sector to promote equal opportunities and encourage more immigrants to pursue a career in ECCE. This could be done through an access route where they would be mentored and trained to work in the sector. This would broaden the staff in the Irish ECCE sector. The researcher is aware that there is a community employment route that people receiving certain social welfare benefits for a certain period can avail of to work in Irish community ECCE settings. However, the researcher suggests routes specifically targeting ethnic immigrants to work in the ECCE sector to help address this need. For example, it could be through a route similar to The Migrant Teacher Project (Ryan and Lannin 2021), whereby immigrants qualified to work as early years educators outside of Ireland can be mentored to work in the Irish ECCE settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further research include: A mixed-method research utilizing both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to generate a wider knowledge of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE.

This study indicates that when it comes to Nigerian culture, mothers are critical actors in their children's ECCE. However, during the interview, some participants mentioned that their partners took active roles in their children's ECCE. Hence, for future research, the researcher suggests that a qualitative study should be conducted,

seeking the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant fathers' engagement with their children's ECCE to examine whether they are critical actors in their children's ECCE.

Future researchers might replicate this study by investigating the lived experiences of other African mothers and mothers from different nationalities in Ireland in relation to their engagement in their children's ECCE.

This study presents Nigerian mothers' experiences of parental engagement in ECCE; hence, early years educators' experiences were not examined. Therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted seeking the perspectives of early years educators on the extent of engagement of Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE.

As this study was conducted during COVID-19, it was a major factor that impacted Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's ECCE in the preschool settings. Thus, further research should be undertaken with Nigerian mothers on their engagement with their children's ECCE post-COVID-19 pandemic, as their responses may now differ.

Likewise, future research should be carried out on how Nigerian/immigrant parents can support one another and build networks and support among themselves and not rely totally on Irish government interventions and support.

The findings of this study recognised the need for early years educators to promote cultural diversity and incorporate more culturally inclusive preschool activities into their curriculum. This is essential to encourage effective parental engagement in ECCE. Hence, this should be considered during the update of Aistear, the National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. In response to this, the researcher participated in an online focus group via Zoom for updating Aistear on the 11th of October, 2023, where she expressed her views on the need for the concept of acknowledging and celebrating cultural diversity in ECCE settings to be embedded in the updated version of Aistear.

Also, the researcher recommends that the concept of multiculturalism in ECCE should be embedded in Irish early childhood policies and frameworks such as The Childcare Act, Síolta, the National Quality Framework, Aistear, the National Curriculum Framework for Children from birth to six and the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education to give importance to

and an understanding of the different culture that exists within the Irish ECCE sector. Also, these policies and frameworks should offer a practical approach that early years educators can use as a guide to implement multicultural preschool education.

Likewise, the researcher recommends that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should provide funding to early learning and care settings to provide free training and webinars to early years educators on parental engagement in ECCE to enable them to develop a better understanding of what it entails to partner with parents in relation to their children's ECCE.

Lastly, as a result of this study, the researcher recommends that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Child develop a mandatory written early childhood policy on parental engagement in ECCE, which should clearly include the parent's rights and responsibilities in their children's ECCE. This policy should be available and accessible to parents and early years educators so that they can use it as a guide to plan and implement programmes and strategies that incorporate parental engagement at home and in preschool settings. Also, this policy should include how ECCE settings will partner with parents in relation to their children's early learning and development. Likewise, the researcher recommends that parents of young children in Ireland should have input into this policy when it is being designed, and there should also be a form of procedure to ensure that the policy is being implemented in all early learning and care settings in Ireland.

Dissemination Plan

The summary of the first findings of this study is published in Ireland's Education Yearbook 2023. Also, the researcher presented an overview of the second findings of this study at the postgraduate lunchtime presentation series at Mary Immaculate College Limerick on the 14th of March, 2024. The last findings of this study were presented as a poster presentation at the 11th Biennial International UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre Conference, held on June 13th and 14th at the University of Galway.

The researcher hopes to disseminate the findings of this research by continuing to present at conferences and events targeted at early childhood educators, family support workers, organisations working with immigrant parents in Ireland, researchers,

and policymakers in ECCE. Likewise, the researcher hopes to share the findings of this research on social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook. Lastly, the researcher aims to disseminate the findings of this research through peer reviewed journal publications in the near future.

Summary

This chapter included the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research. This study examined the lived experiences of 15 Nigerian immigrant mothers in Ireland who had children availing of a free preschool programme between the years of 2020 and 2022 regarding their engagement with their children's early childhood care and education, the challenges they face due to their immigrant status, and the ways in which cultural differences manifest in home-school interactions during early childhood. A phenomenological approach, which deals with how humans experience, interpret, and construct their world, was used for this qualitative study. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's (2019) Six Types of Parental Involvement. This study proved that Nigerian mothers are proactive in engaging with their children's early childhood care and education and that parental engagement in early childhood care and education differs according to culture.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Letter to Preschool Owners/ Preschool Managers
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Appendix W: MIREC Amended Form

Appendix X: Photos from the diversity day event

Appendix Y: Populations of Nigerians in Ireland from the Census Statistics Office

Appendix Z: Examples of Sub-themes with the number of references.



Appendix A

Letter to Preschool Owners/ Preschool Managers

Title of Research:

A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education.

Dear ...,

My name is Florence Ajala, and I am currently completing a research project for my Doctorate (PhD) degree at Mary Immaculate College Limerick. This research study has received Ethics approval from The Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). This research project will be using semi-structured interviews to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian mothers in relation to their engagement with their children's early childhood care and education. This study will enable the voice of the Nigerian mothers whose voices are not currently heard within research.

I am writing to you asking if you could give out the enclosed information letters to Nigerian immigrant mothers whose child/children are availing of the universal early childhood care and education programme in your setting for at least 3 months. If the Nigerian mothers are willing to partake in the study, they will contact me directly, using the contact details on the information letter. I wish to state that pseudonyms would be used to protect the participants of this study, and therefore, your preschool and participants will not be identified. The findings of this study will be made available to the examination board at Mary Immaculate College Limerick for the examination of my Doctorate degree.

If you seek further clarification on this study, kindly contact me on my mobile 083..... or email address Florence.Ajala@mic.ul.ie.

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Yours Sincerely,

Florence Ajala.



Appendix B

Information Sheet for Participants in English Language

My name is Florence Ajala, and I am a Doctoral researcher at Mary Immaculate College Limerick. I am completing this study as part of my PhD thesis. The primary aim of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers' engagement with their children's early childhood care and education. This study seeks to examine how you engage with your child's early childhood care and education, factors that influences your engagement in your children's early childhood care and education and how Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education could be enhanced.

This study will enable your voice to be heard. It is hoped that the findings of this research will help early years educators and Irish policymakers to have a deeper understanding of how Nigerian immigrant mothers perceive and engage with their children's early childhood care and education. It will assist policy makers to map out ways to encourage Nigerian immigrant mothers to engage with their children's early childhood education and develop more effective parental engagement in early childhood care and education. This research study has received Ethics approval from The Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

To achieve this objective, Nigerian immigrant mothers whose children are availing of the universal early childhood care and education programme in all provinces of Ireland are invited to take part in an interview in relation to their experiences concerning their engagement with their children's early childhood care and education. Before you agree to take part in this study, you need to understand why this study is being done and what this may involve for you. Please take time to read about what will be involved.

Taking part in this study will involve you engaging in a face-to-face/online(zoom) semi-structured interview in English or Pidgin English Language. This interview will explore your experience in relation to your engagement with your child's early childhood care and education, factors that influences your engagement in your children's early childhood care and education and how Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education could be enhanced. Interviews are expected to take approximately 40-60 minutes. The location of the interview will be determined by yourself. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. However, I could break confidentiality if there is a serious reason to believe that there is a risk of harm to a participant or another individual. Should you agree to participate you can withdraw at any time without any reason and any consequences. If you decide to participate in this study, you have the right not to answer any questions that will put you under duress.

After the interview, the audiotape will be transcribed, and a copy will be given to you for review. The findings of this study will also be reviewed by you once I have them prepared. Also, the research committee, the assessors will have access to the information only after the interviews are anonymised, and they will be bound by confidentiality.

This research is being supervised by Dr. Michele Dunleavy (michele.dunleavy@mic.ul.ie) and Dr. Aimie Brennan (aimie.brennan@mie.ie).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you have any questions about this study or you are interested in taking part in this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are as follows:

Name: Florence Omotayo Ajala

Email Address: Florence.Ajala@mic.ul.ie

Contact Number: 083.....

If you have a concern about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Name: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Email Address: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Contact Number: 061-204980



Appendix C

Information Sheet for Participants in Pidgin English

My name na Florence Ajala, and abi a Doctoral researcher for Mary Immaculate College Limerick. I dey complete this study as part of my PhD thesis. The primary aim of this study na to investigate the lived experiences of Nija immigrant mamas engagement with their pikin early childhood care and education. This study be won examine how you take engage for your pikin early childhood care and education, factors wey influence your engagement for your pikin early childhood care and education and how Nija mamas' engagement for their pikin early childhood care and education fit be enhanced.

This study go enable make your voice dey heard. I hope say the findings of this research go help early years educators and Irish policymakers get deeper understanding of how Nija immigrant mamas perceive and take dey engage with their pikin early childhood care and education. The findings go assist policy makers map out ways to encourage Nija immigrant mamas to engage with their pikin early childhood care and education and develop more effective parental engagement in early childhood care and education. This research study don receive Ethics approval from The Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

To achieve this objective, Nija immigrant mamas wey their pikin dey avail of the universal early childhood care and education programme for all provinces of Ireland are invited to take part for an interview in relation to their experiences concerning their engagement with their pikin early childhood care and education. Before you agree to take part in this study, you need to understand why I dey do this study and wetin this fit involve for you. Abeg take your time to read about wetin go dey involved.

Taking part in this study go involve you make you engage in face-to-face/online(zoom) semi-structured interview for English or Pidgin English Language. This interview go explore your experience in relation to your engagement with your pikin early childhood care and education, factors wey influence your engagement with your pikin early childhood care and education and how Nija mamas' engagement for their pikin early childhood care and education fit be enhanced. Interviews fit be at least 40 to 60 minutes. Na you go determine the location of the interview. Your participation in this study na voluntary and confidential. However, I fit break confidentiality if I believe say serious risk of harm fit happen to any participant or another individual. If you agree say you won participate you fit withdraw any time without any reason and any consequences. If you decide say you won participate in this study, you get right no answer any questions way fit put you under duress.

After the interview, I go transcribe the interview, and I go give you a copy make you review. You go review the findings of this study also after I don prepare them. Also, the research committee, the assessors for my college go have access to the

information only after I don anonymised the interviews and they go dey bounded by confidentiality.

Dr. Michele Dunleavy (michele.dunleavy@mic.ul.ie) and Dr. Aimie Brennan (aimie.brennan@mie.ie) na them dey supervise this research.

Thank you say you take your time read this information sheet. If you get any questions about this study or you dey interested in taking part in this study, abeg contact me. Na my contact details be this:

Name: Florence Omotayo Ajala

Email Address: Florence.Ajala@mic.ul.ie

Contact Number: 083.....

If you get concern about this study and be won contact someone else wey dey independent, you fit contact:

Name: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Email Address: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Contact Number: 061-204980



Appendix D

Consent Form for Participants in English

Study Title: 'A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mother's engagement with their children's early childhood care and education'.

- I confirm that I have been given, have read, and understood the information sheet for the study.
- I have asked and received answers to any questions raised concerning the study.
- I understand what the study is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am aware the study will enable my voice to be heard as Nigerian mothers voices are not currently heard within research.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way.
- I understand that the researcher will hold all information, data collected securely and in confidence.
- All efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study except required by law.
- I agree to the interview being audio recorded:

Signature:

Date:



Appendix E

Consent Form for Participants in Pidgin English

Study Title: 'A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mother's engagement with their children's early childhood care and education'.

- I confirm say dey don give me, I don read, and understood the information sheet for the study.
- I don ask and received answers to any questions wey I raised concerning the study.
- I don understand wetin the study dey about and wetin the results go be used for.
- I dey aware say the study go enable my voice make he dey heard as he be say Nija mamas voices never dey currently heard within research.
- I dey fully aware of all the procedures wey involve me and any risks and benefits wey dey associated with the study.
- I understand say my participation na voluntary and I dey free to withdraw anytime without giving a reason and without my right dey affected in any way.
- I understand say the researcher go hold all the information, data wey she collect securely and for confidence.
- All efforts go ensure say make I no fit dey identified as participant in the study except say na law require am.
- I agree to the interview make he be audio recorded:

Signature:

Date:



Appendix F

Interview Procedure in English Language

Interview to be conducted in English.

