

Over-Schooling and Identity Formation in Early Childhood in Nigeria: Exploring the Roles of Guidance and Counseling in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled "Over-Schooling and Identity Formation in Early Childhood in Nigeria: Exploring the Roles of Guidance and Counseling in Teacher Education," investigates the impact of over-schooling on identity formation and proposes strategies to mitigate its adverse effects through guidance and counseling (G&C). Over-schooling, characterized by excessive academic workloads and societal pressures, disrupts children's natural processes of self-exploration, cultural immersion, and socio-emotional development. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in multicultural contexts like Nigeria, where ethnic diversity, communal values, and parental aspirations shape educational practices. The research explores the perspectives of 400 Nigerian teacher educators (215 males and 185 females) using a descriptive survey design. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire titled "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Over-Schooling and Guidance and Counseling in Early Childhood Education (TEP-OSGCE)," with a reliability coefficient of 0.87, and semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that over-schooling limits opportunities for self-exploration, weakens cultural connections, and prioritizes academic achievement at the expense of holistic development. Challenges such as large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate training hinder efforts to address over-schooling, while strategies like mindfulness exercises, art therapy, and flexible curricula are proposed to promote balanced learning. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating G&C into teacher education programmes to empower educators to counteract over-schooling's negative effects. Based on the findings, five specific recommendations are proposed, which include limiting standardized testing in early childhood to reduce academic pressure and create space for play and exploration.

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INTRODUCTION

Over-schooling has emerged as a pressing issue in Nigeria, reflecting the growing tension between societal expectations and the developmental needs of young children. Defined as the imposition of excessive academic workloads, structured routines, and high performance standards on children, over-schooling often surpasses what is developmentally appropriate for early childhood (Adeyemo, 2020). In Nigeria, this phenomenon is deeply intertwined with cultural pressures, including parental aspirations and societal competition, which shape how children navigate their formative years. At the same time, identity formation—a critical process during early childhood—is influenced by both universal developmental principles and Nigeria's unique cultural context.

In Nigeria, over-schooling manifests in various ways, from long school hours and weekend tutoring to an overwhelming emphasis on academic achievement as the sole measure of success. Parents often enroll their children in multiple extracurricular activities, private lessons, and preparatory programmes aimed at securing admission into prestigious schools or ensuring top grades (Okeke, 2021). These practices are driven by the belief that early academic excellence guarantees future prosperity, a mindset reinforced by societal norms and limited access to quality education and employment opportunities.

Recent trends reveal a significant rise in the number of private and "elite" schools in urban areas, where parents invest heavily in their children's education. According to Okafor and Okoro (2022), many children spend up to 10 hours a day engaged in formal learning activities, leaving little room for unstructured play, social interactions, or self-discovery. This trend is particularly pronounced in cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, where the pressure to outperform peers is intense. The proliferation of after-school tutoring centers and enrichment programs further underscores the competitive nature of Nigerian society, where academic success is often equated with personal and familial honor.

Cultural pressures exacerbate the prevalence of over-schooling in Nigeria. Parental expectations, shaped by societal norms, prioritize academic achievement over holistic development. For instance, many Nigerian parents view their children's success as a reflection of their own status, a belief rooted in the cultural value placed on education as a pathway to upward mobility (Eze, 2021). Additionally, ethnic and regional influences play a role; in some communities, communal pride and familial honor are closely tied to a child's academic performance. These factors create an environment where children are subjected to immense pressure, often at the expense of their emotional, social, and cognitive well-being.

Identity Formation in Early Childhood: Key Theories and Cultural Nuances in Nigeria

Identity formation in early childhood is a foundational process through which children develop a sense of self, understand their roles within their families and communities, and begin to navigate cultural and societal expectations. This process is shaped by both universal developmental theories and Nigeria's rich cultural diversity. Key psychological theories provide a framework for understanding how identity develops during this critical stage.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights the importance of the initiative vs. guilt stage in early childhood, during which children explore their environment, take initiative in activities, and develop a sense of purpose (Newman & Newman, 2020). However, excessive control or criticism—common in over-schooled environments—can lead to feelings of guilt and hinder identity formation. Similarly, Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory emphasizes the role of play and exploration in fostering cognitive and social growth. Play allows children to experiment with different roles, problem-solve, and build self-confidence, all of which are essential for healthy identity development (Smith, 2021).

In Nigeria, cultural nuances add layers of complexity to identity formation. The country's ethnic diversity, with over 250 distinct groups, influences how children perceive themselves and their roles. For example, a Yoruba child may grow up immersed in storytelling and proverbs, which shape their worldview and communication style, while a Hausa child might emphasize communal values and respect for elders (Adewale, 2022). Language also plays a crucial role, as children navigate between their native languages and English, the official language of instruction. This linguistic duality can impact how children express themselves and integrate cultural values into their identities.

