Advances In Multidisciplinary & Scientific Research
A Multidisciplinary & Interdisciplinary Journal

Vol. 12 No. 3, September , 2026

Preschoolers' Behavioral Control, Perceived Influencing Factors and Behavior Management Strategies in Pre-Primary/Nursery Schools in Akure North Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria

Awopetu, A. V. (PhD)
Department of Counselling Psychology
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology (BOUESTI),
Ikere Ekiti, Nigeria
E-mail: awopetu.anna@bouesti.edu.ng
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0268-056X

ABSTRACT

Cultivating behavioral control in children serves as a vital developmental foundation for early learning and emotional competences. In early childhood care and education practices, establishing a clear conceptual distinction between a child's internal capacity for behavioral control (emerging self-regulation) and external adult-led behavior management is essential for fostering long-term children's socio-emotional skills. This study examined stakeholders' perceptions regarding early childhood behavioral manifestations, socio-environmental, psychological and nutrition/health factors and the perceived utility of proactive behavior management strategies among nursery/pre-primary school children (ages 3–5 years) in Akure North Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. rounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the investigation utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey design administered between October and December 2025 across 20 randomly sampled pre-primary institutions (12 public, 8 private). Data were gathered through the self-administered Early Childhood Behavioral Control and Environmental Factors Questionnaire (ECBCEFQ) from 120 validated stakeholders (55 parents, 40 nursery teachers, and 25 headteachers; response rate = 85.7%). Statistical analysis combined descriptive metrics (group means, standard deviations, sample-weighted pooled means, and global standard deviations) evaluated against a 2.50 midpoint affirmation criterion, alongside inferential One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA, $\alpha = .05$, η^2) to test for perceptual divergence across stakeholder cohorts. Stakeholders reported notable perceived levels of rule non-compliance (M_p= 3.27, SD_g= 0.55), peer aggression (M_p = 3.24, SD_g = 0.56), and task resistance (M_p = 3.23, SD_g = 0.63). Significant inter-group divergence emerged for task resistance ($F(2, 117) = 9.38$, $p < .001$, η^2= .138) and peer exclusion ($F(2, 117) = 7.15$, $p = .001$, η^2= .109), which educators see more acutely in structured classrooms than parents. Unmonitored digital screen exposure was affirmed as the single most critical socio-environmental factor (M_p = 3.85, SD_g = 0.36), followed by domestic family stability (M_p = 3.56, SD_g = 0.51). For proactive management, stakeholders demonstrated overwhelming consensus endorsing positive reinforcement (M_p = 3.78, SD_g = 0.41), complete abolition of harsh punitive discipline (M_p = 3.63, SD_g = 0.50), parental role modeling (M_p = 3.57, SD_g = 0.51), and assertive, non-violent dialogue (M_p = 3.47, SD_g = 0.52). The study concluded that early childhood stakeholders perceived that preschool behavior patterns were strongly linked to domestic stability and unsupervised digital device consumption. They also demonstrated strong consensus endorsing positive behavioral supports over punitive coercion. The study recommended that early behavioral management strategies and interventions for preschoolers should focus on positive behavioral supports and coordinated home–school communication.

Keywords: Behavioral Control, Behavior Management Strategies, Early Childhood Education, Nigeria, Positive Behavior Support, Preschoolers.

Aims Research Journal Reference Format:
Awopetu, A. V. (2026): Preschoolers' Behavioral Control, Perceived Influencing Factors and Behavior Management Strategies in Pre-Primary/Nursery Schools in Akure North Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. Advances in Multidisciplinary Research Journal. Vol. 12 No. 3. Pp 55-67. www.isteams.net/aimsjournal. dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/V12N3P6

1. INTRODUCTION

The preschool developmental period of ages 3 to 5 years represents one of the most dynamic and sensitive phases of human development. During this foundational stage, children undergo rapid neural, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional maturation, transitioning from primary domestic caregiving into structured early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings. Within these early learning environments, children begin mastering behavioral control—the emerging internal capacity for effortful self-regulation, impulse inhibition, delays of gratification, and emotional modulation (Kochanska & Aksan, 2018; Slee, 2018). Cultivating self-regulation during these formative years forms the operational baseline for early literacy acquisition, social competence, and long-term scholastic readiness (Babangida & Tarda, 2018; Berk & Meyers, 2016; Blair & Raver, 2015).