Date:

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Interview Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (Pseudonym):

Interviewee Email address:

Hi,

My name is Florence Ajala, a Doctorate (Ph.D.) researcher at Mary Immaculate College Limerick and thank you for accepting to take part in this study by reviewing and signing the informed consent form.

Before I start the interview, let me inform you that you can take a break at any time during the interview stage without any penalty. I will stop the recording and proceed whenever you are ready. Also, during the interview stage, you have the right to decide not to proceed further if you feel uncomfortable during the process without penalty. If you decide not to proceed further with the interview, your data will be deleted from the audiotape. You have the right not to answer questions that would put you under duress. If you agree to go ahead with the interview, the audiotape will be transcribed by me, and you will be given a copy to review. The findings of this study will also be reviewed by you once I have them prepared.

I do appreciate your time in taking part in this study.

Any questions before we start?



Appendix G

Interview Procedure in Pidgin English

Interview for Pidgin English Language

Date:

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Interview Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (Pseudonym):

Interviewee Email address:

Hi,

My name na Florence Ajala, a Doctorate (Ph.D.) researcher for Mary Immaculate College Limerick and thank you for accepting say you won take part in this study as you don review and sign the informed consent form.

Before I go start the interview, make I tell you say you fit take a break any time during the interview stage without any penalty. I go stop to dey record and proceed whenever you dey ready. Also, during the interview stage, you get right to decide say you no won proceed further if you feel uncomfortable during the process without any penalty. If you decide say you no won proceed further with the interview, I go delete your data for the audiotape. You get right not to answer questions wey go put you under duress. If you agree to go ahead with the interview, I go transcribe the interview and I go give you a copy make you review am. You go review the findings of this study when I don prepared them.

I appreciate your time say you won take part in this study.

You get any questions before we start?



Appendix H

Interview Questions in English Phase one

1. How long have you been living in Ireland as a Nigerian immigrant mother?
2. If I may ask, why did you move to Ireland?
3. Tell me about your experience transitioning from your home country, Nigeria, to Ireland as a mother.
4. How long has your child/children been availing of the universal early childhood care and education programme?
5. Can you tell me your experience parenting a child availing of the universal early childhood care and education programme?
6. Based on your experience as a Nigerian mother, what do you understand by the term 'parental engagement'? How did you come to that definition?
7. Do you think there are benefits to parental engagement in early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes, what are these benefits? If No, why are there no benefits to parental engagement in early childhood care and education?
8. How do you engage with your child's early childhood care and education?
9. Do you generally ask the early years educators for feedback on your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes how do you go about this, if No why?
10. Do you generally attend your child's early childhood events? Yes/No, if Yes how often do you attend these events, if No why?
11. Does anything prevent you from engaging with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes what are they? if No elaborate more on this?
12. Do you think your race/class influences the way you engage with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you tell me more about this, if No why not?

13. Do you think COVID has affected the way you engaged with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why has it not affected your engagement?

14. Do you think changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nigerian mothers of young children in Ireland? Yes/No, if Yes what are these changes, if No why not?

15. Do you think parental engagement should be enhanced for Nigerian mothers of young children attending Irish early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why not?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you?

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Interview Questions in English Phase two

1. Based on your experience as a Nigerian mother, what do you understand by the term parental engagement with your child's early childhood care and education (ECCE)?
2. How do you engage with your child's early childhood care and education? (Within the ECCE Setting).
3. Does anything prevent you from engaging with your child's early childhood care and education (ECCE)? Yes/No, if Yes, what are they? If No, elaborate more on this.
4. Do you think changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nigerian mothers in early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes, what are these changes? If No, why not?

Appendix I

Interview Questions in Pidgin English Phase one

1. How long you don dey live for Ireland as Nija immigrant mama?
2. I fit ask wetin make you move to Ireland?
3. You fit tell me about your experience transitioning from your home country Nija to Ireland as mama?
4. How long your pikin don dey avail of the universal early childhood care and education programme?
5. You fit tell me how your experience of parenting pikin wey dey avail of the universal early childhood care and education programme?
6. You fit tell me base on your experience as Nija mama, wetin you sabi say bi 'parental engagement'? How you come to that definition?
7. You think say benefits dey for parental engagement in early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if na Yes wetin be these benefits, if No why benefits no dey for parental engagement in early childhood care and education?
8. How you take dey engage with your pikin early childhood care and education?
9. You dey generally ask the early years educators for feedback on your pikin early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if na Yes how you take dey go about this? if na No why?
10. You dey generally attend your pikin early childhood events? Yes/No, if na Yes how often you dey attend these events, if na No why?

11. You get anything wey dey prevent you from engaging with your pikin early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if na Yes wetin dem be? if na No you fit tell me more about this?

12. You think say your race/class influences the way you dey engage with your pikin early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if na Yes you fit tell me more about this, if na No why you say no?

13. You think say COVID don affect the way you take dey engaged with your pikin early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if na Yes you fit elaborate more on this, if na No why COVID no affect your engagement?

14. You think say changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nija mamas of young pikin for Ireland? Yes/No, if Yes na wetin be these changes, if na No why you say no?

15. You think say parental engagement should be enhanced for Nija mamas of small pikin wey dey attend Irish early childhood settings? Yes/No, if na Yes you fit elaborate more, if na No why you say no?

16. You get anything wey you won add wey I never ask you?

Thank you say you take part in this study.

Interview Questions in Pidgin English Phase two

1. You fit tell me base on your experience as Nija mama, wetin you sabi say bi parental engagement for your pikin early childhood care and education (ECCE)?
2. How you take dey engage with your pikin early childhood care and education (for ECCE setting)?
3. You get anything wey dey prevent you from engaging with your pikin early childhood care and education (ECCE)? Yes/No, if na Yes wetin dem be? if na No you fit tell me more about this?
4. You think say changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nija mamas for early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes na wetin be these changes, if na No why you say no?



Appendix J

Fieldwork Timeline Table

December 2021-February 2022: Sending of letters and information letters to 66 Preschool Owners/Managers in Ireland.

January-February 2022: Scheduling of Interviews with Participants.

January-February 2022: Interviewing of Participants (Phase one).

January-March/November 2022: Transcribing of Interviews.

March-June/November 2022: Coding.

June 2022: Phone calls to participants to compile participant profiles.

November 2022: Interviewing of Participants (Phase two) (Post-COVID-19).

Appendix K

A sample of a transcribed interview

This Participant preferred the interview in English Language

1. How long have you been living in Ireland as a Nigerian immigrant mother? **A: Umm I have been in Ireland for a while Umm 15 years.**

2. If I may ask, why did you move to Ireland? **A: Umm Well, my parents moved me here Umm I guess in search of (laugh) a better life.**

3. Tell me about your experience transitioning from your home country Nigeria to Ireland as a mother? **A: I say it's umm a lot more (laugh) different umm looking at, well I'll speak from because I was basically a child in Nigeria, I will speak from maybe my mother's experience in Nigeria. I think things would have been a lot more harder for her umm in Nigeria than it would be here for me but that being said, umm when it comes to things like childcare it is a lot easier in Nigeria than here.**

If I may ask you, you said childcare is a lot much easier in Nigeria than here can you tell me more about this? **A: Umm I think because in Nigeria its umm how would I say it, like it is more of like a community effort when umm child rearing is so you have a lot of people there like your grandparents, or your aunties and uncles, that can umm give a hand and help with umm childminding whereas here you are kind of pretty much on your own and you are really depending on like umm childcare services and it is a lot more expensive obviously than back home where you can get someone for cheaper if you don't have umm family around but there is always family around there yeah.**

4. How long has your child/children been availing of the universal early childhood care and education scheme? **A: She started umm September 2020 yeah. (15 months).**

5. Can you tell me what your experience of parenting a child availing of the universal early childhood care and education scheme? **A: Umm (sigh laugh) It is (a deep breathe), it is okay in the sense that at least umm (a deep laugh) I get that break in the morning you know from 9am to 12 noon, umm it's nice to have that break umm but to be honest in fact me completely honest (laugh) those 3 hours (laugh)**

you can't really get much done umm in that time frame but umm it's been really good for her. Umm from the developmental perspective getting to be with people, her peers which is why you know I continue to go plus it's free so.

In terms for you as a parent? A: Umm it's been good because she is a lot more confident, she is, she can tell me now what she wants or what she doesn't want umm (laugh) in some sense, it's (laugh) it's a bit more tricker now that she is ascertain her own independence umm but it's been, it's been a good experience.

6. Based on your experience as a Nigerian mother, what do you understand by the term 'parental engagement'? A: I (a deep sigh) think that's just umm being pretty much involved in your child's umm everyday life, so you know teaching her and umm being actively involved basically in her growing up stage.

How did you come to that definition? A: Umm (laugh) because it is hard especially umm as someone as a mother who is working it is hard to kind of not forget but not be as actively involved as you would like in your child's life because like I said things are different here umm you are working, and you know the time to spend with the kids is kind of a lot more limited. Umm so just trying to remember to be to be present there for umm and umm because it is hard to like forget yeah that we need to spend specific amount of time umm a day just actively sitting and listening to umm and engaging with them. So yeah, that's how I came to that.

7. Do you think there are benefits to parental engagement in early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes what are these benefits, if No why are there no benefits to parental engagement in early childhood care and education? A: Oh yeah yeah, definitely, umm your child kind of grow up to be more secure, more confident, more umm like they have a more better self-esteem cause they are able to engage with you as a parent when they go out umm they have that confident again to engage with other people as well.

8. How do you engage with your child's early childhood care and education? A: Am not sure I understand the question but are you saying like how I involve myself with the crèche/preschool. Umm like for example, when she first started you know she umm she was very confident in herself, she is a very confident girl, so I didn't umm, I didn't have to do as much umm to push her. Then when she

started going, I kind of noticed you know like umm for example she would have been potty trained before she started going so when she started going I realise she was kind of regressing a bit so you know I would engaged with like the preschool to see how she could umm how they could assist her to be more confident because when she is at home she is perfect so, how they could assist umm, umm with helping her to toilet and things. And then at home, I would kind of asked her you know how was your day being or what did you do in school and you know did anyone else go the toilet you know umm just kind of talking to her basically about her day but yeah.

I asked the participant again how she engaged with her child's early childhood care and education? **A: Yeah, like I said, I will just ask her kind of what she learnt, you know like her alphabet and things we would go over it. I would ask her umm has she started learning her numbers, or you know what did her teachers teach her today so that I would kind of go over it and explain kind of. I know there are somethings that she might not understand so I will kind of go over it and explain. We'll also get like umm a lot of toys, which would be more umm educational kind of to just help her and give her that extra boost to what she is learning.**

9. Do you generally ask the early years educators for feedback on your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes how do you go about this, if No why? **A: Oh yeah, we would so umm maybe at the end of the week. I would always ask oh how she was umm during the week, and you know if they feel like she is umm having any difficulties that I can help with at home or if they feel like she is developing you know along with her peers yeah. I do this weekly.**

10. Do you generally attend your child's early childhood events? Yes/No, if Yes how often do you attend these events, if No why? **A: Umm yeah but having said because we are in COVID times they actually haven't done (laugh) umm any event but I remembered from my older umm daughter, yeah, they had like umm some events umm where they would umm you know where they would invite the parents not with this my second child no because just because of COVID umm rules and regulations.**

For your other child how often did you attend these events? **A: Just whenever there was an event either myself or my husband would attend yeah.**

11. Does anything prevent you from engaging with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes what are they? if No elaborate more on this? **A: Yeah well, I wouldn't say there is. I can't think of anything that would prevent me like I say the COVID regulations we are not physically allowed to be inside there, but umm if I have any issues, I could always ring them yeah.**

12. Do you think your race/class influences the way you engage with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you tell me more about this, if No why not? **A: Umm (a long silent) no I won't say it does simply because the preschool she goes to is very umm multicultural, there are actually different nationalities there, so I think they are well used to umm accommodating different culture that is the only reason (laugh) I see, I haven't had any difficulty.** Are you saying because your child attends a multicultural preschool this has not influence the way you engage with your child's ECCE? **A: None none that I can think of.**