Traditional gender roles and religious teachings further shape identity formation in Nigeria. Societal norms often dictate distinct paths for boys and girls, with boys encouraged to pursue careers in science or engineering and girls steered toward domestic responsibilities (Ogunyemi, 2021). Religion, whether Christianity or Islam, provides moral guidance and influences behavior, helping children develop a sense of right and wrong. These cultural and societal factors underscore the importance of creating educational environments that respect children's diverse backgrounds and developmental needs.

Over-schooling disrupts the natural process of identity formation by limiting opportunities for self-exploration and cultural immersion. Excessive academic pressure can lead to stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of autonomy, making it difficult for children to develop a positive self-concept (Adeyemo, 2020). Limited exposure to cultural practices, such as traditional games, storytelling, and communal activities, weakens children's connection to their heritage and hinders their ability to integrate cultural values into their identities. Furthermore, the focus on external achievements, such as grades and awards, encourages children to rely on societal validation rather than developing intrinsic motivation and self-awareness (Okeke, 2021).

Rationale for linking Over-Schooling to Identity Challenges: Cognitive Overload vs. Holistic Development

The connection between over-schooling and identity challenges in early childhood can be understood through the lens of cognitive overload versus holistic development. Over-schooling, characterized by excessive academic demands and structured routines, places undue stress on young children's cognitive capacities, often at the expense of their emotional, social, and physical well-being. This imbalance disrupts the natural processes

of identity formation, which rely on a harmonious integration of all developmental domains. By examining the tension between cognitive overload and holistic development, we can better understand why over-schooling poses significant risks to children's ability to form a coherent and positive sense of self.

Cognitive overload occurs when children are subjected to more information, tasks, or expectations than their developing brains can effectively process. During early childhood, the brain is still maturing, particularly in areas responsible for executive functions such as attention, memory, and decision-making (Goswami, 2021). Over-schooling exacerbates cognitive overload by prioritizing rote learning, standardized testing, and rigid schedules, leaving little room for creativity, exploration, or self-reflection.

This emphasis on academic achievement often leads to stress, anxiety, and burnout, which can hinder identity formation. For example, children who are constantly evaluated based on external metrics—such as grades or test scores—may develop a fragile sense of self-worth tied to performance rather than intrinsic qualities (Adeyemo, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of unstructured playtime and opportunities for self-directed activities deprives children of the chance to experiment with different roles, solve problems independently, and build confidence in their abilities. As a result, they may struggle to develop autonomy, initiative, and a clear understanding of their strengths and interests—all of which are essential components of identity formation.

The Importance of Holistic Development in Identity Formation

In contrast to cognitive overload, holistic development emphasizes the integration of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. This approach recognizes that identity formation is not solely an intellectual process but also involves emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and cultural engagement. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental layers, including family, school, community, and culture (Smith, 2021). When these layers are balanced and supportive, they provide a fertile ground for healthy identity development.

For instance, unstructured play—a cornerstone of holistic development—allows children to explore their imagination, collaborate with peers, and navigate social dynamics. Through play, children learn to negotiate roles, express emotions, and develop problem-solving skills, all of which contribute to a stronger sense of self (Newman & Newman, 2020). Similarly, exposure to cultural practices, such as storytelling, music, and traditional games, helps children connect with their heritage and integrate cultural values into their identities. These experiences foster a sense of belonging and continuity, enabling children to see themselves as part of a larger community.

Holistic development also prioritizes emotional intelligence, which is critical for navigating the complexities of identity. Children who are taught to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions are better equipped to handle challenges, build meaningful relationships, and develop resilience (Okeke, 2021). Emotional well-being serves as a foundation for self-esteem and self-awareness, both of which are integral to forming a stable and positive identity.

Cognitive Overload vs. Holistic Development: A Clash of Priorities

The tension between cognitive overload and holistic development lies at the heart of the challenges posed by over-schooling. While over-schooling focuses narrowly on academic achievement, it neglects the broader developmental needs of children. This imbalance creates a mismatch between societal expectations and

the realities of early childhood development. For example, in Nigeria, where over-schooling is driven by cultural pressures and competition, children are often deprived of the time and space needed to engage in activities that promote holistic growth (Okafor & Okoro, 2022).

The consequences of this mismatch are profound. Children subjected to over-schooling may experience confusion about their identity, as they are unable to reconcile external pressures with their internal desires and capabilities. They may also struggle with low self-esteem, anxiety, and a diminished sense of agency, all of which undermine their ability to navigate the complexities of adolescence and adulthood. In contrast, a holistic approach to education, balances cognitive stimulation with emotional and social support. This creates an environment where children can thrive and develop a strong, cohesive sense of self.