In early childhood pedagogy and educational psychology, a clear conceptual distinction must be maintained between behavioral control and behavior management. Behavioral control refers to the child's internal, neuropsychological capacity for self-regulation and voluntary compliance with social norms (Kochanska & Aksan, 2018). In contrast, behavior management denotes the external, adult-structured strategies, pedagogical frameworks, and routines instituted by teachers and parents to guide conduct, provide physical and emotional safety, and scaffold pro-social habits (Alberto & Troutman, 2019; Stonehouse, 2018). For children aged 3–5 years, internal behavioral control is still nascent; thus, external management strategies must be developmentally supportive and non-punitive to allow children to internalize behavioral boundaries organically without anxiety or fear (Cloney, 2018; Denham et al., 2014).

Within Nigerian nursery and preschool classrooms, early childhood educators routinely encounter age-typical externalizing behavioral manifestations, such as sharing difficulties, temper outbursts, oppositional defiance, and structured activity avoidance (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; Raheem, 2025; Wahab, 2026). Traditionally, disciplinary approaches in many localized settings have leaned toward authoritarian coercion or physical reprimands. However, developmental evidence confirms that harsh punitive methods in early childhood induce short-term fear-based compliance rather than enduring self-regulation, frequently exacerbating oppositional traits (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Santrock, 2021; Slee, 2018). Evaluating how early years teachers, school administrators, and parents perceive these behavioral expressions and their socio-environmental correlates is essential for building context-responsive, developmentally grounded intervention models.

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. Bronfenbrenner's model conceptualizes early childhood development across nested ecological systems: the immediate microsystem (domestic households, nursery classrooms, and peer groups), the mesosystem (collaborative home–school communication and rule alignment), and distal exo/macrosystems (socio-economic conditions, community child-rearing traditions, and media saturation) (National Council for Arts and Culture [NCAC], 2019; World Bank, 2020). Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides the explanatory psychological mechanism of observational learning, imitative modeling, and vicarious reinforcement. Preschoolers acquire behavioral repertoires largely through observing primary models (parents, teachers, peers, and screen media) (Bandura, 1977; Crain, 2015). When exposed to unregulated screen media or adult coercive patterns, children readily imitate those behavioral scripts. Conversely, when pro-social communication, emotional labelling, and calm conflict resolution are consistently modelled and positively reinforced, children internalize self-regulatory competencies (Collier-Meek et al., 2013; Sugai & Horner, 2020).

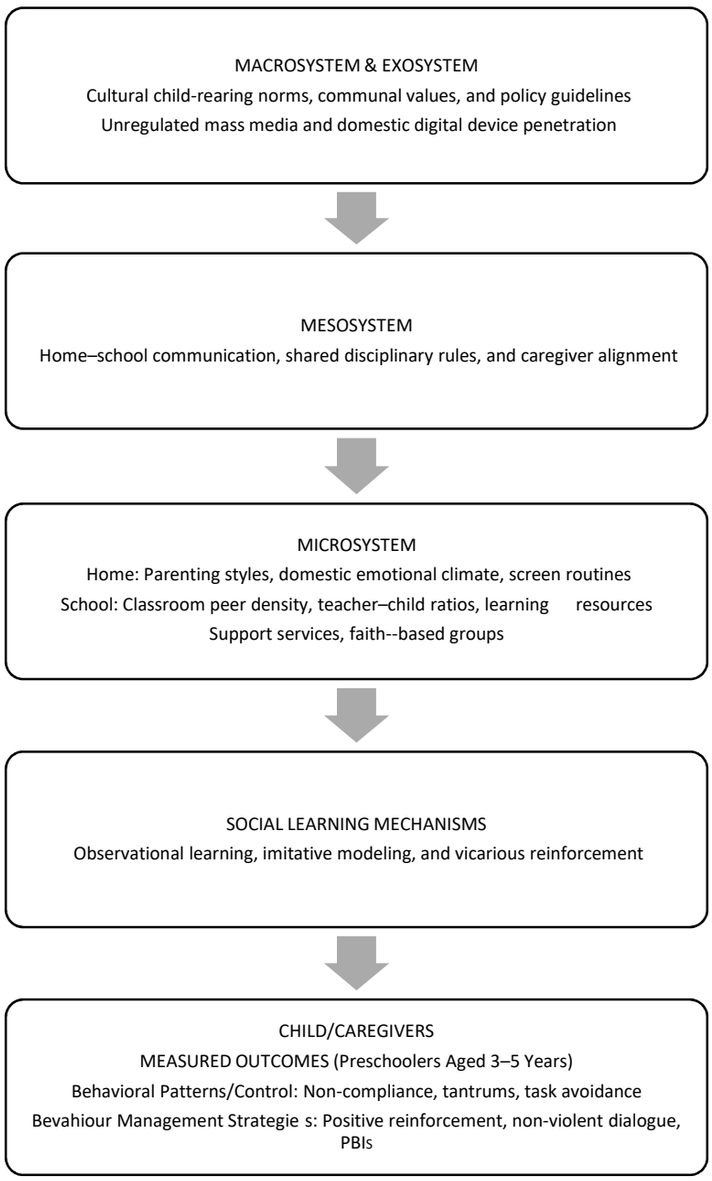


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems and Bandura's Social Learning Mechanisms to Preschoolers' Behavioral Patterns/Control and Behavior Management Strategies.