13. Do you think COVID has affected the way you engaged with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why has it not affected your engagement? **A: Yeah, umm in the sense that umm you can't physically be present to talk to umm your umm the you know the minders or the teachers whatever about umm anything like you really want to talk about it kind of. They kind of literally rush you out of the door really as you know you just hand in your child, and you are rushing out or umm you go pick umm and you know they are trying to preserve that umm protocol but umm in that sense umm. It's been hard umm because when I did want to speak to them umm about the whole potty train thing normally I would be able to well with my previous child I would have been able to go in and sit with them, talk to them even like even view the facilities just view you know the toilet and just kind of find out why she is having difficulties going to the, going to their own toilet, umm whereas now you know most things are done from outside so you can't really go in and yeah so that I found very hard and it was harder because she was kind of living two different lives umm so at home she would be able to go to the toilet fine and in school she would be going in the pull ups so I think it was harder for her umm and for me now as well not being able to go in but I was able to talk to them on the phone umm but like it wasn't the same yeah yeah.**

14. Do you think changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nigerian mothers of young children in Ireland? Yes/No, if Yes what are these changes, if No why not? **A: Umm yeah I definitely I'll say so in the sense that like most, not most all of their staffs would be Irish umm they would be all Irish whereas I think if they had umm one or two other nationalities working there umm they would, those staffs would be able to relate to you know like mothers like myself or other kids umm umm that are non-Irish they would be able to relate to them more in the sense that they would understand umm things that like your typical Nigerian child (laugh), like you know if there was a Nigerian for example if there was a Nigerian person there like they would know that I am not happy with her using the pull ups when she can go the toilet at homes so they would know things like that and they would help her go the toilet whereas they are more like oh it is fine you know she can learn at her own time. But I am trying to explain that she knows the only reason while she does it here because you know she is free to wee in her pull ups (laugh) whereas at home she knows like that she can't do that, she understand that, she is very intelligent so I think umm if there is umm like other nationality like you know working there, you know things just that was just an example things like sometimes the food they would serve umm like she wouldn't eat it at home like I would have to like have you know things that I know she would comfortably eat and they (creche) would be comfortable with umm seeing it as well, they would be comfortable with it as well. Is kind of yeah it is tricky sometimes to manage yeah.**

15. Do you think parental engagement should be enhanced for Nigerian mothers of young children attending Irish early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why not? **A: Umm definitely should be in the sense that umm when Nigeria umm like when Nigerian mothers come here, there (laugh) there is a lot of things they are thinking about, there is a lot that they have to do for the children umm could be they can be kind of push back a little bit sometimes so I think it's important for that, for people to realise that umm though we are struggling in other aspect like, they need to realise that we are still actively raising these children umm (laugh) like we need the help sometimes to just even, just a little bit pat on the back just to help us and just to push us**

and just to help us understand that these children are the future umm yeah that would yeah, we would definitely need it.

Any other help needed in the long run from the preschool/govt apart from patting in the back? **A: Yeah, I have another one that will be going soon (to preschool) (laugh) so umm from the preschool's perspective I think it would be nice now considering that COVID is all over and things like that umm but it would be nice for even umm to just even invite umm the parents over just to kind of see what the children are learning kind of, see where they are in (classroom). Umm like for example maybe every day, the end of every week or something like that even the end of every month just to kind of invite parents over to see umm what their children have being doing, things like how they've progressed, how we as parent could kind of at home just help umm revise or go over whatever they have learnt.**

From the government point of view to be honest umm (laugh) I am not sure what they can do but it would be nice if they could offer more hours umm that would be it umm (laugh) that would be ideal but umm yeah.

If they offer more hours, how would it be beneficial to you/Nigerian mothers? **A: Well speaking solely for me (laugh) if they offer me more hours, as in if they offer the children more hours in preschool, it's gonna help me plan my day better and am not going to be rushing when things like that come in to play you are rushing, you are trying to see who is gonna help pick up the child 2 hours after you have dropped umm or you know things like that it kind of put stress on me and then that reflect on umm you know my attitudes and things throughout the day and you know it could really mess up the day whereas if there is more flexibility with the way the child scheme is I personally wouldn't like need my child to go there every day. What I would prefer is you know if she could do three days and have like longer hours those 3 days it would help me kind of plan my day better meaning like even the days am home I can engage with her because you know I am more relaxed and not rushing to kind of take her there and then umm (laugh) go there to pick her so just things like that would be more beneficial but I know they have to stick to 3 hours over the 5 days but if they could have a bit more flexibility yeah it would be ideal.**

16. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you? **A: Umm I think you have covered everything.**

Appendix L

A sample of a coded transcribed interview

The first participants prefer to do the interview in English

1. How long have you been living in Ireland as a Nigerian immigrant mother? A: Umm I have been in Ireland for a while Umm 15 years.

2. If I may ask, why did you move to Ireland? A: Umm Well, my parents moved me here Umm I guess in search of (laugh) a better life.

3. Tell me about your experience transitioning from your home country Nigeria to Ireland as a mother? A: say it's Umm a lot more (laugh) different Umm looking at well I'll speak from because I was basically a child in Nigeria, I will speak from maybe my mother's experience in Nigeria. I think things would have been a lot more harder for her umm in Nigeria than it would be here for me but that being said, Umm when it comes to things like childcare it is a lot easier in Nigeria than here.

If I may ask you said childcare is a lot much easier in Nigeria than here, can you tell me more about it? A: Umm I think because in Nigeria its Umm how would I say it, like it is more of like a community effort when Umm child rearing is so you have a lot of people there like your grandparents, or your aunts and uncles, that can Umm give a hand and help with Umm childminding whereas here you are kind of pretty much on your own and you are really depending on like Umm childcare services and it is a lot more expensive obviously than back home where you can get someone for cheaper. you don't have Umm family around but there is always family around there yeah.

Comments:

- Florence Ajala 15 years
- Florence Ajala My parents moved me here Better life
- Florence Ajala Harder life in Nigeria
- Florence Ajala March 16, 2022 Childcare easier in Nigeria than Ireland
- Florence Ajala Community effort
- Florence Ajala Childcare is a community effort in Nigeria compare to Ireland where you depend on expensive childcare services

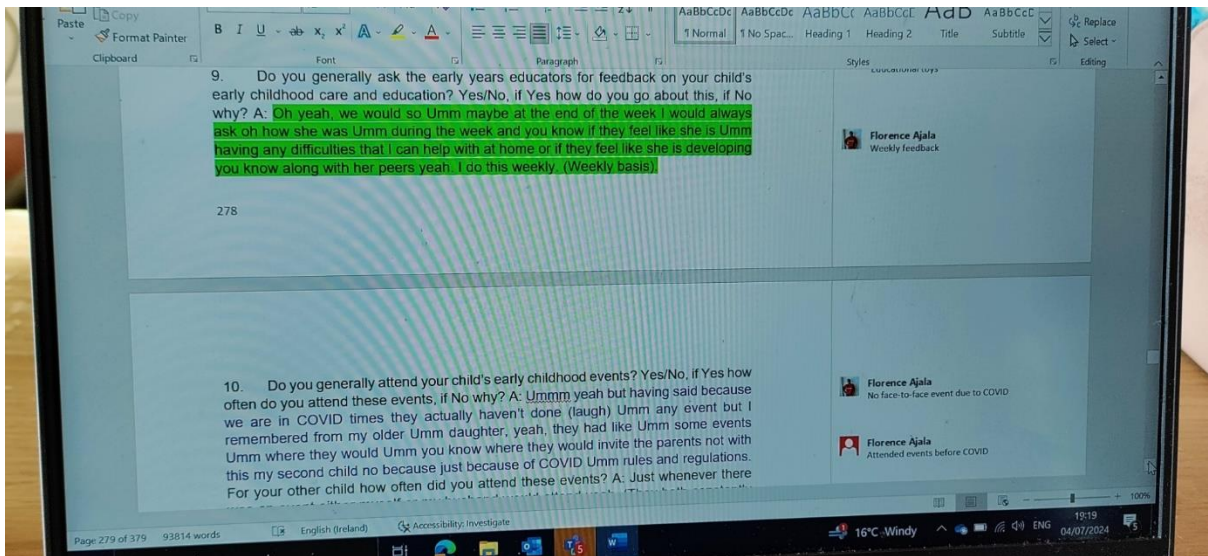
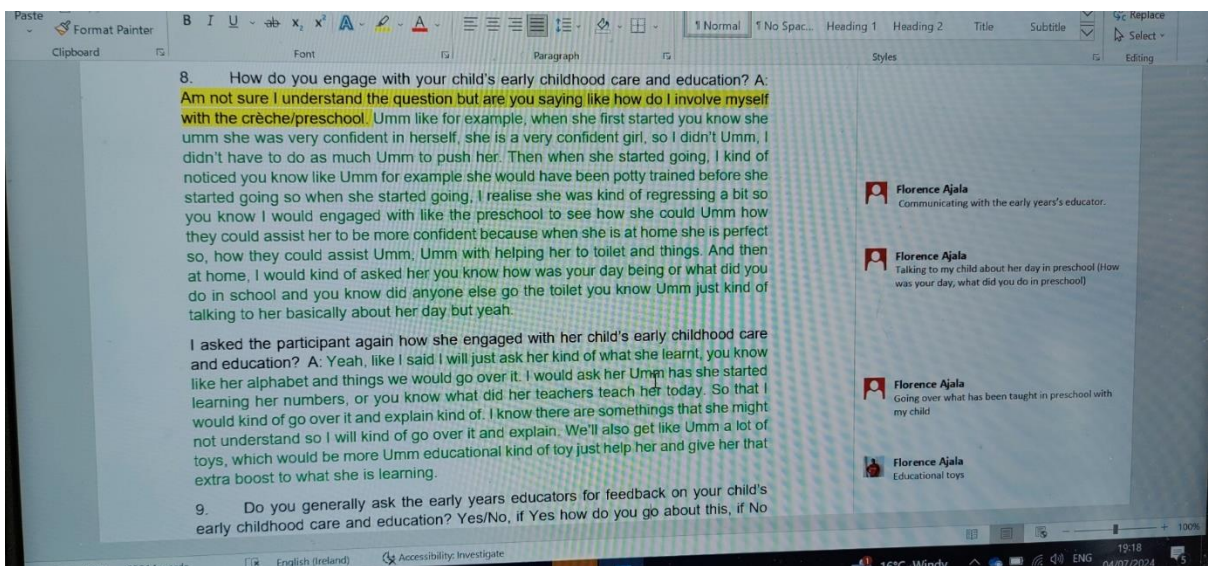
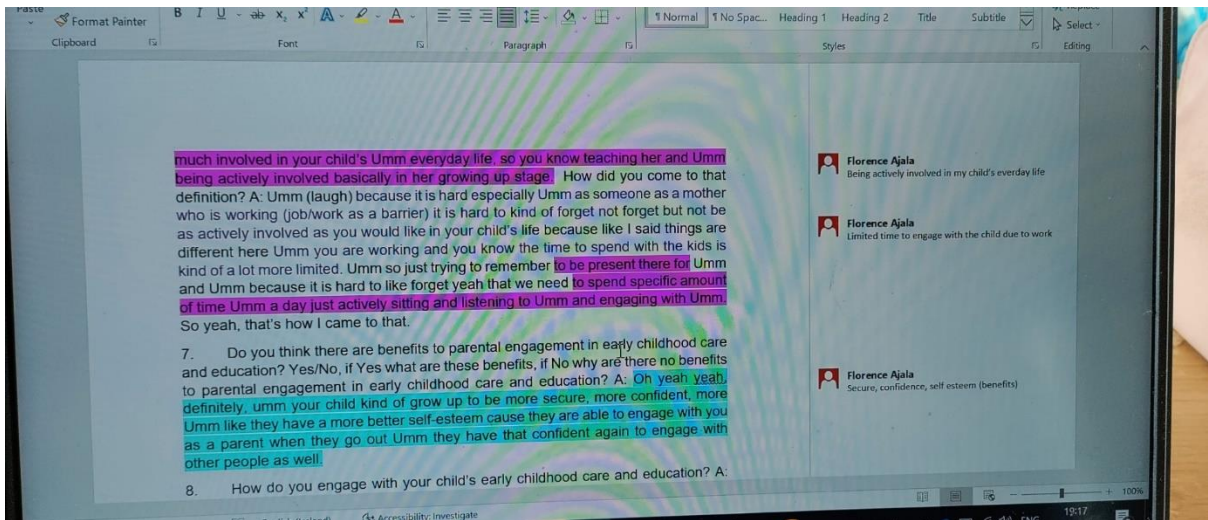
4. How long has your child/children been availing of the universal early childhood care and education scheme? A: She started Umm so let's say September 2020 year (15 months)

5. Can you tell me what your experience of parenting a child availing of the universal early childhood care and education scheme? A: Umm (sigh laugh) It is (a deep breathe) it is okay in the sense that at least Umm (a deep laugh) I get that break in the morning you know from 9am to 12 noon Umm it's nice to have that break Umm but to be honest in fact me completely honest (laugh) those 3 hours (laugh) you can't really get much done Umm in that time frame but Umm it's been really good for her Umm from the developmental perspective getting to be with people, her peers which is why you know I continue to go plus it's free so. In terms for you as a parent? A: Umm it's been good because she is a lot more confident, she is, she can tell me now what she wants or what she doesn't want Umm (laugh) in some sense, it's (laugh) it's a bit more trickier now that she is ascertain her own independence Umm but it's been it's been a good experience.