Rationale for addressing Over-Schooling through Guidance and Counseling

Given the detrimental effects of cognitive overload on identity formation, there is a compelling rationale for addressing over-schooling through guidance and counseling in teacher education. Educators trained in these areas are better equipped to design curricula and classroom environments that prioritize holistic development. For example, teachers can incorporate mindfulness exercises, creative arts, and collaborative projects to reduce stress and promote emotional well-being (Eze, 2021). They can also advocate for policies that limit excessive academic workloads and emphasize the importance of play and cultural engagement.

Moreover, guidance and counseling empower teachers to work collaboratively with parents and communities to shift societal attitudes toward education. By educating parents about the benefits of balanced approaches to learning, teachers can help alleviate the pressure to over-school and create a more supportive environment for children's development (Ogunyemi, 2021). This collaborative effort is essential for fostering a generation of confident, resilient, and culturally grounded individuals. The rationale for linking over-schooling to identity challenges lies in the fundamental conflict between cognitive overload and holistic development. Over-schooling prioritizes academic achievement at the expense of emotional, social, and cultural growth, creating barriers to healthy identity formation. By contrast, a holistic approach supports children's overall well-being, enabling them to develop a strong and positive sense of self. Integrating guidance and counseling into teacher education is a critical step toward addressing these challenges, ensuring that educators are equipped to nurture children's full potential and mitigate the adverse effects of over-schooling. In Nigeria, over-schooling reflects a complex interplay of cultural pressures, societal competition, and parental aspirations. While the intention behind these practices is often to prepare children for success, the imbalance between academic rigor and holistic development poses significant risks to identity formation in early childhood. Understanding the cultural and developmental contexts of over-schooling is essential for addressing its adverse effects.

Objectives of the Work

To address these gaps, the work articulates four key objectives through targeted research questions. The first objective is to explore how over-schooling impacts identity formation among young children in multicultural contexts like Nigeria and to understand the role of cultural traditions and societal expectations in shaping this process. This objective seeks to uncover the nuanced relationship between academic pressure, cultural

influences, and identity development, particularly in settings where communal values and individual autonomy may conflict.

The second objective is to identify strategies that can be implemented in teacher education programs to equip educators with the skills needed to integrate guidance and counseling practices that counteract the negative effects of over-schooling. This objective focuses on designing training methods and curricula that enable teachers to address the socio-emotional needs of children while maintaining academic standards, ensuring a balanced approach to learning.

The third objective is to investigate the systemic changes required at the policy and institutional levels to reduce the prevalence of over-schooling and promote holistic child development in early childhood education. This objective aims to explore how educational policies, school structures, and community engagement can be reformed to create environments that prioritize emotional, social, and cognitive growth alongside academic achievement.

Finally, the fourth objective is to examine how guidance and counseling professionals can collaborate with parents, educators, and communities to shift societal attitudes toward education and emphasize the importance of holistic development over academic achievement alone. This objective addresses the need for collaborative efforts to challenge cultural pressures and societal norms that prioritize success in exams and grades at the expense of children's overall well-being.

By addressing these objectives, the work aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of over-schooling and its impact on identity formation in early childhood. It also seeks to offer practical solutions for educators, policymakers, and communities to create supportive environments that respect children's developmental needs and cultural diversity, ultimately fostering a generation of confident, resilient, and culturally grounded individuals.

Research Questions

To address the identified challenges and gaps in knowledge, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How does over-schooling impact identity formation among young children in multicultural contexts like Nigeria, and what role do cultural traditions and societal expectations play in shaping this process?
2. What strategies can be implemented in teacher education programs to equip educators with the skills to integrate guidance and counseling practices that mitigate the negative effects of over-schooling?
3. What systemic changes are needed at the policy and institutional levels to reduce the prevalence of over-schooling and promote holistic child development in early childhood education?
4. How can guidance and counseling professionals collaborate with parents, educators, and communities to shift societal attitudes toward education and emphasize the importance of holistic development over academic achievement alone?

Theoretical Frameworks

The exploration of over-schooling and its impact on identity formation in early childhood necessitates a robust theoretical foundation that integrates educational psychology, identity development models, and the role of guidance and counseling (G&C). These frameworks provide insights into how educators can balance academic rigor with socio-emotional growth, understand

identity formation within multicultural contexts, and leverage G&C to mitigate the adverse effects of over-schooling (Sweller, 2021; Erikson, as cited in Newman & Newman, 2020).

A. Educational Psychology: Balancing Academic Rigor with Socio-Emotional Development

Educational psychology offers critical perspectives on how children learn and develop, emphasizing the importance of balancing cognitive demands with socio-emotional needs. This balance is particularly relevant when addressing the phenomenon of over-schooling, which often prioritizes academic achievement at the expense of holistic development.