Evaluating how early childhood educators, headteachers, and parents perceive these behavioral manifestations, their socio-environmental correlates, and proactive management frameworks is necessary for informing context-responsive, developmentally grounded practices in Nigerian preschools. A prominent gap in the existing literature is that regional studies frequently examine child behavior from an isolated stakeholder perspective—evaluating either teacher reports or parental attitudes independently—without comparing multi-stakeholder perceptual alignment across home and school ecologies. This study addresses this empirical gap by analyzing relevant stakeholders' perceptions across public and private preschools.

1.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine stakeholders' perceptions (parents, early childhood teachers, and headteachers) regarding observed preschoolers' behavioral manifestations, perceived socio-environmental correlates, and the perceived utility of proactive behavior management strategies in nursery schools in Akure North Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study addressed three research questions:

1. What specific behavioral manifestations/patterns do participants perceive among preschool children (ages 3–5 years) within selected schools in Akure North Local Government Area?
2. What socio-environmental, psychological and nutrition/health factors do caregivers and educators perceive as influential in shaping early childhood behavior?
3. What is the perceived utility of proactive, non-coercive behavior management strategies among surveyed stakeholders in early childhood settings?

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to capture, quantify, and analyze stakeholders' perceptions. As a non-experimental perceptual investigation, findings reflect stakeholders' beliefs and reported perceptions rather than direct clinical evaluations or observational counts.

The empirical setting was the pre-primary education sector of Akure North Local Government Area (LGA), Ondo State, South-Western Nigeria. Akure North LGA comprises semi-urban and agrarian communities (including Iju, Itaogbolu, Oba-Ile, and Ayede-Ogbese), characterized by diverse family socio-economic backgrounds, varying access to institutional early learning facilities, and growing domestic digital device availability. Data collection took place across an eight-week window from 13 October to 5 December 2025.

2.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised early childhood teachers, headteachers, and parents associated with registered pre-primary and nursery institutions in Akure North LGA. A multi-stage sampling framework was implemented:

1. School Selection: From an official sampling frame of 68 basic educational institutions operating pre-primary departments in Akure North LGA, 20 schools (stratified into 12 public nursery sections and 8 approved private nursery schools) were selected using simple random sampling via a random numbers table.
2. Respondents Selection: Purposive sampling was used to recruit respondents based on predetermined inclusion criteria:
    - Nursery Teachers (n = 40): currently teaching in Nursery 1, Nursery 2, or Kindergarten classrooms who held recognized teaching qualifications in early childhood or primary education and possessed a minimum of two continuous years of teaching experience in early years settings (two teachers per sampled school).
    - Headteachers (n = 25): school administrators holding at least five continuous years of administrative leadership oversight over early childhood and nursery departments (one administrator per school, with five larger schools providing two administrative respondents which made in total 25 administrators).
    - Parents (n = 55): who had at least one child aged 3–5 years enrolled in the pre-primary sections of the sampled institutions at the time of the study, voluntary recruited during drop-off/pickup periods or parent-teacher meetings. An average of 3 to 4 parents were targeted per institution across the 20 selected schools. Between 2 to 4 questionnaires from each school were successfully returned and validated. Final yield comprised 55

completed questionnaires while 9 were unreturned or uncompleted (response rate of 85.9%).

Out of 140 self-administered questionnaires distributed, 120 completed instruments were retrieved, representing an overall response rate of 85.7%. The 20 non-respondents (14.3%) comprised 9 parents, 7 teachers, and 4 headteachers who were either unavailable during the retrieval window due to personal logistical constraints or their questionnaires were not completed accordingly. Potential non-response and distribution patterns were examined. Non-returns were evenly dispersed across sampled schools rather than clustered in specific schools.
A sample-size power calculation using G*Power 3.1 indicated that a minimum sample of 115 participants was adequate for cross-sectional survey parameters (α = .05, power = .85, medium effect size). The final sample of N = 120 comprised 55 Parents (45.8%), 40 Nursery Teachers (33.3%), and 25 Headteachers (20.8%). Demographic characteristics included 68 female participants (56.7%) and 52 male participants (43.3%); 74 respondents (61.7%) represented public pre-primary settings and 46 (38.3%) represented private nursery institutions. Professional experience among educators ranged from 2 to 24 years (M = 8.4 years, SD = 4.2).