6. Based on your experience as a Nigerian mother, what do you understand by the term 'parental engagement'? A: (a deep sigh) think that's just Umm being pretty

Comments:

- Florence Ajala 15 months on ECCE Scheme
- Florence Ajala 3 hours break from my child
- Florence Ajala 3 hours too short can't get much done
- Florence Ajala Developmental benefits for my child (meeting people, peers) plus the scheme is free
- Florence Ajala She is confident, she can tell me what she wants now (independence)



11. Does anything prevent you from engaging with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes what are they? if No elaborate more on this? A: Yeah well, I wouldn't say there is, I can't think of anything that would prevent me like I say the COVID regulations we are not physically allowed to be inside there, but Umm if I have any issues I could always ring Umm yeah.

12. Do you think your race/class influences the way you engage with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you tell me more about this, if No why not? A: Umm (a long silent) no I won't say it does simply because the preschool she goes to is very Umm multicultural there are actually different nationalities there, so I think they are well used to Umm accommodating different culture that is the only reason (laugh) I see I haven't had any difficulty. Are you saying because your child attends a multicultural preschool this has not influence the way you engage with your child's ECCE? A: None none that I can think of.

13. Do you think COVID has affected the way you engaged with your child's early childhood care and education? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why has it not affected your engagement? A: Yeah, Umm in the sense that Umm you can't physically be present to talk to Umm your Umm the you know the minders or the teachers whatever about Umm anything like you really want to talk about it kind of. They kind of literally rush you out of the door really as you know you just hand in your child, and you are rushing out or Umm you go pick Umm and you know they are trying to preserve that Umm protocol but Umm in that sense Umm it's been hard Umm because when I did want to speak to them Umm about the whole potty train thing normally I would be able to well with my previous child I would have been able to go

Florence Ajala
Not physically allowed in the creche

Florence Ajala
Phone calls

Florence Ajala
Race/class (no influence)

Florence Ajala
Can't physically talk to the staffs

in and sit with them, talk to them even like even view the facilities just view you know the toilet and just kind of find out why she is having difficulties going to the, going to their own toilet Umm whereas now you know most things are done from outside so you can't really go in and and yeah so that I found very hard and it was harder because she was kind of living two different lives. Umm so at home she would be able to go to the toilet fine and in school she would be going in the pull ups so I think it was harder for her Umm and for me now as well not being able to go in but I was able to talk to them on the phone Umm but like it wasn't the same yeah yeah.

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14. Do you think changes could be made to enhance parental engagement for Nigerian mothers of young children in Ireland? Yes/No, if Yes what are these changes,

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Florence Ajala
I could not go in and speak with the staffs when my child had issue with toileting. It was done over the phone.

Nigerian mothers of young children in Ireland? Yes/No, if Yes what are these changes, if No why not? A: Umm yeah I definitely will say so in the sense that like most not most all of their staffs would be Irish Umm they would be all Irish whereas I think if they had Umm one or two other nationalities working there Umm they would, those staffs would be able to relate to you know like mothers like myself or other kids Umm Umm that are non-Irish they would be able to relate to them more in the sense that they would understand Umm things that like your typical Nigerian child (laugh) like you know if there was a Nigerian for example if there was a Nigerian person there like they would know that I am not happy with her using the pull ups when she can go the toilet at homes so they would know things like that and they would help her go the toilet whereas they are more like oh it is fine you know she can learn at her own time (staff not from other nationals). but I am trying to explain that she knows the only reason while she does it here because you know she is free to wee in her pull ups (laugh) whereas at home she knows like that she can't do that she understand that she is very intelligent so I think Umm if there is Umm like other nationality like you know working there, you know things just that was just an example things like that Umm even to do like food sometimes like the food like, they would serve Umm like she wouldn't eat it at home like I would have to like have you know things that I know she would comfortably eat but they (creche) would be comfortable with Umm seeing it as well they would be comfortable with it as well. Is kind of yeah it is tricky sometimes to manage yeah.

15. Do you think parental engagement should be enhanced for Nigerian mothers of young children attending Irish early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why not? A: Umm definitely should be in the sense that

Florence Ajala
The lack of non Irish early years educators

Florence Ajala
Early years educators' attitude to potty training

Florence Ajala
Staff from different nationalities

15. Do you think parental engagement should be enhanced for Nigerian mothers of young children attending Irish early childhood settings? Yes/No, if Yes can you elaborate more on this, if No why not? A: Umm definitely should be in the sense that Umm when Nigeria Umm like when Nigerian mothers come here, there (laugh) there is a lot of things they are thinking about, there is a lot that they have to do for the children. Umm could be they can be kind of push back a little bit sometimes so I think it's important for that, for people to realise that Umm though we are struggling in other aspect like they need to realise that we are still actively raising these children Umm (laugh) like we need the help sometimes to just even, just a little bit pat on the back just to help us and just to push us and just to help us understand that these children are the future Umm yeah that would yeah, would definitely need it. Any other help needed in the long run from the preschool/Govt apart from patting in the back? A: Yeah I have another one that will be going soon (to preschool) (laugh) so Umm from the preschool's perspective I think it would be nice now considering that Covid is all over and things like that Umm but it would be nice for even Umm to just even invite Umm the parents over just to kind of see what the children are learning kind of, see where they are in (classroom) Umm like for example maybe every day, the end of every week or something like that even the end of every month just to kind of invite parents over to see Umm what their children have being doing, thing like how they've progressed, how we as parent could kind of at home just help Umm revise or go over whatever they have learnt. From the Govt point of view A: To be honest Umm (laugh) I am not sure what they can do but it would be nice if they could offer more hours Umm that would be it Umm (laugh) that would be ideal but umm yeah. If they offer more hours, how would it be beneficial to you/Nigerian mothers? A: Well speaking solely for

Florence Ajala
Challenging fitting into the Irish system

Florence Ajala
Raising kids alone in Ireland

Florence Ajala
Invite mothers to see what their children are learning (face to face interaction)(once a week or month)

Florence Ajala
The need for more hours

me (laugh) if they offer me more hours, as in if they offer the children more hours in preschool it's gonna help me plan my day better and am not going to be rushing when things like that come in to play you are rushing, you are trying to see who is gonna help pick up the child 2 hours after you have dropped Umm or you know things like that it kind of put stress on me and then that reflect on Umm you know my attitudes and things throughout the day and you know it could really mess up the day whereas if there is more flexibility with the way the child scheme is I personally wouldn't like need my child to go there every day (I personally do not need the services Monday to Friday). What I would prefer is you know if she could do three days a week (I could do 3 days a week) and have like longer hours those 3 days it would help me kind of plan my day better meaning like even the days am home I can engage with her because you know I am more relaxed and not rushing to kind of take her there and then Umm (laugh) go there to pick her so just things like that would be more beneficial but I know they have to stick to 3 hours over the 5 days but if they could have a bit more flexibility yeah it would be ideal.

16. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you? A: Umm I think you have covered everything.

Florence Ajala
Flexibility of the Scheme

Florence Ajala
Options of 3 ECCE days

Appendix M

Colours assigned to the coded data

-
- engaged with their children's education -
- Why did they move to Ireland - Violet
 - The benefits of the ECCE scheme - Journal article
 - Work - Deep Teal (barrier) from transition
 - Benefits to parental engagement in early childhood
 - Experience transitioning - Deep Red X
 - Purple - Good impact - Purple ✓
 - The benefits of the ECCE Scheme - Blue
 - The experience of parenting a child awaiting of the free preschool year - Green Accent 6
 - How they engage with their children's education - Green
 - The influence of race/class/culture - Orange accent 2
 - How changes could be replaced - Yellow
 - Flexibility in/with the scheme - ^{around the need for an Irish staff} highlighted yellow
 - What is parental engagement - Deep Pink
 - Benefit for the child - Deep Turquoise
 - Benefit for the parent - Deep Blue
 - Do they ask for feedback - ~~Blue~~ Deep Green

Appendix N

Initial Codes generated from the transcribed Interviews

1. Asylum
2. Better life for me and my kids
3. Moved with my parents during my teenage years
4. Social and economic reasons
5. Stable and secure country to raise kids
6. Marriage
7. Personal safety
8. Study
9. English-speaking country
10. Parents not allowed in
11. Don't know my child classroom
12. Can't physically speak with early years educators
13. Not allowed in to celebrate my child's birthday
14. School bags not allowed
15. Restricted face-to-face communication
16. Difficulty communicating with face masks on
17. No face-to-face meetings with early years educators
18. Busy work schedule
19. I spend limited time with my child
20. Rushing to work
21. Training
22. No time to attend preschool events
23. No time to chat/meet with early years educators
24. Changing of my work schedule
25. The early years educators are Irish
26. The lack of non-Irish early years educators
27. Early years educators' attitude to potty training
28. Early years educators' attitude to thumb sucking
29. Early years educators' attitudes towards immigrant parents
30. Childcare is easier in Nigeria
31. Childcare is expensive in Ireland
32. Childcare is a community effort in Nigeria
33. Alone in a foreign country
34. No family supports
35. No childcare supports
36. Raising kids alone in Ireland with no family support
37. The Irish way of raising kids is different
38. Raising kids in Ireland is hard
39. I can't smack my kids in Ireland
40. I can't discipline my kids the way I want in Ireland
41. Child rearing is different in Ireland
42. My culture influence how I raise my kids in Ireland
43. Children can talk back at you in Ireland
44. You have to be careful raising kids in Ireland
45. The Nigerian culture is different from the Irish culture
46. Tough starting my life all over again
47. Challenging fitting into the Irish system
48. Not rosy living in Ireland
49. Stressful life in the beginning

50. First few years were challenging
51. Ireland was new to me
52. Hard life here
53. Life not easy in Ireland for a Nigerian mother
54. You have no say of your own in the hostel
55. Difficulty starting all over again
56. Ireland is totally different from where I was coming from
57. 3 hours break from my child
58. A space away from the child
59. Quiet time for myself
60. Alone time
61. Returned to work
62. Resting time
63. Shopping time
64. Me time
65. Opportunity to save money
66. Free preschool education for 3 hours a day
67. Reduction in the cost of childcare
68. 3 hours is too short
69. The need for more hours
70. Options for full day universal ECCE hours
71. Options of 3 ECCE days
72. Extra time for late pick up
73. Allowances for 5 to 10 minutes late pick-up
74. Allowance for up to 15 minutes late pick-up
75. Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two
76. Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two years and five months
77. Universal ECCE Programme availability immediately children turned 2 years and 8 months
78. Early years educators' influence my child's learning
79. My child is coached outside the home
80. My child is learning from his peers
81. Improvement in my child's growth and development
82. My child is learning more in the preschool
83. Things I can't teach my child, he is learning them in preschool
84. Less stress because my child is learning in preschool
85. Rest of mind because my child is learning in preschool
86. Getting educated
87. Mixing with his peers
88. Make friends
89. More sociable
90. Spending time with people
91. Socially inclined
92. Socialising with other kids
93. Voicing her thought
94. Telling me what she wants/doesn't want
95. Speech is more advanced
96. Calling her friends
97. Changes in my child's speech
98. More outspoken
99. Communicating more
100. Talking more
101. Speech improved
102. Confident expressing herself
103. Preparation for proper school