Cognitive load theory posits that learners have limited working memory capacity, and excessive demands on this capacity can hinder learning and retention (Sweller, 2021). In the context of over-schooling, young children are frequently subjected to overwhelming workloads, rigid schedules, and high-stakes assessments, all of which exceed their cognitive thresholds. This cognitive overload not only impedes academic performance but also detracts from opportunities for emotional regulation, social interaction, and creative exploration—key components of socio-emotional development. For instance, a child who spends long hours memorizing facts or completing worksheets may lack the mental bandwidth to engage in self-reflection, empathy-building, or problem-solving. As a result, their ability to form a coherent and positive identity is compromised. Educational psychologists advocate for age-appropriate curricula that align with children's developmental stages, ensuring that academic rigor does not overshadow socio-emotional growth (Goswami, 2021).

Attachment theory highlights the importance of secure relationships in fostering emotional well-being and resilience. According to Bowlby (as cited in Newman & Newman, 2020), children who experience consistent support and nurturing from caregivers and educators are more likely to develop a strong sense of self-worth and emotional stability. However, over-schooling often disrupts these supportive relationships by placing undue stress on both children and parents. For example, parents who prioritize academic success may inadvertently neglect their children's emotional needs, leading to feelings of inadequacy or insecurity. Teachers trained in educational psychology can help bridge this gap by creating classroom environments that emphasize emotional safety, trust, and collaboration. By fostering secure attachments, educators enable children to explore their identities without fear of judgment or failure (Newman & Newman, 2020).

Social learning theory underscores the role of observation, imitation, and reinforcement in shaping behavior and identity. Children learn valuable social skills—such as cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution—through interactions with peers and adults (Bandura, 2020). Over-schooling, however, limits opportunities for unstructured play and peer engagement, depriving children of essential social experiences. To address this imbalance, educational psychologists recommend incorporating collaborative activities, group projects, and cooperative learning strategies into the curriculum. These approaches not only enhance academic outcomes but also promote prosocial behaviors and a sense of belonging, both of which are integral to identity formation (Bandura, 2020).

B. Identity Development Models in Multicultural Contexts

Identity development models provide a framework for understanding how children navigate the complex interplay of personal, cultural, and societal influences during early childhood. These models are particularly relevant in multicultural contexts

like Nigeria, where diverse ethnicities, languages, and traditions shape children's identities.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory identifies eight stages of human development, each characterized by a central crisis that must be resolved. In early childhood (ages 2–8), the initiative vs. guilt stage plays a pivotal role in identity formation. During this period, children explore their environment, take initiative in activities, and develop a sense of purpose. However, excessive control or criticism—common in over-schooled environments—can lead to feelings of guilt and hinder identity development (Newman & Newman, 2020). In multicultural contexts, Erikson's model can be adapted to account for cultural nuances. For example, Nigerian children may experience tension between individual initiative and communal values, as many cultures emphasize collective responsibility over personal autonomy. Educators must recognize these dynamics and create spaces where children can assert their independence while respecting cultural norms (Okeke, 2021).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive lens for examining how various environmental layers influence identity formation. These layers include the microsystem (family, school), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (community, policies), and macrosystem (cultural values, societal norms) (Smith, 2021). In Nigeria, over-schooling disrupts the balance between these systems by placing disproportionate emphasis on academic achievement. For instance, children may struggle to reconcile parental expectations (microsystem) with societal pressures (macrosystem), leading to confusion about their roles and identities. By addressing these systemic imbalances, educators can foster environments that respect children's cultural backgrounds and developmental needs (Smith, 2021).

James Marcia's identity status model builds on Erikson's work by identifying four identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. While this model is typically applied to adolescence, its principles can inform early childhood education by highlighting the importance of exploration and commitment. Over-schooled children often face foreclosure—a premature adoption of roles or values imposed by others—due to the lack of opportunities for self-discovery (Okeke, 2021). In multicultural settings, Marcia's model underscores the need for educators to encourage exploration while honoring cultural traditions. For example, teachers can integrate storytelling, music, and traditional games into the curriculum, allowing children to connect with their heritage and make informed choices about their identities (Ogunyemi, 2021).

C. Role of Guidance and Counseling (G&C) in Mitigating Over-Schooling: Empowerment vs. Remediation

Guidance and counseling (G&C) play a dual role in addressing the challenges posed by over-schooling: empowerment and remediation. While empowerment focuses on equipping children with the tools to navigate their developmental journey, remediation addresses the negative consequences of over-schooling. G&C empowers children by promoting holistic development, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. Counselors and educators trained in G&C can design interventions that balance academic rigor with socio-emotional support. For example, incorporating mindfulness exercises can reduce stress and enhance focus, while art therapy encourages self-expression and creativity. Facilitating peer mentoring programs helps build confidence and leadership skills (Eze, 2021). These strategies empower children to take ownership of their learning and identity formation, fostering resilience and adaptability. By shifting the

focus from external validation to intrinsic motivation, G&C helps children develop a stable and positive sense of self.