2.3 Instrumentation

Data were gathered using the Early Childhood Behavioral Control and Environmental Factors Questionnaire (ECBCEFQ), developed based on early childhood developmental milestones and theoretical operationalization:

Section A: Perceived Externalizing Behavioral Manifestations (7 items): Assessed observable externalizing challenges, including rule non-compliance, peer aggression, temper tantrums, task avoidance, peer exclusion, property destructiveness, and oppositional argumentation.

Section B: Perceived Socio-Environmental and Physiological Correlates (7 items): Assessed domestic interaction styles, classroom crowding, peer dynamics, domestic conflict, digital screen exposure, and baseline nutrition.

Section C: Perceived Utility of Proactive Behavior Management Strategies (10 items): Assessed positive reinforcement, adult role modeling, collaborative boundary setting, non-violent communication, and the abolition of harsh punitive discipline. All items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The questionnaire was administered in English only, the official language of educational instruction in Ondo State. Parents with low literacy level or with non-English preference were excluded. Face and content validity were evaluated by a panel of three educational psychology and early childhood specialists from Ekiti State University, yielding a Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI/Average) of 0.89. A pilot study was conducted with a separate cohort of 30 early childhood stakeholders (14 parents, 10 nursery teachers, and 6 headteachers) in Akure South LGA. Internal consistency analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.81 for Section A, 0.84 for Section B, 0.79 for Section C, and 0.82 (95% CI [0.76, 0.87]) for the full instrument. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee alongside permissions from the Ondo State Ministry of Education. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and questionnaires were administered anonymously in individual sealed envelopes to minimize social desirability bias.

2.4 Data analysis

Data were audited, with missing values (< 1.5%) addressed via mean imputation. Descriptive statistics included group Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD). To account for unequal subgroup sample sizes (n_1 = 55, n_2 = 40, n_3 = 25; N = 120), the sample-weighted Pooled Mean (M_p) was calculated as:

$$M_p = [(55 \cdot M_{parents}) + (40 \cdot M_{teachers}) + (25 \cdot M_{headteachers})] / 120 \quad \text{.....(1)}$$

The Global Standard Deviation (SD_g) was computed using the pooled variance across groups. In accordance with standard survey conventions for 4-point scales, a midpoint affirmation criterion of 2.50 was applied, where items with $M_p \geq 2.50$ were classified as endorsed/affirmed by participants, whereas items scoring below 2.50 were classified as unendorsed. The relative prominence of perceived factors was evaluated using perceived salience levels anchored to the 4-point rating scale: M_p scores of 2.50-3.29 indicated moderate level, M_p scores of 3.30-3.69 indicated high level, and M_p scores above 3.70 were rated as very high. Inferential One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA, df = 2, 117, $\alpha = .05$) was conducted across the three stakeholders' groups for each item to test for inter-group perceptual differences, with effect sizes reported using eta squared (η^2), interpreted as small (.01), medium (.06), and large (.14).

3. RESULTS

Research questions were answered using data collected through the Early Childhood Behavioral Control and Environmental Factors Questionnaire (ECBCEFQ).

Research Question 1

What specific behavioral manifestations/patterns did participants perceive among preschool children (ages 3–5 years) within selected schools in Akure North Local Government Area?

Table 1. Stakeholders' Perceptions of Pre-Schoolers' Behavioral Patterns with One-Way ANOVA Comparisons