104. Graduating to big school
105. Eliminates the fear of primary school
106. Prepares the child for primary school
107. Routine of moving on to primary school
108. Preparation for where they are going
109. Readiness for big school
110. Readiness for primary school
111. I can tell if my child is ready for primary school
112. The learning experiences prepares my child for primary school
113. Engaging in meaningful activities in the preschool
114. The child gets supported in preschool
115. The child learns in preschool
116. Preschool education helps my child to grow and develop
117. Children from certain ages are availing of preschool learning opportunities
118. Children born at certain age are not stuck at home
119. How my child is growing and developing physically
120. Engagement in my child's growths educationally
121. How my child is growing and developing emotionally
122. How my child is growing and developing mentally
123. Investing in my child's mental well-being
124. Complete involvement in my child's life
125. Understanding what the early years educators are doing with my child
126. Monitoring my child's progress
127. Involvement in my child's daily/everyday life
128. Involvement in every aspect of my child's life
129. Involvement in all my child does
130. Involvement in all that has to do with my child
131. Taking interest in my child's life
132. Hands on with my child
133. Being part of my child's everyday life
134. Spending time with my child
135. Communicating with my child
136. Knowing my child's likes, dislikes, and personalities
137. A bond between a parent and the child
138. Playing with my child
139. Passing of information to the early years' educators
140. Supporting environment for my child
141. Helping my child
142. Creating time for my child
143. Spending time with my children
144. Help with schoolwork
145. Weekly feedback
146. Daily feedback
147. Rarely asked for feedback
148. Not keen on feedback
149. Forth night feedback
150. No Christmas carols during COVID
151. Christmas carols before COVID
152. No graduation celebrations during COVID
153. Graduation ceremony before COVID
154. No face-to-face PTA meetings during COVID
155. Attended events in previous years before COVID
156. Meet and greet session before COVID
157. Zoom meeting during COVID

158. Online meeting during COVID
159. No face-to-face events during COVID
160. No meet and greet session during COVID
161. Christmas carol during COVID
162. No preschool events during COVID
163. A secure base for my child
164. Communicating better with my child
165. Doing things with my child
166. Trust is built
167. Connecting with my child
168. Friendship with my child
169. Closer with my child
170. Bonding with my child
171. Knowing my child capability
172. Knowing my child more
173. Eases stress
174. Knowing what my child can and not do
175. Understanding my child better
176. Knowing my child abilities
177. Knowing my child gifts
178. Developed the child's skill
179. The child learns more
180. The child grows
181. Independence
182. Advances the child
183. Widens the child horizon
184. Better person
185. Development processed
186. Happier child
187. The child will come out well
188. Better person in the society
189. More secure
190. More confidence
191. Better self-esteem
192. Child security
193. Confidence to relate with the parent
194. Free to express themselves
195. Free to relate with you
196. Confidence to relate with people
197. Educational toys
198. Picture books
199. Financial support
200. Arts and crafts
201. Alphabet and numbers
202. Books
203. Provision of necessary resources for preschool
204. How was your day?
205. What did you do in preschool?
206. What did you learn in preschool?
207. Talking to my child
208. What games did you play in preschool?
209. Where did you go to in preschool?
210. Going over things with my child.
211. Engaging in discussions about preschool with my child
212. What happened in preschool today?

213. Who did you play with in preschool?
214. Did you go to the toilet?
215. Sing along songs
216. Dancing
217. Colouring shapes
218. Colouring
219. Circle time
220. Storytelling
221. Writing
222. Painting
223. Pouring
224. Mixing
225. Playdough
226. Dropping off in the morning
227. Pick up in the afternoon
228. Pick up on time
229. Dropping off on time
230. Making sure my child is in 5 days a week
231. Aladdin
232. Teach Kloud
233. WhatsApp groups
234. Parent groups
235. Emails
236. Phone calls
237. Text messages
238. Zoom meeting
239. Online portfolio system
240. Cultural day to showcase the Nigerian culture
241. A day in the life
242. Programs for parents and the children
243. Activities for parents of young children
244. Events parent and children could attend together
245. Sports
246. Seminar
247. Online seminar
248. Online training
249. Parenting classes
250. Online courses
251. Mother groups
252. Ongoing training
253. Parenting groups
254. Involvement in my child's education
255. Early intervention for parent struggling
256. Classes for African mums of young children
257. Visit to the children's classroom
258. Face to face meeting with the early years' educators
259. Onsite Parent Teacher's Meeting
260. One on one chat with the early years' educators
261. Onsite visit to the preschool
262. Online photos
263. End of the year meeting
264. Early years educators are non-Irish nationals
265. Buying pyjamas for pyjamas day
266. Toy kitchen
267. Cooking materials

268. Little support from the Irish government
269. Raising kids in Ireland is different from Nigeria
270. Communicating with the early years' educator
271. Having relationship with the preschool teachers
272. Raising concerns with the preschool teacher
273. Questioning the preschool teacher
274. One on one conversation with the preschool teacher
275. Follow up
276. African stories
277. African culture into the preschool curriculum
278. Housing
279. Getting jobs
280. Exploration
281. Socially
282. Language
283. Child benefit
284. Areas to support my child at home
285. Things to do with my child at home
286. Activities mothers can do with their children at home
287. Support parents to take on active roles
288. Meet and greet sessions
289. Christmas carols
290. Graduation parties
291. Coffee mornings
292. Room openings

Appendix O

Grouping similar codes together

Asylum

Better life for me and my kids

Moved with my parents during my teenage years

Social and economic reasons

Stable and secure country to raise kids

Marriage

Personal Safety

Study

English-speaking country

Tough starting my life all over again
Challenging fitting into the Irish system
Not rosy living in Ireland
Stressful life in the beginning
First few years was challenging
Ireland was new to me
Hard life here
You have no say of your own in the hostel
Difficulty starting all over again
Ireland is totally different from where I was coming from
Housing
Getting jobs

The Irish way of raising kids is different

Raising kids in Ireland is hard

I can't smack my kids in Ireland

I can't discipline my kids the way I want in Ireland

Child rearing is different in Ireland

My culture influence how I raise my kids in Ireland

Children can talk back at you in Ireland

You have to be careful raising kids in Ireland

The Nigerian culture is different from the Irish culture

Raising kids in Ireland is different from Nigeria

The early years educators are Irish

The lack of non-Irish early years educators

Early years educators' attitudes towards the immigrant parents

Early years educators' attitude to potty training

Early years educators' attitude to thumb sucking

Early years educators are non-Irish nationals

Opportunity to save money

Free preschool education for 3 hours a day

Reduction in the cost of childcare

Returned to Work

Training

A space away from the child

Quiet time for myself

Alone time

Returned to Work

Resting time

Shopping time

Me time

3 hours break from my child

3 hours is too short

The need for more hours

Options for full day universal ECCE hours

Options of 3 ECCE days

Extra time for late pick up

Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two

Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two years and five months

Universal ECCE Programme availability immediately children turned 2 years and 8 months

Allowances for 5 to 10 minutes late pick-up

Allowance for up to 15 minutes late pick-up

Childcare is easier in Nigeria

Childcare is expensive in Ireland

Childcare is a community effort in Nigeria

Alone in a foreign country

No family supports

Child benefit

No childcare supports

Raising kids alone in Ireland with no family support

Little support from the Irish government

Life not easy in Ireland for a Nigerian mother

Early years educators influence my child's learning
My child is coached outside the home
My child is learning from his peers
Improvement in my child's growth and development
My child is learning more in the preschool
Things I can't teach my child, he is learning them in preschool
Less stress because my child is learning in preschool
Rest of mind because my child is learning in preschool
Getting educated
Children from certain ages are availing of preschool learning opportunities
Children born certain age are not stuck at home
Engaging in meaningful activities in the preschool
The child gets supported in preschool
The child learns in preschool
Preschool education helps my child to grow and develop

Children born at certain age are not stuck at home

Mixing with his peers

Make friends

More sociable

Spending time with people

Socially inclined.

Socialising with other kids

Voicing her thought

Telling me what she wants/doesn't want

Speech is more advanced

Calling her friends

Changes in my child's speech

More outspoken

Communicating more

Talking more

Speech improved

Confident expressing herself

Preparation for proper school

Graduating to big school

Eliminates the fear of primary school

Prepares the child for primary school

Routine of moving on to primary school

Preparation for where they are going

Readiness for big school

Readiness for primary school

I can tell if my child is ready for primary school

The learning experiences prepares my child for primary school

How my child is growing and developing physically

Engagement in my child's growths educationally

How my child is growing and developing emotionally

How my child is growing and developing mentally

Investing in my child's mental well-being

Socially

Language

Complete involvement in my child's life
Monitoring my child's progress
Involvement in my child's daily/everyday life
Involvement in every aspect of my child's life
Involvement in all my child does
Involvement in all that has to do with my child
Taking interest in my child's life
Hands on with my child
Being part of my child's everyday life
Involvement in my child's education

Spending time with my child

Communicating with my child

Knowing my child's likes, dislikes, and personalities

A bond between a parent and the child

Playing with my child

Supporting environment for my child

Helping my child

Creating time for my child

Spending time with my children

Help with schoolwork

Being part of my child's everyday life

Exploration

Communicating with the early years' educator

Understanding what the early years educators are doing with my child

Having relationship with the preschool teachers

Raising concerns with the preschool teacher

Questioning the preschool teacher

Passing of information to the early years' educators

One on one conversation with the preschool teacher

Follow up

Parents not allowed in

Don't know my child classroom

Can't physically speak with early years educators

Not allowed in to celebrate my child's birthday

School bags not allowed

Restricted face-to-face communication

Difficulty communicating with face masks on

No face-to-face meetings with early years educators

Busy work schedule

I spend limited time with my child

Rushing to work

No time to attend preschool events

No time to chat/meet with early years educators

Changing of my work schedule

Weekly feedback

Daily feedback

Rarely asked for feedback

Not keen on feedback

Forth night feedback

No Christmas carols during COVID
Christmas carols before COVID
No graduation celebrations during COVID
Graduation ceremony before COVID
No face-to-face PTA meetings during COVID
Attended events in previous years before COVID
Meet and greet session before COVID
Zoom meeting during COVID
Online meeting during COVID
No face-to-face events during COVID
No meet and greet session during COVID
Christmas carol during COVID
No preschool events during COVID

A secure base for my child

Communicating better with my child

Doing things with my child

Trust is built

Connecting with my child

Friendship with my child

Closer with my child

Bonding with my child

Knowing my child capability

Knowing my child more

Eases stress

Knowing what my child can and not do

Understanding my child better

Knowing my child abilities

Knowing my child gifts

Developed the child's skill

The child learns more

The child grows

Independence

Advances the child

Widens the child horizon

Better person

Development processed

Happier child

The child will come out well

Better person in the society

More secure

More confidence

Better self-esteem

Child security

Confidence to relate with the parent

Free to express themselves

Free to relate with you

Confidence to relate with people

Educational toys

Picture books

Financial support

Arts and crafts

Alphabet and numbers

Books

Provision of necessary resources for preschool

Buying pyjamas for pyjamas day

Toy kitchen

Cooking materials

How was your day?

What did you do in preschool?

What did you learn in preschool?

What games did you play in preschool?

Where did you go to in preschool?

What happened in preschool today?

Who did you play with in preschool?

Did you go to the toilet?

Going over things with my child.

Engaging in discussions about preschool with my child

Talking to my child

Sing along songs

Dancing

Colouring shapes

Colouring

Circle time

Storytelling

Writing

Painting

Pouring

Mixing

Playdough

Dropping off in the morning

Pick up in the afternoon

Pick up on time

Dropping off on time

Making sure my child is in 5 days a week

Aladdin

Teach Kloud

WhatsApp groups

Parent groups

Emails

Phone calls

Text messages

Zoom meeting

Online portfolio system

Visit to the children's classroom
Face to face meeting with the early years' educators
Onsite Parent Teacher's Meeting
One on one chat with the Early years' educators
Onsite visit to the preschool
End of the year meeting
Cultural day to showcase the Nigerian culture
A day in the life
Programs for parents and the children
Activities for parents of young children
Events parent and children could attend together
Sports
Meet and greet sessions
Christmas carols
Graduation parties
Coffee mornings
Room openings
African stories
African culture into the preschool curriculum
Seminar
Online seminar
Parenting classes
Online courses
Online training
Mother groups
Ongoing training
Parenting groups
Early intervention for parent struggling
Classes for African immigrant mums of young children
Areas to support my child at home
Things to do with my child at home
Activities mothers can do with their children at home
Support parents to take on active roles

Appendix P

Focused codes derived from the Initial codes

Evidence that led to the focussed code 'Reasons for moving to Ireland'.

Asylum
Better life for me and my kids
Moved with my parents during my teenage years
Social and economic reasons
Stable and secure country to raise kids
Marriage
Personal safety
Study
English-speaking country

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Navigating New Systems'.