Over-schooling often leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, and burnout, requiring targeted remediation efforts. G&C professionals can intervene by providing individual or group counseling sessions to address emotional challenges, teaching stress management techniques such as deep breathing and visualization, and collaborating with parents and teachers to create supportive environments (Ogunyemi, 2021). For example, in Nigeria, counselors can organize workshops for parents on the importance of balanced approaches to education, helping them recognize the value of play and cultural engagement. Similarly, teachers can use restorative practices to resolve conflicts and rebuild trust, enabling children to recover from the negative effects of over-schooling.

Beyond individual interventions, G&C professionals can advocate for systemic changes that address the root causes of over-schooling. This includes lobbying for policies that limit standardized testing in early childhood, promote outdoor play, and allocate funding for mental health services in schools. By raising awareness about the importance of holistic development, G&C practitioners can influence broader societal attitudes toward education (Eze, 2021).

Gaps in Knowledge

The exploration of over-schooling and its impact on identity formation in early childhood reveals several gaps in the existing body of knowledge. First, there is limited understanding of how over-schooling affects identity formation within multicultural contexts like Nigeria, where diverse ethnicities, languages, and traditions shape children's sense of self. While over-schooling is acknowledged as a growing concern, its intersection with cultural values, societal norms, and communal expectations remains underexplored, particularly in early childhood. Second, there is insufficient integration of guidance and counseling (G&C) into teacher education programs to address the adverse effects of over-schooling. Although G&C is highlighted as a critical tool for mitigating these effects, there is a lack of clarity on how educators can be effectively trained to balance academic rigor with socio-emotional development in culturally sensitive ways. Third, current efforts to address over-schooling often focus on individual interventions, such as counseling or parental workshops, but systemic approaches to mitigate the phenomenon are lacking. There is a need for research that examines how policies, institutional frameworks, and community engagement can be restructured to promote holistic child development and reduce the prevalence of over-schooling.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to explore the perspectives of Nigerian teacher educators on the impact of over-schooling and the role of guidance and counseling (G&C) in early childhood education. The descriptive survey method was chosen because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to describe participants' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions regarding the research topic (Oyedepi, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This design is particularly suitable for addressing the research questions, which aim to understand how over-schooling affects identity formation, the challenges posed by cultural pressures, and the strategies proposed for integrating G&C into teacher education programs to foster holistic development.

The study focused on teacher educators who participated in a national conference on effective early childhood education in

Nigeria. These individuals were selected due to their critical role in shaping educational practices, particularly in the context of early childhood development. By using this research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of over-schooling and its implications for identity formation from the perspective of key stakeholders.

Participants

The target population for this study comprised teacher educators in Nigerian universities and colleges of education who are directly involved in programs related to early childhood education and curriculum development. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on their professional roles and expertise in shaping educational practices. This non-probability sampling method ensured that the sample included individuals with relevant experience and knowledge about the research topic.

A total of 400 teacher educators participated in the study, consisting of 215 males and 185 females, ensuring balanced gender representation. The participants were drawn from various higher education institutions across Nigeria, reflecting diverse geographic and institutional contexts. This diversity enhanced the generalizability of the findings while maintaining a focus on the specific challenges and opportunities within the Nigerian education system. Additionally, participants included lecturers who specialize in guidance and counseling, educational psychology, and multicultural education, providing a multidisciplinary perspective on the issue of over-schooling.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Both tools were developed by the researchers and validated by experts in the fields of educational assessment, curriculum studies, and holistic learning. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into the final versions of the instruments to ensure their relevance and accuracy. The questionnaire, titled "Teacher Educators' Perceptions on Over-Schooling and Guidance and Counseling in Early Childhood Education (TEP-OSGCE)," consisted of 20 items organized into five sections corresponding to the research questions. Section A focused on the impact of over-schooling on identity formation, Section B explored cultural pressures and societal expectations, Section C examined strategies for integrating G&C into teacher education, Section D investigated systemic changes needed to reduce over-schooling, and Section E addressed collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and communities. Responses were measured using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD).

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. The interviews allowed for open-ended discussions on topics such as the role of cultural traditions in shaping identity, the challenges of balancing academic rigor with socio-emotional development, and the potential of G&C to address the adverse effects of over-schooling.

Data collection took place during a national conference on effective early childhood education in Nigeria, attended by teacher educators from various higher education institutions across the country. Two trained research assistants facilitated the distribution and collection of questionnaires to ensure a high response rate and completeness. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, guaranteeing confidentiality, and adhering to the principle of non-maleficence to prevent any harm to participants.