Item / Behavioral Manifestations/ patterns	Parents (n =55) M ± SD	Teachers (n = 40) M ± SD	Headteachers (n = 25) M ± SD	Pooled Mean (M_p)	Global SD (SD_g)	F (2, 117)	p	η^2	Affirmation Status ($M_p \geq 2.50$)
1. Rule non-compliance and authority defiance	3.15 ± 0.62	3.42 ± 0.48	3.28 ± 0.51	3.27	0.55	2.76	.067	.045	Endorsed
2. Peer aggression, outbursts, and irritability	3.22 ± 0.58	3.35 ± 0.50	3.12 ± 0.60	3.24	0.56	1.48	.232	.025	Endorsed
3. Academic resistance and task avoidance	2.98 ± 0.71	3.50 ± 0.51	3.36 ± 0.49	3.23	0.63	9.38	< .001*	.138	Endorsed
4. Deflecting personal accountability	2.84 ± 0.68	3.22 ± 0.58	3.16 ± 0.55	3.03	0.63	4.87	.009*	.077	Endorsed
5. Peer bullying, exclusion, and hostility	3.04 ± 0.65	3.48 ± 0.51	3.40 ± 0.50	3.26	0.60	7.15	.001*	.109	Endorsed
6. Property destructiveness and toy dispute damage	2.65 ± 0.74	3.10 ± 0.64	2.96 ± 0.68	2.86	0.71	4.88	.009*	.077	Endorsed
7. Oppositional verbal argumentation	3.12 ± 0.60	3.38 ± 0.49	3.20 ± 0.58	3.22	0.56	2.45	.091	.040	Endorsed
Overall Dimension Index	**3.00 ± 0.44**	**3.35 ± 0.35**	**3.21 ± 0.39**	**3.16**	**0.42**	**9.12**	**< .001***	**.135**	**Endorsed**

*Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and inferential ANOVA results for stakeholders' perceptions of preschool externalizing behavioral manifestations/patterns. All seven behavioral patterns exceeded the 2.50 threshold, with pooled means ranging from 2.86 to 3.27. Rule non-compliance (pattern 1) achieved the highest pooled affirmation (M_p = 3.27, SD_g = 0.55), followed by peer bullying/hostility (M_p = 3.26, SD_g = 0.60), and peer aggression (M_p = 3.24, SD_g = 0.56). The One-Way ANOVA confirmed statistically significant inter-group differences for academic task avoidance ($F(2, 117) = 9.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .138$), peer exclusion ($F(2, 117) = 7.15$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .109$), property destructiveness ($F(2, 117) = 4.88$, $p = .009$), and accountability deflection ($F(2, 117) = 4.87$, $p = .009$).

Post-hoc comparisons indicated that teachers and headteachers reported significantly higher concern for task resistance and peer exclusion than parents. Conversely, rule defiance ($p = .067$), peer aggression ($p = .232$), and verbal argumentation ($p = .091$) showed no significant group divergence, reflecting general agreement across home and school ecologies. These observations corroborate regional research reports. Raheem (2025) reported that oppositional behaviors and sharing disputes are frequently observed during early transitions into structured group environments in Nigeria. Similarly, Wahab (2026) emphasized that preschool engagement depends heavily on structured routines and adult guidance loops. A plausible developmental interpretation is that structured nursery classrooms require sustained collective focus, structured sharing of scarce play materials, and adherence to timetable transitions—demands that are less intensive in informal home environments (Cloney, 2018; Denham et al., 2014). Consequently, emerging self-regulatory deficits are observed earlier and more acutely by classroom educators.

Research Question 2

What socio-environmental, psychological and nutrition/health factors did caregivers and educators perceive as influential in shaping behavior in early childhood?

Table 2. Perceived Socio-Environmental, Psychological and Nutrition/Health Factors with One-Way ANOVA Comparisons

Identified factors	Parents (n =55) M ± SD	Teachers (n = 40) M ± SD	H/teachers (n = 25) M ± SD	Pooled Mean (M_p)	Global SD (SD_g)	F (2, 117)	p	η^2	Perceived Salience Level
1.Domestic Climates and Parental Styles	3.45 ± 0.54	3.68 ± 0.47	3.60 ± 0.50	3.56	0.51	2.37	.098	.039	High
2. School Culture and Physical Learning Settings	3.02 ± 0.66	3.32 ± 0.57	3.28 ± 0.61	3.17	0.63	3.01	.053	.049	Moderate
3. Peer Group Affiliations and Neighborhood Ecology	3.24 ± 0.58	3.55 ± 0.50	3.44 ± 0.51	3.38	0.55	3.73	.027*	.060	High
4.Psychological Distress and Domestic Conflicts	3.16 ± 0.69	3.40 ± 0.59	3.32 ± 0.56	3.27	0.63	1.70	.188	.028	Moderate
5.Environmental Stress and Overcrowded Classrooms	2.94 ± 0.71	3.48 ± 0.51	3.36 ± 0.57	3.21	0.66	9.54	< .001*	.140	Moderate