Tough starting my life all over again

Challenging fitting into the Irish system

Not rosy living in Ireland

Stressful life in the beginning

First few years was challenging

Ireland was new to me

Hard life here

You have no say of your own in the hostel

Difficulty starting all over again

Ireland is totally different from where I was coming from

Housing

Getting jobs

Evidence that led to the focused code ‘Cultural differences in child-rearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland’.

The Irish way of raising kids is different
Raising kids in Ireland is hard
I can't smack my kids in Ireland
I can't discipline my kids the way I want in Ireland
Child rearing is different in Ireland
My culture influence how I raise my kids in Ireland
Children can talk back at you in Ireland
You have to be careful raising kids in Ireland
The Nigerian culture is different from the Irish culture
Raising kids in Ireland is different from Nigeria

Evidence that led to the focused code ‘Cultural differences between the Nigerians mothers and the Early years educators’.

The early years educators are Irish
The lack of non-Irish early years educators
Early years educators' attitudes towards the immigrant parents
Early years educators' attitude to potty training
Early years educators' attitude to thumb sucking
Early years educators are non-Irish nationals

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Free preschool education'.

Opportunity to save money

Free preschool education for 3 hours a day

Reduction in the cost of childcare

Returned to Work

Training

A space away from the child

Quiet time for myself

Alone time

Returned to Work

Resting time

Shopping time

Me time

Evidence that led to the focused code 'More flexibility within the Programme'.

Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two

Allowances for 5 to 10 minutes late pick-up

Allowance for up to 15 minutes late pick-up

Age reduction of the Universal ECCE Programme to two years and five months

Universal ECCE Programme availability immediately children turned 2 years and 8 months

Options of 3 ECCE days

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Extended hours'.

3 hours is too short

The need for more hours

Options for full day universal ECCE hours

Extra time for late pick up

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland'.

Childcare is easier in Nigeria

Childcare is expensive in Ireland

Childcare is a community effort in Nigeria

Alone in a foreign country

No family supports

Child benefit

No childcare supports

Raising kids alone in Ireland with no family support

Little support from the Irish government

Life not easy in Ireland for a Nigerian mother

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Realisation my child is learning from knowledgeable others'.

Early years educators influence my child's learning
My child is coached outside the home
My child is learning from his peers
Improvement in my child's growth and development
My child is learning more in the preschool
Things I can't teach my child, he is learning them in preschool
Less stress because my child is learning in preschool
Rest of mind because my child is learning in preschool
Getting educated
Children from certain ages are availing of preschool learning opportunities
Children born at certain age are not stuck at home
Engaging in meaningful activities in the preschool
The child gets supported in preschool
The child learns in preschool
Preschool education helps my child to grow and develop

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Socialisation'.

Children born at certain age are not stuck at home

Mixing with his peers

Make friends

More sociable

Spending time with people

Socially inclined.

Socialising with other kids

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Language development'.

Voicing her thought

Telling me what she wants/doesn't want

Speech is more advanced

Calling her friends

Changes in my child's speech

More outspoken

Communicating more

Talking more

Speech improved

Confident expressing herself

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Preparation for primary school'.

Preparation for proper school

Graduating to big school

Eliminates the fear of primary school

Prepares the child for primary school

Routine of moving on to primary school

Preparation for where they are going

Readiness for big school

Readiness for primary school

I can tell if my child is ready for primary school

The learning experiences prepares my child for primary school

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Holistic development'.

How my child is growing and developing physically
Engagement in my child's growths educationally
How my child is growing and developing emotionally
How my child is growing and developing mentally
Investing in my child's mental well-being
Socially
Language

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Active Involvement'.

Complete involvement in my child's life
Monitoring my child's progress
Involvement in my child's daily/everyday life
Involvement in every aspect of my child's life
Involvement in all my child does
Involvement in all that has to do with my child
Taking interest in my child's life
Hands on with my child
Being part of my child's everyday life
Involvement in my child's education

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Interaction between mother and child'.

Spending time with my child

Communicating with my child

Knowing my child's likes, dislikes, and personalities

A bond between a parent and the child

Playing with my child

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Supporting my child'.

Supporting environment for my child

Helping my child

Creating time for my child

Spending time with my children

Help with schoolwork

Being part of my child's everyday life

Exploration

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Liaising with the Early Years Educators'.

Communicating with the early years' educator

Understanding what the early years educators are doing with my child

Having relationship with the preschool teachers

Raising concerns with the preschool teacher

Questioning the preschool teacher

Passing of information to the early years' educators

One on one conversation with the preschool teacher

Follow up

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19 pandemic'.

Parents not allowed in
Don't know my child classroom
Can't physically speak with early years educators
Not allowed in to celebrate my child's birthday
School bags not allowed
Restricted face-to-face communication
Difficulty communicating with face masks on
No face-to-face meetings with early years educators

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Employment'.

Busy work schedule

I spend limited time with my child

Rushing to work

No time to attend preschool events

No time to chat/meet with early years educators

Changing of my work schedule

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Asking for feedback from early years educators'.

Weekly feedback

Daily feedback

Rarely asked for feedback

Not keen on feedback

Forth night feedback

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Attending Preschool Events'.

No Christmas carols during COVID
Christmas carols before COVID
No graduation celebrations during COVID
Graduation ceremony before COVID
No face-to-face PTA meetings during COVID
Attended events in previous years before COVID
Meet and greet session before COVID
Zoom meeting during COVID
Online meeting during COVID
No face-to-face events during COVID
No meet and greet session during COVID
Christmas carol during COVID
No preschool events during COVID

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Bonding with my child'.

A secure base for my child

Communicating better with my child

Doing things with my child

Trust is built

Connecting with my child

Friendship with my child

Closer with my child

Bonding with my child

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Understanding my child's capabilities and Needs'.

Knowing my child capability

Knowing my child more

Eases stress

Knowing what my child can and not do

Understanding my child better

Knowing my child abilities

Knowing my child gifts

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Improved development for the child'.

Developed the child's skill

The child learns more

The child grows

Independence

Advances the child

Widens the child horizon

Better person

Development processed

Happier child

The child will come out well

Better person in the society

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Boost the child's self-esteem and confidence'.

More secure

More confidence

Better self-esteem

Child security

Confidence to relate with the parent

Free to express themselves

Free to relate with you

Confidence to relate with people

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Providing Financial Support'.

Educational toys

Picture books

Financial support

Arts and crafts

Alphabet and numbers

Books

Provision of necessary resources for preschool

Buying pyjamas for pyjamas day

Toy kitchen

Cooking materials

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Questioning and talking to my child on preschool matters'.

How was your day?

What did you do in preschool?

What did you learn in preschool?

What games did you play in preschool?

Where did you go to in preschool?

What happened in preschool today?

Who did you play with in preschool?

Did you go to the toilet?

Going over things with my child.

Engaging in discussions about preschool with my child

Talking to my child

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Play based learning activities with my child'.

Sing along songs

Dancing

Colouring shapes

Colouring

Circle time

Storytelling

Writing

Painting

Pouring

Mixing

Playdough

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Dropping off and picking up my child from preschool'.

Dropping off in the morning

Pick up in the afternoon

Pick up on time

Dropping off on time

Making sure my child is in 5 days a week

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Virtual Engagement with Early Years Educators'.

Aladdin

Teach Kloud

WhatsApp groups

Parent groups

Emails

Phone calls

Text messages

Zoom meeting

Online portfolio system

Online photos

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Parent-Teacher Meetings'.

Face to face meeting with the early years' educators

Onsite Parent Teacher's Meeting

One on one chat with the Early years' educators

End of the year meeting

Evidence that led to the focused code ‘opportunities to take active role in my child’s ECCE’.

Visit to the children’s classroom
Areas to support my child at home
Things to do with my child at home
Activities mothers can do with their children at home
Support parents to take on active roles
Intervention plan for parent struggling
Onsite visit to the preschool

Evidence that led to the focused code 'More Culturally Inclusive Preschool events to showcase the Nigerian culture'.

Cultural day to showcase the Nigerian culture

Sports

African stories

African culture into the preschool curriculum

Evidence that led to the focused code 'More culturally inclusive preschool events organised by Early Years Educators'.

A day in the life

Meet and greet sessions

Christmas carols

Graduation parties

Coffee mornings

Room openings

Programs for parents and the children

Activities for parents of young children

Events parent and children could attend together

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Seminar'.

Seminar

Online seminar

Online courses

Online training

Ongoing training

Evidence that led to the focused code 'Parenting classes'.

Parenting classes

Mother groups

Parenting groups

Early intervention for parent struggling

Classes for African immigrant mums of young children

Appendix Q

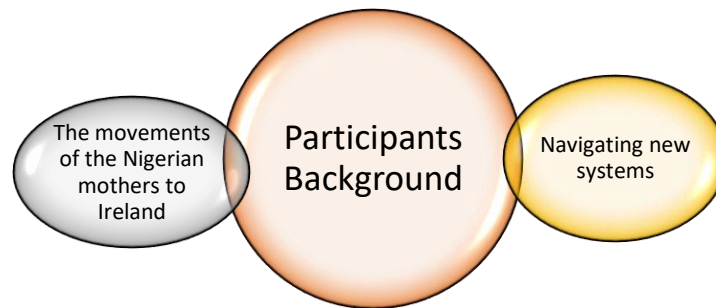
List of focused codes

1. The movements of the Nigerian mothers to Ireland
2. Navigating new systems
3. Cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland
4. Free preschool education
5. Socialisation
6. Language development
7. Preparation for primary school
8. Child learning from knowledgeable others
9. More flexibility within the programme
10. Extended hours
11. Holistic development
12. Active Involvement
13. Interaction between mother and child
14. Supporting my child
15. Liaising with the early years educators
16. Virtual Engagement with the Early Years Educators
17. Restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19 pandemic
18. Employment
19. Requesting feedback from early years educators
20. Attending Preschool Events
21. Bonding with my child
22. Understanding my child's capabilities and Needs
23. Improved development for the child
24. Boost the child's self-esteem and confidence
25. Providing Financial Support
26. Questioning and talking to my child on preschool matters
27. Playing with my child
28. Lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland
29. Dropping off and picking up my child from preschool
30. Opportunities to take a more active role in their children's ECCE
31. Parent-Teacher Meetings
32. More culturally inclusive preschool events organised by Early Years Educators
33. More culturally inclusive preschool events to showcase the Nigerian culture
34. Seminars
35. Parenting classes

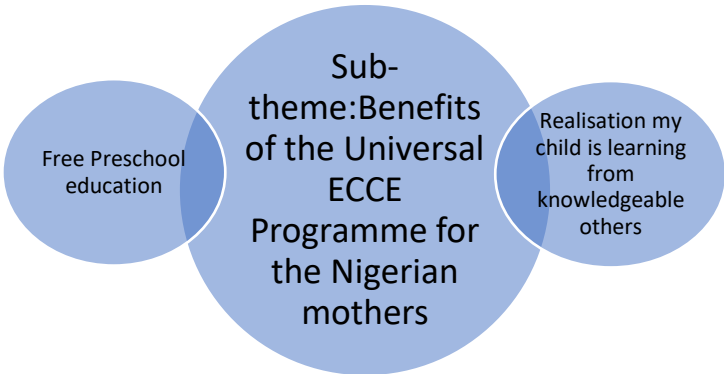
Appendix R

Categorising the focused codes into sub-themes/themes

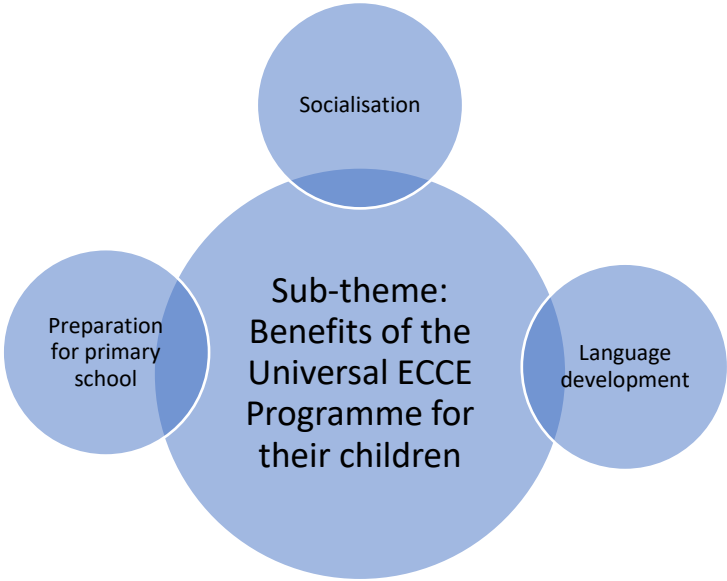
Evidence that led to the 'Participants Background'.