The reliability of the research instrument was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency. This high reliability score ensures that the instrument accurately measures the constructs under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, to summarize participants' responses. Items with a mean score of 2.50 or higher were considered acceptable, while those below 2.50 were flagged as areas needing attention. This threshold was chosen to identify consensus among participants and highlight areas where further intervention may be required.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. Themes were identified based on recurring patterns and key insights related to

the research questions. For example, themes such as "cultural influences on identity formation," "challenges of over-schooling," and "strategies for integrating G&C" emerged from the data. These themes were then cross-referenced with the quantitative findings to provide a more nuanced understanding of the research problem. By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and multi-dimensional perspective on the impact of over-schooling and the role of G&C in early childhood education in Nigeria.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in four tables, each addressing a specific aspect of teacher educators’ perceptions regarding over-schooling, identity formation, and the role of guidance and counseling (G&C) in early childhood education. Below are the tables, their data, and brief discussions

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators’ Perceptions of Over-Schooling’s Impact on Identity Formation

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MALE EDUCATORS		REM	FEMALE EDUCATORS		REM
		X	SD		X	SD	
1	Over-schooling limits children’s opportunities for self-exploration and identity development.	3.80	0.75	Accept	3.85	0.72	Accept
2	Excessive academic pressure leads to stress and anxiety, hindering identity formation.	3.70	0.70	Accept	3.65	0.68	Accept
3	Over-schooling weakens children’s connection to cultural traditions and values.	3.65	0.68	Accept	3.70	0.65	Accept
4	Over-schooling prioritizes academic achievement at the expense of emotional and social growth.	3.85	0.80	Accept	3.90	0.78	Accept
5	Children subjected to over-schooling struggle with low self-esteem and confusion about identity.	3.50	0.65	Accept	3.55	0.63	Accept
Sum Avera ge		3.70	0.72	Accept	3.73	0.69	Accept

Table 1, high lights that both male and female teacher educators perceive over-schooling as detrimental to identity formation in early childhood. High mean scores indicate agreement that over-schooling limits self-exploration, causes stress, and weakens cultural connections. The slightly lower scores for items related to low self-esteem suggest that while educators recognize these

issues, they may not view them as the most critical consequences of over-schooling. Overall, the findings underscore the need to address over-schooling to support holistic identity development.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators’ Challenges in Addressing Over-Schooling

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MALE EDUCATORS		REM	FEMALE EDUCATORS		REM
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S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MALE EDUCATORS		REM	FEMALE EDUCATORS		REM
		X	SD		X	SD	
6	Large class sizes make it difficult to address the effects of over-schooling.	3.80	0.85	Accept	3.85	0.82	Accept
7	Lack of resources hinders efforts to integrate G&C practices into early childhood education.	3.70	0.80	Accept	3.75	0.78	Accept
8	Teachers are not adequately trained to mitigate the adverse effects of over-schooling.	3.60	0.75	Accept	3.65	0.73	Accept
9	Parental pressure for academic success exacerbates the prevalence of over-schooling.	3.50	0.70	Accept	3.55	0.68	Accept
10	Current educational policies do not support systemic changes to reduce over-schooling.	2.30	0.45	Reject	2.35	0.50	Reject
Sum Average		3.38	0.71	Accept	3.41	0.70	Accept

Table 2 reveals significant challenges faced by teacher educators in addressing over-schooling, including large class sizes, resource limitations, and inadequate training. However, Item 10 ("Current educational policies do not support systemic changes") was rejected, indicating that educators believe policy reform is possible if other barriers are addressed. The findings emphasize the need for

targeted interventions, such as improved teacher training and resource allocation, to create supportive environments for children.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Strategies for Mitigating Over-Schooling through Guidance and Counseling

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MALE EDUCATORS		REM	FEMALE EDUCATORS		REM
		X	SD		X	SD	
11	Incorporating mindfulness exercises can reduce stress caused by over-schooling.	3.85	0.80	Accept	3.90	0.78	Accept
12	Art therapy and creative activities can help children express themselves and build confidence.	3.75	0.75	Accept	3.80	0.73	Accept
13	Teacher training programs should include G&C strategies to address over-schooling.	3.70	0.70	Accept	3.75	0.68	Accept
14	Reducing academic workloads would allow more time for play and socio-emotional development.	2.20	0.40	Reject	2.25	0.45	Reject
15	Schools should adopt flexible curricula that balance academics with socio-emotional learning.	3.65	0.68	Accept	3.70	0.65	Accept
Sum Average		3.43	0.67	Accept	3.48	0.66	Accept

Table 3 shows that teacher educators propose practical strategies to mitigate over-schooling through G&C, such as mindfulness exercises, art therapy, and improved teacher training. However, Item 14 ("Reducing academic workloads") was rejected,

suggesting reluctance to reduce academic demands due to societal and parental expectations. The findings highlight the potential of G&C to empower children and promote holistic development without compromising academic rigor.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Teacher Educators' Perspectives on Gender Differences in Addressing Over-Schooling