Identified factors	Parents (n =55) M ± SD	Teachers (n = 40) M ± SD	H/teachers (n = 25) M ± SD	Pooled Mean (M_p)	Global SD (SD_g)	F (2, 117)	p	η^2	Perceived Salience Level
6.Unmonitored Digital Screen and Media Exposure	3.78 ± 0.42	3.92 ± 0.27	3.88 ± 0.33	3.85	0.36	2.01	.138	.033	Very High
7.Nutritional Status and Physical Health	2.82 ± 0.75	3.08 ± 0.66	2.92 ± 0.70	2.93	0.72	1.55	.217	.026	Moderate
Overall Dimension Index	**3.20 ± 0.43**	**3.49 ± 0.35**	**3.40 ± 0.40**	**3.34**	**0.42**	**6.44**	**.002***	**.099**	**High**

*Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 2 summarizes stakeholders' salience levels and ANOVA comparisons for perceived socio-environmental, psychological and nutrition/health factors. Unmonitored digital device exposure was perceived as the single most influential factor ($M_p = 3.85$, $SD_g = 0.36$), with no significant inter-group difference ($F(2, 117) = 2.01$, $p = .138$). This aligns directly with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory: preschoolers are in a developmental phase characterized by imitative learning and limited capacity to evaluate screen content critically (Berk & Meyers, 2016; Crain, 2015).

Exposure to fast-paced or aggressive media scripts often leads to direct behavioral imitation during peer interactions, supporting Aliyu's (2025) call for early childhood curriculum frameworks addressing domestic media literacy in Nigeria. Domestic climates and parenting styles also recorded high pooled endorsement ($M_p = 3.56$, $SD_g = 0.51$), corroborating Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem framework. Inconsistent domestic routines or parenting styles disrupt early emotional self-regulation, manifesting as externalizing challenges during preschool activities (Babangida & Tarda, 2018; Kochanska & Aksan, 2018). Furthermore, inferential ANOVA identified a significant difference regarding overcrowded classrooms ($F(2, 117) = 9.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .140$). Teachers ($M = 3.48$) and headteachers ($M = 3.36$) rated classroom crowding as a much more disruptive factor than parents ($M = 2.94$), highlighting the structural strain high child-to-teacher ratios place on early learning environments.

Research Question 3

What was the perceived utility of proactive, non-coercive behavior management strategies among surveyed stakeholders in early childhood settings?

Table 3. Stakeholders' Perceived Utility for Proactive Behavior Management Strategies with One-Way ANOVA Comparisons

Proactive Behavior Management Strategy	Parents (n =55) M ± SD	Teachers (n = 40) M ± SD	Headteachers (n = 25) M ± SD	Pooled Mean (M_p)	Global SD (SD_g)	F (2, 117)	p	η^2	Affirmation Status ($M_p \geq 2.50$)
1. Parental proactive role modeling	3.52 ± 0.54	3.65 ± 0.48	3.56 ± 0.51	3.57	0.51	0.81	.448	.014	Endorsed
2. Transmission of moral and cultural values	3.64 ± 0.49	3.58 ± 0.50	3.52 ± 0.51	3.60	0.50	0.54	.587	.009	Endorsed
3. Allocation of dedicated caregiver attention	3.48 ± 0.54	3.60 ± 0.50	3.44 ± 0.58	3.51	0.53	0.94	.394	.016	Endorsed
4. Systematic instruction in pro-social skills	3.32 ± 0.61	3.45 ± 0.50	3.36 ± 0.49	3.37	0.55	0.68	.509	.011	Endorsed
5. Assertive, respectful non-violent dialogue	3.44 ± 0.54	3.52 ± 0.51	3.48 ± 0.51	3.47	0.52	0.30	.742	.005	Endorsed
6. Collaborative boundary and rule setting	3.02 ± 0.73	3.28 ± 0.55	3.16 ± 0.62	3.14	0.66	1.83	.166	.030	Endorsed
7. Deployment of active listening routines	3.18 ± 0.64	3.35 ± 0.53	3.24 ± 0.52	3.25	0.58	0.98	.377	.017	Endorsed
8. Complete abolition of harsh punitive discipline	3.56 ± 0.54	3.72 ± 0.45	3.64 ± 0.49	3.63	0.50	1.34	.267	.022	Endorsed
9. Structured faith-based and ethical character inculcation	3.25 ± 0.67	3.12 ± 0.72	3.20 ± 0.65	3.20	0.68	0.41	.663	.007	Endorsed
10. Proactive positive reinforcement and praise	3.72 ± 0.45	3.85 ± 0.36	3.80 ± 0.41	3.78	0.41	1.15	.321	.019	Endorsed
Overall Dimension Index	**3.41 ± 0.38**	**3.51 ± 0.32**	**3.44 ± 0.37**	**3.45**	**0.36**	**0.95**	**.391**	**.016**	**Endorsed**

*Significant at $p < .05$.