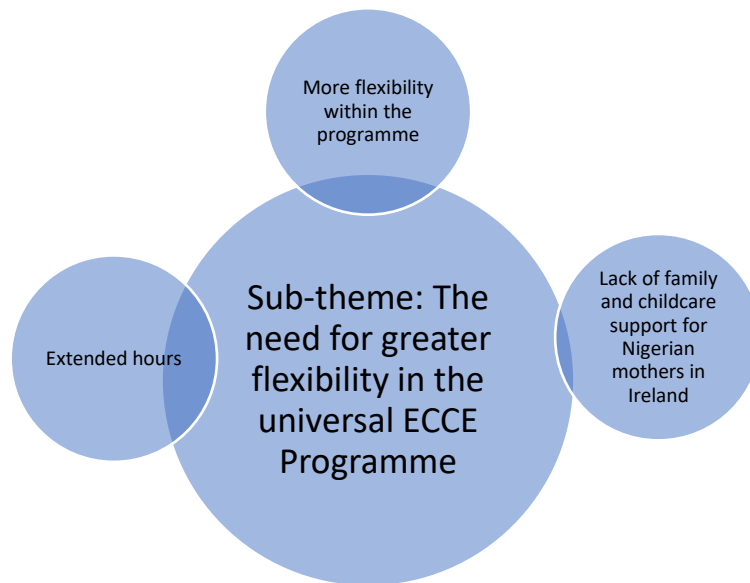
Evidence that led to the sub-theme 'Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for the Nigerian mothers'.



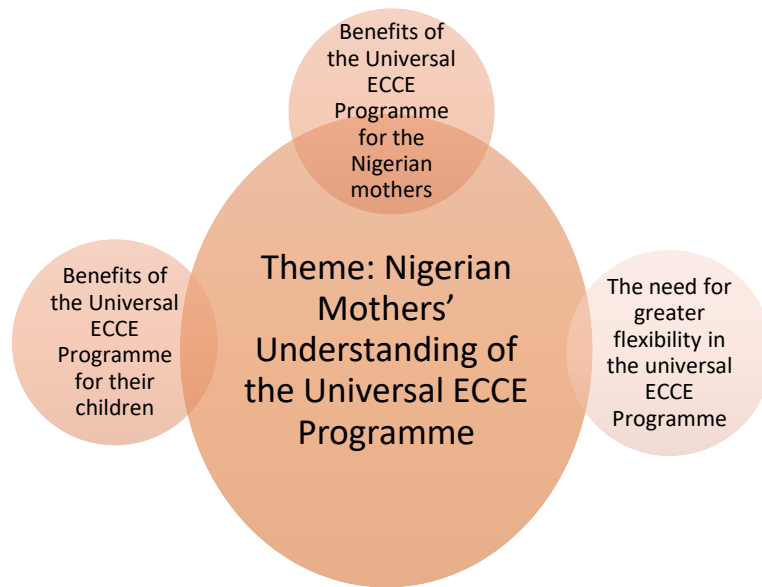
Evidence that led to the sub-theme 'Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for their children'.



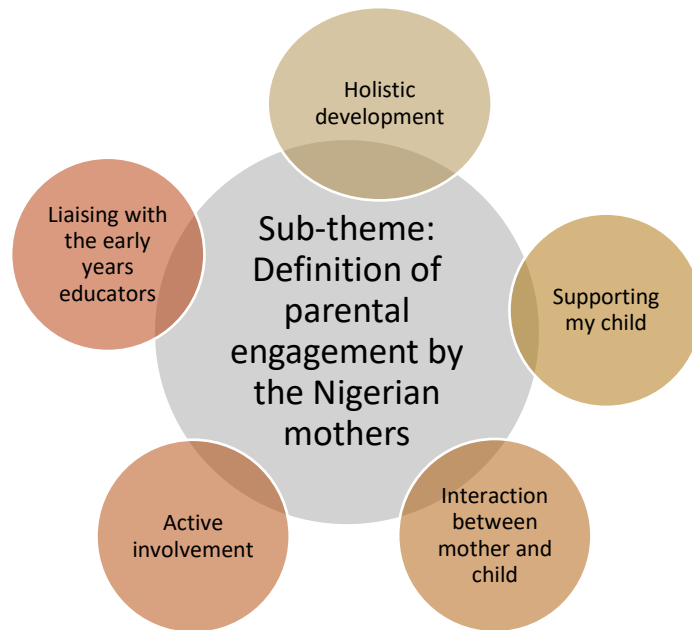
Evidence that led to the sub-theme ‘The need for greater flexibility in the universal ECCE Programme’.



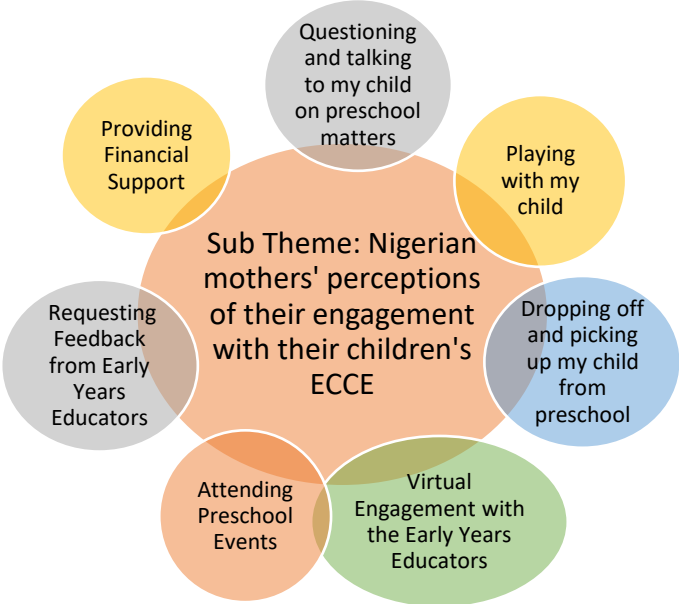
Evidence that led to the theme ‘Nigerian Mothers’ Understanding of the Universal ECCE Programme’.



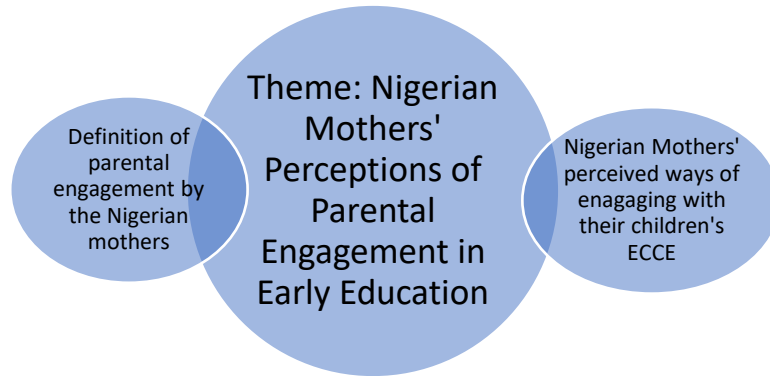
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Definition of parental engagement by the Nigerian mothers'.



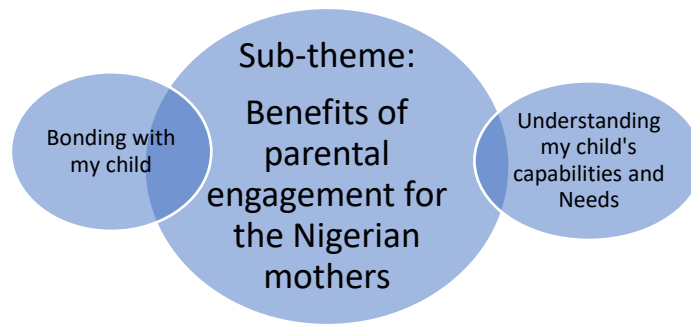
Evidence that led to the Sub theme 'Nigerian mothers' perceptions of their engagement with their children's ECCE'.



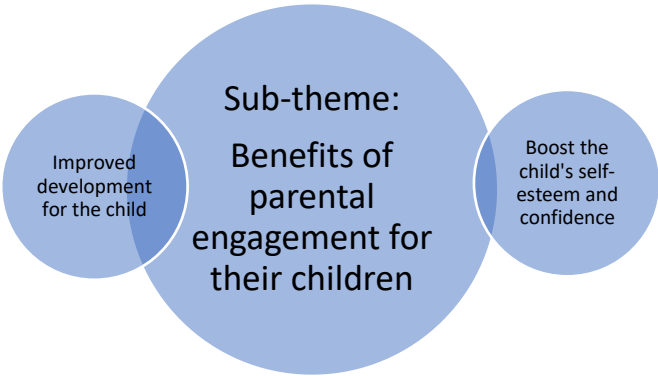
Evidence that led to the Theme 'Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Education'.



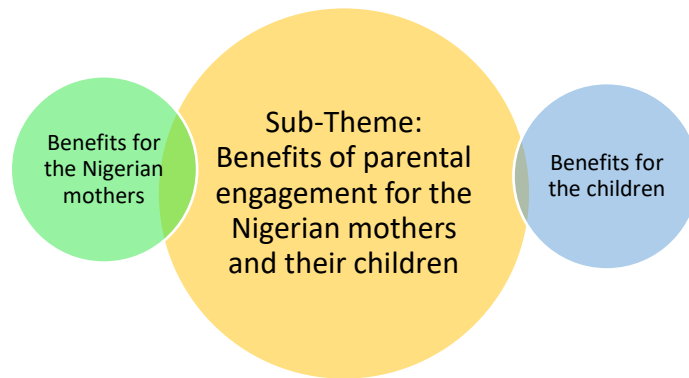
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Benefits of parental engagement for the Nigerian mothers'.



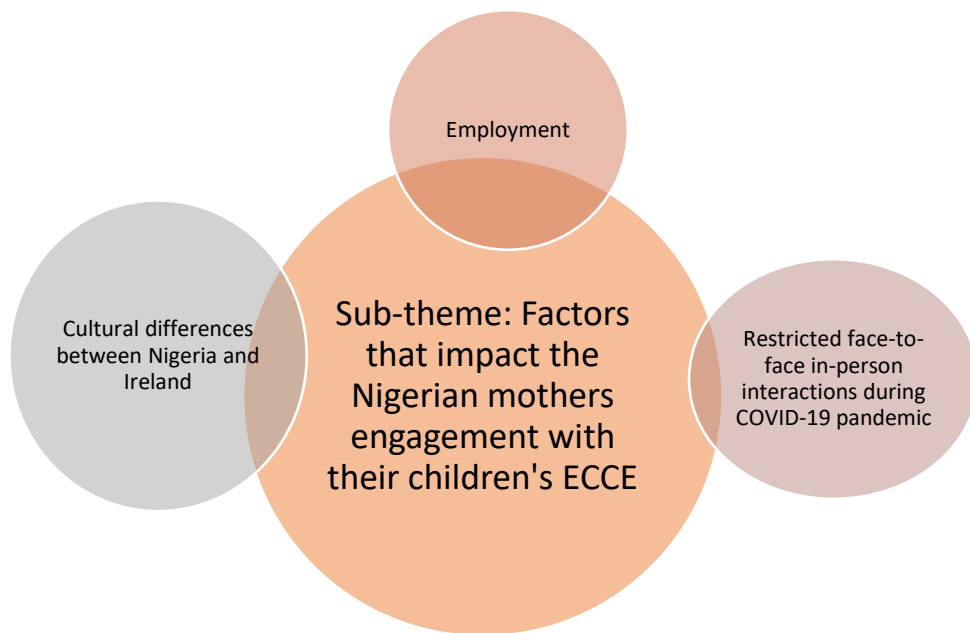
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Benefits of parental engagement for their children'.



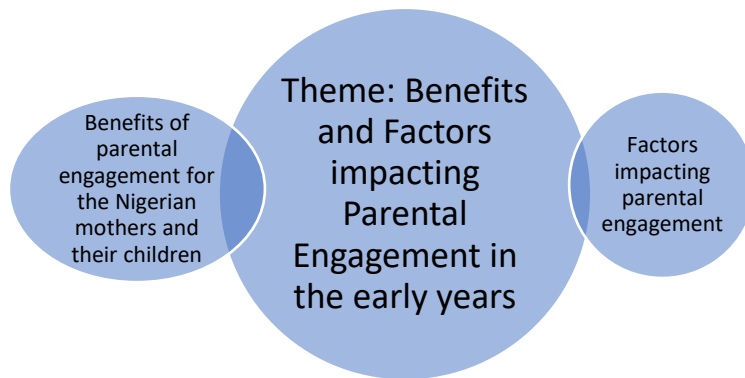
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Benefits of parental engagement for the Nigerian mothers and their children'.