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MALE EDUCATORS		REM	FEMALE EDUCATORS		REM
		X	SD		X	SD	
16	Male and female teacher educators have different perspectives on addressing over-schooling.	2.80	0.60	Accept	2.85	0.65	Accept
17	Female teacher educators prioritize holistic learning more than their male counterparts.	3.10	0.65	Accept	3.15	0.70	Accept
18	Male teacher educators focus more on academic achievement than holistic development.	2.30	0.45	Reject	2.35	0.50	Reject
19	Gender does not significantly influence perspectives on addressing over-schooling.	2.10	0.35	Reject	2.15	0.40	Reject
20	Female teacher educators face more societal pressure to conform to traditional roles in education.	3.00	0.70	Accept	3.05	0.75	Accept
Sum Average		2.66	0.55	Accept	2.71	0.60	Accept

Table 4 indicates that while some gender differences exist in addressing over-schooling, they are not statistically significant. Items 18 and 19 were rejected, suggesting that educators do not perceive gender as a major factor influencing priorities in education. However, female educators scored higher on items related to prioritizing holistic learning and facing societal pressures, indicating a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in educational contexts.

Discussion

Over-schooling in Nigeria has emerged as a critical issue, reflecting the tension between societal expectations and the developmental needs of young children. This phenomenon not only disrupts identity formation but also highlights significant challenges in early childhood education, including large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate teacher training. The findings presented in the tables provide valuable insights into how over-schooling impacts identity formation, the challenges educators face, proposed strategies for mitigation, and nuanced gender dynamics in addressing these issues.

The findings in Table 1 reveal a strong consensus among both male and female teacher educators regarding the negative impact of over-schooling on identity formation in early childhood. The high mean scores for items such as "Over-schooling limits children's opportunities for self-exploration and identity development" (3.80 for males, 3.85 for females) and "Excessive academic pressure leads to stress and anxiety, hindering identity formation" (3.70 for males, 3.65 for females) align with Adeyemo's (2020) argument that over-schooling disrupts natural identity formation processes by creating cognitive overload and emotional strain. Similarly, the perception that over-schooling weakens children's connection to cultural traditions and values (mean scores of 3.65 for males and

3.70 for females) resonates with Okeke's (2021) assertion that limited exposure to cultural practices diminishes children's ability to integrate their heritage into their identities.

The slightly lower scores for items related to low self-esteem and confusion about identity (mean scores of 3.50 for males and 3.55 for females) suggest that while educators recognize these issues, they may not view them as the most immediate consequences of over-schooling. This finding is consistent with Erikson's psychosocial theory, which emphasizes the importance of initiative versus guilt during early childhood (Newman & Newman, 2020). Excessive academic control can lead to feelings of guilt, but educators may perceive this as less critical compared to other developmental challenges. Overall, the findings underscore the need for systemic interventions to address over-schooling and support holistic identity development, echoing calls from Ogunyemi (2021) and Eze (2021) for balanced approaches to education.

Table 2 highlights significant challenges faced by teacher educators in mitigating the effects of over-schooling, particularly large class sizes, lack of resources, and inadequate training. For instance, the statement "Large class sizes make it difficult to address the effects of over-schooling" received high mean scores of 3.80 for males and 3.85 for females, reflecting Goswami's (2021) emphasis on the cognitive and emotional demands placed on young learners when individualized attention is lacking. Similarly, the item "Lack of resources hinders efforts to integrate G&C practices into early childhood education" (mean scores of 3.70 for males and 3.75 for females) aligns with Sweller's (2021) cognitive load theory, which underscores the importance of age-appropriate curricula and supportive learning environments. Interestingly, Item 10—"Current educational policies do not support systemic changes to reduce over-schooling"—was rejected by both groups, indicating

a belief that policy reform is possible if other barriers are addressed. This finding contrasts with Okafor and Okoro's (2022) observation that systemic pressures perpetuate over-schooling, suggesting that educators see room for optimism despite existing challenges. The overall findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions, including improved teacher training and resource allocation, to create supportive environments for children—a perspective echoed by Eze (2021), who advocates for integrating mindfulness and creative activities into curricula to mitigate stress.

The strategies proposed in Table 3 reflect a pragmatic approach to addressing over-schooling through guidance and counseling (G&C). Items such as "Incorporating mindfulness exercises can reduce stress caused by over-schooling" (mean scores of 3.85 for males and 3.90 for females) and "Art therapy and creative activities can help children express themselves and build confidence" (mean scores of 3.75 for males and 3.80 for females) align with Eze's (2021) recommendations for empowering children through holistic development. These strategies emphasize the importance of emotional well-being and self-expression, which are critical components of identity formation according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Smith, 2021). However, the rejection of Item 14—"Reducing academic workloads would allow more time for play and socio-emotional development"—highlights the tension between societal expectations and developmental needs. This reluctance to reduce academic demands reflects Okeke's (2021) observation that cultural pressures prioritize academic achievement over holistic growth. Despite this, the acceptance of Item 15—"Schools should adopt flexible curricula that balance academics with socio-emotional learning"—suggests that educators are open to innovative solutions that integrate both domains. These findings underscore the potential of G&C to empower children and promote holistic development without compromising academic rigor, a view supported by Ogunyemi (2021).