Table 3 presents stakeholder perceived utility ratings and ANOVA results for proactive behavior management strategies. All 10 strategies scored above the 2.50 threshold, led by positive reinforcement and praise ($M_p = 3.78$, $SD_g = 0.41$). Collaborative boundary and rule setting strategy scored the least ($M_p = 3.14$, $SD_g = 0.66$). ANOVA tests confirmed no statistically significant differences across stakeholder groups for any of the 10 proactive strategies (all $p > .16$, $\eta^2 < .03$). This invariance demonstrates consensus across parents, teachers, and school administrators on the utility of proactive, non-violent behavior guidance.

These perceptions align with developmental research demonstrating that positive reinforcement, warm dialogue, and consistent routines build internal self-regulation more effectively than physical coercion (Alberto & Troutman, 2019; Cloney, 2018; Stonehouse, 2018; Sugai & Horner, 2020; Zinsser et al., 2014). Item 9 (faith-based and ethical character inculcation, M_p = 3.20) reflects the socio-cultural context of South-Western Nigeria, where cultural traditions and communal faith practices are widely integrated to reinforce pro-social habits (NCAC, 2019).

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Following methodological limitations should be considered:

1. The study was conducted within a single local government area (Akure North LGA) in Ondo State, South-Western Nigeria, which may limit generalizability to areas with differing cultural, linguistic, or socio-economic dynamics.
2. The cross-sectional design identifies perceived associations and mean differences; it cannot establish causal relationships between environmental correlates and child behavioral outcomes.
3. Construct validity was established through expert content validity index (S-CVI) and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), without confirmatory factor analysis or test–retest reliability metrics. Subgroup sample sizes were unequal (n = 55, 40, 25), though accounted for via sample-weighted pooled calculations and ANOVA testing.
4. Although administrative confidentiality and sealed anonymous submissions were employed to minimize response distortion, no formal social desirability scale was embedded in the instrument. Given the sensitive nature of child discipline and behavioral management, some degree of social desirability bias cannot be entirely ruled out, as participants may have felt inclined to endorse modern non-violent strategies over punitive methods. Future research could incorporate validated social desirability measures or triangulate survey data with direct classroom and domestic behavioral observations.
5. Potential non-response bias represents a methodological delimitation. While the study achieved an overall response rate of 85.7% (N = 120) with non-returns distributed evenly across participating schools, strict procedural anonymity precluded the collection of baseline sociodemographic or behavioral data from the 20 non-responding individuals (9 parents, 7 teachers, 4 headteachers). Consequently, statistical comparison of respondents and non-respondents on individual-level parameters (such as parental stress, caregiver educational attainment, or specific child temperament profiles) was not feasible. Although balanced cohort response rates suggest minimal systemic attrition, the possibility that non-responding caregivers and educators held differing perceptions regarding behavioral control cannot be completely discounted.
6. Findings reflected stakeholders' perceptions gathered via self-administered questionnaires rather than direct observational counts or clinical diagnostic assessments.
7. Demographic variables such as parental educational attainment, household socioeconomic status, child gender, and individual child behavioral/clinical history were not captured in the instrument. Because these demographic characteristics can influence caregiver stress levels, parental disciplinary tolerance, and teacher evaluations, their omission represents study delimitation. Future empirical investigations should incorporate comprehensive sociodemographic profiling and child history covariates to determine how family socioeconomic background and child gender moderate perceptions of early childhood behavioral control.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provided empirical evidence on how parents, nursery educators, and headteachers perceived behavioral patterns, environmental correlates, and behavior management strategies among preschool children (ages 3–5 years) in Nigerian nursery schools. Stakeholders reported notable instances of non-compliance, peer conflicts and task avoidance, which they perceived to be closely linked to domestic home dynamics, unmonitored digital device use and classroom conditions. Furthermore, stakeholders strongly endorsed positive reinforcement, caregiver role modeling, and non-violent communication over punitive coercion. Strengthening behavioral self-regulation in preschoolers requires coordinated home-school partnerships and consistent, non-punitive behavior management practices.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide practical and feasible solutions for early childhood settings, the following recommendations based on this study's findings are offered:

1. Nursery school administrators should establish school-wide positive behavior routines utilizing visual rule charts, token reinforcement, and structured praise, fully replacing physical reprimands and public embarrassment.
2. Low-cost teacher professional development. Local Government Education Authorities (LGEA) should utilize routine staff meetings to deliver micro-workshops on early childhood emotional de-escalation, conflict resolution, and age-appropriate classroom transitions (monitored via pre- and post-workshop evaluation rubrics).
3. Parent–Teacher Association committees should organize short practical workshops during termly PTA meetings addressing age-appropriate screen-time limits, media monitoring strategies, and consistent home routines (monitored via attendance records and resource distribution).
4. Structured playground social-skill scaffolding provided by classroom teachers and assistants. Pre-primary teachers should organize cooperative group games during outdoor play periods to model sharing, turn-taking, and verbal peer conflict resolution (monitored via weekly observational checklists).
5. Cluster-based visiting guidance counselling support (State Ministry of Education): Education boards should deploy visiting early years guidance counsellors across school clusters to assist teachers with persistent behavioral concerns without requiring full-time appointments at every school.

5.1 Conflict of Interests Disclosure

The author wishes to declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest related to the publication of this manuscript. This research was self-sponsored and received no specific grant or external funding

5.2 Data Availability

The de-identified quantitative survey dataset, psychometric questionnaire instruments, and statistical calculation summaries supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable academic request from the corresponding author. Data access will be granted for scholarly replication and academic validation purposes subject to institutional ethical data-sharing protocols.

REFERENCES

Akinrotimi, A. A., & Olowe, P. K. (2016). Assessment of the implementation of early childhood education curriculum in Nigerian nursery schools. Journal of Education and Practice, 7(5), 184–191. https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/28921

Alberto, P. A., & Troutman, A. C. (2019). Applied behavior analysis for teachers (10th ed.). Pearson.

Aliyu, A. Y. (2025). Towards a policy framework for the use of generative AI in Nigerian curriculum for early childhood education. Journal of Early Childhood Development and Education, 2(2), 38–43. https://ejournal.gomit.id/junior/article/view/332

Babangida, M., & Tarda, G. (2018). Cognitive development and emotional stability in early childhood education. Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology, 12(1), 45–59.

Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Prentice-Hall.

Berk, L. E., & Meyers, A. B. (2016). Infants, children, and adolescents (8th ed.). Pearson.

Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2015). School readiness and self-regulation: A neurodevelopmental approach. Annual Review of Psychology, 66, 711–731. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015221

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2176kvz

Cloney, D. (2018). Assessment of children as confident and involved learners in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review. Australian Council for Educational Research. https://research.acer.edu.au/early_childhood_misc/32

Collier-Meek, M. A., Fallon, L. M., Sanetti, L. M., & Maggin, D. M. (2013). Focus on implementation: Assessing and promoting treatment fidelity. Teaching Exceptional Children, 45(5), 52–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991304500506

Crain, W. (2015). Theories of development: Concepts and applications (6th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662473

Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., Way, E., Mincic, M., Zinsser, K., & Graling, K. (2014). Preschoolers' emotion knowledge: Self-regulatory foundations, and predictive validity for social and academic success. Early Education and Development, 25(5), 667–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2014.858835

Gershoff, E. T., & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016). Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses. Journal of Family Psychology, 30(4), 453–469. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000191

Kochanska, G., & Aksan, N. (2018). Children's compliance and conscience: A longitudinal look at family relationships and moral development. Developmental Psychology, 54(4), 621–635. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000458

National Council for Arts and Culture. (2019). Cultural heritage, values education, and child upbringing in contemporary Nigeria. NCAC Press.

Raheem, A. O. (2025). Assessment of oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) among preschool-aged children in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Journal of Early Childhood Development and Education, 3(2), 61–69. https://doi.org/10.58723/junior.v3i2.743

Santrock, J. W. (2021). Child development (15th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Slee, P. T. (2018). Child, adolescent and family development (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108123716

Stonehouse, A. (2018). Partnerships with parents: Nurturing acceptable social behaviors in early childhood cohorts. Victoria Early Years Framework Publications. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/veyldf.aspx

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2020). School-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports: A systems-level approach to addressing disciplinary inequities. Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 64(2), 145–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2019.1706697

Wahab, S. K. (2026). Influence of primary school teachers' motivation on pupils' academic performance in Federal Capital Territory Abuja Nigeria. Journal of Early Childhood Development and Education, 3(1), 1–7. https://ejournal.gomit.id/junior/article/view/522

World Bank. (2020). Nigeria development update: Investing in human capital for a future generation. World Bank Group. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34912

Zinsser, K. M., Shewark, E. A., Denham, S. A., & Curby, T. W. (2014). A mixed-method examination of preschool teacher beliefs about social-emotional learning and relations to observed emotional support. Infant and Child Development, 23(5), 471–493. https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.1843