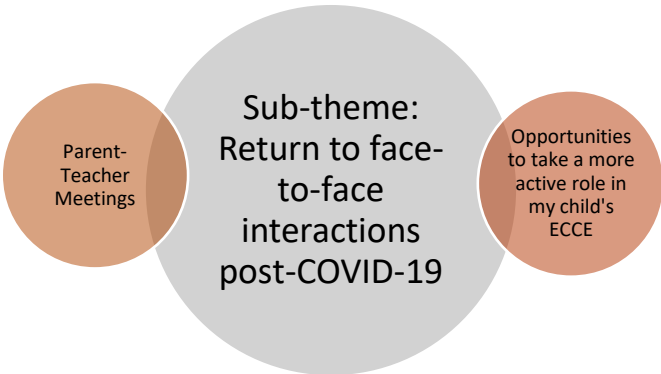
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Factors that impact the Nigerian mothers' engagement with their children's ECCE'.



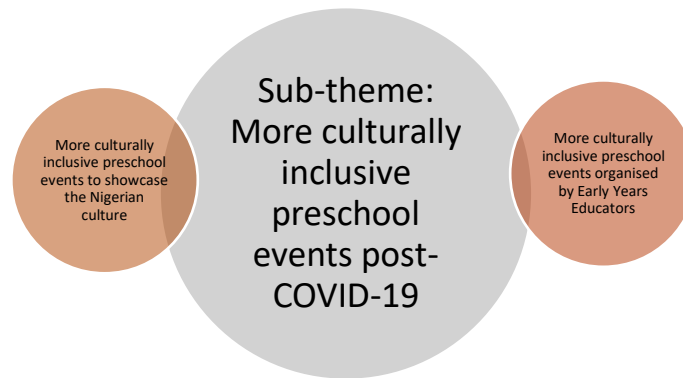
Evidence that led to the Theme ‘Benefits and Factors impacting Parental Engagement in the early years’.



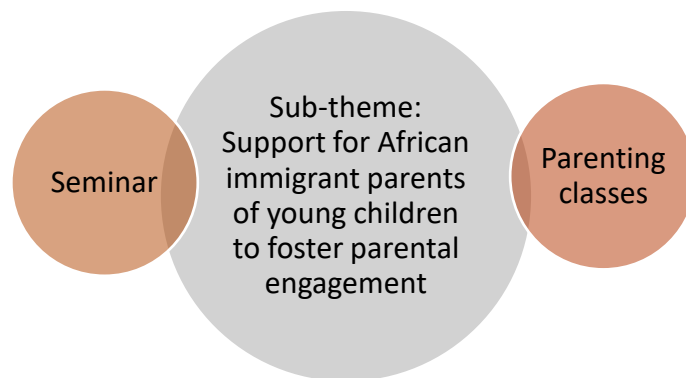
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Return to face-to-face interactions post-COVID-19'.



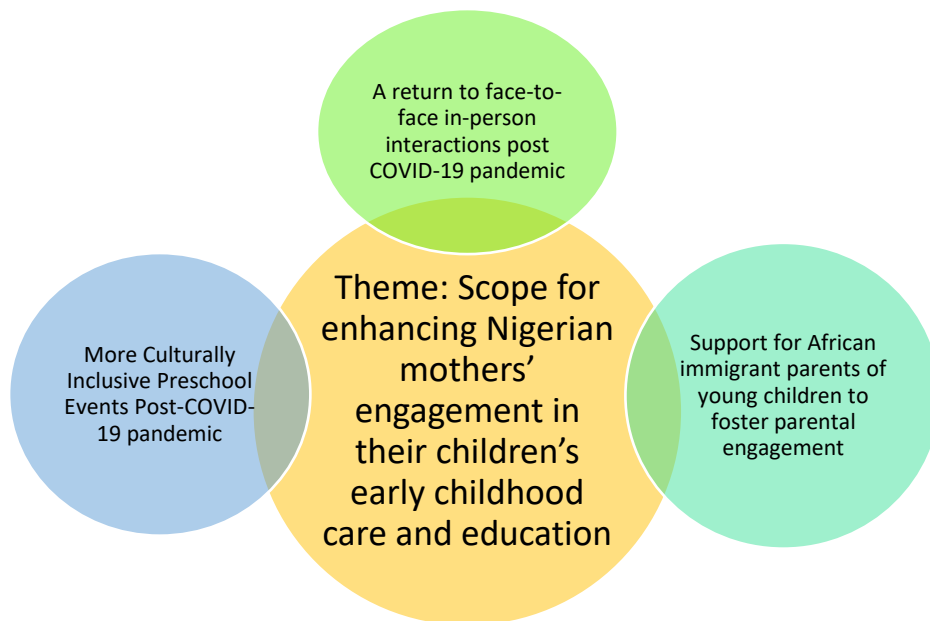
Evidence that led to the Sub-theme ‘More culturally inclusive preschool events post-COVID-19’.



Evidence that led to the Sub-theme 'Support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement'.



Evidence that led to the theme ‘Scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers’ engagement in their children’s early childhood care and education’.



Appendix S

Themes and sub themes generated from the Nigerian mothers' interviews

Themes	Sub Themes
1. Nigerian Mothers' Understanding of the Universal ECCE Programme	
	Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for the Nigerian Mothers
	Free preschool education
	Realisation my child is learning from knowledgeable others
	Benefits of the Universal ECCE Programme for their Children
	Socialisation
	Language development
	Preparation for Primary school
	The need for greater Flexibility in the Universal ECCE Programme
	More flexibility within the programme
	Extended hours
	Lack of family and childcare support for Nigerian mothers in Ireland
2. Nigerian Mothers' Perceptions of Parental Engagement in Early Education	
	Definition of parental engagement by the Nigerian Mothers
	Active Involvement
	Liaising with Early Years Educators
	Interaction between mother and child
	Supporting my child
	Holistic development
	Nigerian mothers' perceptions of their engagement with their children's ECCE
	Questioning and talking to my child on preschool matters
	Dropping off and picking up my child from preschool
	Virtual Engagement with Early Years Educators
	Engaging in Play-based learning activities with my child
	Providing Financial Support
	Asking for Feedback from Early Years Educators
	Attending Preschool Events
3. Benefits and Factors impacting Parental Engagement in the early years	
	Benefits of parental engagement
	Benefits for the Nigerian mothers
	Bonding with my child
	Understanding my child's capabilities and needs
	Benefits for their children
	Improved development for the child
	Boost the child's self-esteem and confidence

	Factors that impact the engagement of the Nigerian mothers in their children's ECCE
	Cultural differences in childrearing practices between Nigeria and Ireland
	Restricted face-to-face in-person interactions during COVID-19 pandemic
	Employment
4. Scope for enhancing Nigerian mothers' engagement in their children's early childhood care and education	
	Return to face-to-face in-person interactions post-COVID-19 pandemic
	Opportunities to take a more active role in my child's Early Childhood Care and Education
	Parent-Teacher Meetings
	More Culturally Inclusive Preschool Events Post-COVID-19 pandemic
	More culturally inclusive preschool events to showcase the Nigerian culture
	More culturally inclusive preschool events led by Early Years Educators
	Support for African immigrant parents of young children to foster parental engagement
	Seminars
	Parenting classes

Appendix T

Extract from my reflective diary

My Personal Biases

Nigerian Immigrant mothers prefer to avoid asking for feedback from early years educators, and they do not regularly attend preschool events. I came up with this conclusion from speaking with my students that are working in the field of early years. Well, how true? I need to include this in my interview questions. (Reflective Journal, 20/06/2021).

Appendix U

Extract from my reflective diary

Ogheneme, through her facial expression and words, expressed how unhappy she was that she could not engage in face-to-face in-person discussions with the early years' educators when her daughter had difficulty using the toilet in the preschool due to the COVID-19 restrictive measures that were in place. She expressed her disappointment that the early years' educators resulted in her daughter wearing pull-ups in the preschool after a few incidents of her wetting herself. However, she stated that she communicated with the early years' educators on this issue over the phone but would have preferred face-to-face engagement, where she could have offered in-person solutions. Ogheneme further expressed that she was not pleased with this decision but was compelled to abide by it due to the COVID-19 rules, which prevented face-to-face interactions in preschool settings. (Reflective Diary, 19-01-2022).

Sarah was a bit emotional sharing her story about how she came to seek Asylum in Ireland whilst pregnant. The move was unexpected but was done for the safety of her unborn child. I felt the pain in her voice when she was sharing the circumstances behind why she migrated to Ireland. (Reflective Diary, 22-01-2022).

Appendix V

MIREC Approval Form



Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NO.

A21-043 (FINAL)

1. PROJECT TITLE

A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland and their engagement with their children's universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme.

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Florence Ajala
Department / Centre / Other:	EPISE
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

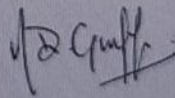
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A21- 043 – Florence Ajala – A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland and their engagement with their children's universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme.

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. It is, therefore, approved.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Marie Griffin
Signature:	
Date:	13 th December, 2021



**Mary Immaculate College
Research Ethics Committee**
MIREC-4: MIREC Chair Decision Form

APPLICATION NO.

A21-043 (FINAL)

1. PROJECT TITLE

A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland and their engagement with their children's universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme.

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Florence Ajala
Department / Centre / Other:	EPISE
Position:	Postgraduate Researcher

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is required.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required and granted. Referral to MIREC is not necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ethical clearance is required but the full MIREC process is not. Ethical clearance is therefore granted if required for external funding applications and the researcher need take no further action in this regard.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient information provided by applicant / Amendments required.

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A21- 043 – Florence Ajala - A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland and their engagement with their children's universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme.

I have reviewed this application and I believe it satisfies MIREC requirements. It is, therefore, approved.

5. DECLARATION (MIREC CHAIR)

Name (Print):	Dr Marie Griffin
Signature:	
Date:	13 th December, 2021

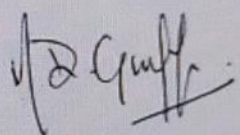
Appendix W
MIREC Amendment Form

4. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A21-043 Amendment Request – Florence Ajala PGR - A Qualitative Phenomenological Study investigating the lived experiences of Nigerian immigrant mothers who reside in Ireland and their engagement with their children's universal early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme.

I have reviewed this request to extend the participants of the study to outside Limerick due to the reasons outlined in form MIREC 5 and I am satisfied that it meets with MIREC requirements. It is, therefore, approved.

5. SIGNATURE OF MIREC CHAIR

Name (Print):	Dr Marie Griffin
Signature:	
Date:	20 th January 2022

Appendix X

Photos from the diversity day event



Appendix Y

Populations of Nigerians in Ireland from the Census Statistics Office

ments Unread To me Mentions me Flag >

From: Census <Census@cso.ie>
Sent: Friday 8 March 2024 17:31
To: Florence Ajala <florence.ajala@mic.ul.ie>
Subject: ##EXTERNAL EMAIL##: FW: re: Census data

You don't often get email from census@cso.ie. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Florence,

Thank you for your email.

Statistic	Census Year	Sex	Administrative County of Usual Residence	Citizenship	Unit	Value
Population Usually Resident and Present in the State	2022	Both sexes	Ireland	Ireland - Nigeria	Number	8,085
Population Usually Resident and Present in the State	2022	Both sexes	Ireland	Nigeria	Number	8,368

The data can be found <https://data.cso.ie/table/F5001>.

Appendix Z

Examples of Sub-themes with the number of references

8 - focalisation - 15, 1, 2, 5, 8, 4, 13, 12
 8 - language development - 8, 4, 14, 3, 13, 15, 6
 6 - preparation for primary school - 2, 3, 5, 14, 11, 9
 9 - the child is learning from knowledgeable others - 15, 2, 5, 4, 3, 10, 11, 13, 14
 Interaction between the states and parents (10)
 Holistic development - 9, 11, 12, 2, 15 (5)
 Active involvement - 9, 12, 14, 1, 2, 8, 10, 12, 13, 3, 4, 15 (12)
 Support - 4, 7, 3, 2, 12, 15 (6)
 Interaction - 4, 5, 14, 13, 7, 3, 10, 6 (8)

events before COVID	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 8
events during COVID	1, 8, 10
NO ABOUT COVID	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15