Table 4 reveals nuanced gender dynamics in addressing over-schooling, though the differences are not statistically significant. The acceptance of Item 17—"Female teacher educators prioritize holistic learning more than their male counterparts" (mean scores of 3.10 for males and 3.15 for females)—aligns with traditional gender roles discussed by Ogunyemi (2021), where women are often seen as nurturers and caregivers. This perception may explain why female educators score higher on items related to prioritizing holistic learning.

Conversely, the rejection of Item 18—"Male teacher educators focus more on academic achievement than holistic development" (mean scores of 2.30 for males and 2.35 for females)—suggests that educators do not perceive gender as a major factor influencing priorities in education. This finding challenges stereotypes and supports the broader theoretical framework of Marcia's identity status model (Okeke, 2021), which emphasizes exploration and commitment over rigid role assignments. Additionally, the acceptance of Item 20—"Female teacher educators face more societal pressure to conform to traditional roles in education" (mean scores of 3.00 for males and 3.05 for females)—underscores the persistent influence of cultural norms on professional practices, a theme highlighted by Adewale (2022) in discussions of Nigeria's ethnic diversity and communal values.

Overall, the findings indicate that while some gender differences exist, they are subtle and context-dependent. This reinforces the need for collaborative efforts among all stakeholders—regardless of gender—to address over-schooling and promote holistic child development, as advocated by Eze (2021) and Ogunyemi (2021).

Conclusion

The exploration of over-schooling and its impact on identity formation in early childhood reveals a complex interplay of cultural pressures, educational practices, and developmental needs. Over-schooling, characterized by excessive academic workloads and rigid schedules, disrupts the natural processes of identity formation by limiting opportunities for self-exploration, causing stress, and weakening connections to cultural traditions. As highlighted in Table 1, both male and female teacher educators perceive these consequences as significant barriers to holistic development, emphasizing the need for systemic interventions to support children's emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Adeyemo (2020) and Okeke (2021) underscore this urgency, arguing that over-schooling creates cognitive overload and diminishes intrinsic motivation, ultimately hindering identity formation.

The challenges of addressing over-schooling, as outlined in Table 2, include large class sizes, resource limitations, and inadequate training for educators. Despite these obstacles, the rejection of Item 10 suggests optimism regarding policy reform if other barriers are mitigated. This finding aligns with Sweller's (2021) cognitive load theory, which advocates for age-appropriate curricula and supportive learning environments. Moreover, the emphasis on improving teacher training and resource allocation reflects calls from Eze (2021) and Ogunyemi (2021) for balanced approaches to education that prioritize socio-emotional development alongside academic rigor.

Proposed strategies for mitigating over-schooling through guidance and counseling (G&C), as shown in Table 3, highlight the potential of mindfulness exercises, art therapy, and flexible curricula to empower children and promote holistic development. However, the reluctance to reduce academic workloads underscores the persistent influence of societal and parental expectations, as noted by Okafor and Okoro (2022). These findings reinforce the importance of integrating G&C into teacher education programs to equip educators with the skills needed to balance academic demands with socio-emotional support, fostering resilience and adaptability in children.

Finally, Table 4 reveals nuanced gender dynamics in addressing over-schooling, though differences are subtle and context-dependent. Female educators score higher on items related to prioritizing holistic learning and facing societal pressures, reflecting traditional gender roles discussed by Ogunyemi (2021). However, the rejection of Items 18 and 19 indicates that educators do not view gender as a major factor influencing educational priorities. This perspective supports Marcia's identity status model, which emphasizes exploration and commitment over rigid role assignments.

In conclusion, addressing over-schooling requires a multifaceted approach that integrates theoretical frameworks, practical strategies, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders. Educational psychology provides insights into balancing cognitive demands with socio-emotional growth, while identity development models offer guidance on navigating personal and cultural influences. G&C plays a dual role in empowering children and remediating the adverse effects of over-schooling, ensuring that they develop strong, cohesive identities. By advocating for systemic changes—such as limiting standardized testing, promoting outdoor play, and allocating funding for mental health services—G&C professionals can influence broader societal attitudes toward education. Ultimately, fostering a generation of confident, resilient, and culturally grounded individuals necessitates creating supportive environments that respect

children's developmental needs and cultural diversity. Through targeted interventions and policy reforms, Nigeria can address the root causes of over-schooling and promote holistic child development, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, five specific recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Early childhood curriculum developers should limit standardized testing in early childhood to reduce academic pressure and create space for play and exploration.
- 2) Relevant teacher education authority should integrate G&C training into teacher education programmes, equipping educators with skills to address socio-emotional needs.
- 3) Promote flexible curricula that balance academics with cultural engagement and socio-emotional learning.
- 4) Government should allocate funding for mental health services in schools to support children affected by over-schooling.
- 5) Government should foster collaborative efforts between parents, educators, and communities to shift societal attitudes toward holistic development.

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