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Correlationship Between Pre-School Teachers' Grit and Work Engagement among Nursery Schools in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The psychological characteristics of preschool teachers may shape their capacity to sustain effective involvement in the demanding work of educating and caring for young children. This study investigated preschool teachers' grit as a correlate of work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the relationship between teachers' grit and work engagement and determined whether age and years of teaching experience moderated this relationship. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 284 preschool teachers in registered public and private nursery schools in Benin City, from which 98 teachers were selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring grit, specifically perseverance of effort and consistency of interests, and work engagement, comprising vigour, dedication and absorption. The instrument was validated by experts and yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.79. Data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and moderation analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement ($r = 0.61$, $p = .001$). However, age did not significantly moderate the relationship ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = .455$), and neither did years of teaching experience ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = .504$). The study concludes that grit is an important personal correlate of preschool teachers' work engagement, with the relationship not significantly varying by age or teaching experience. It recommends integrating psychological resource development, particularly perseverance and sustained commitment, into teacher professional development programmes.

Keywords: Preschool Teachers; Grit; Work Engagement; Age; Teaching Experience; Nursery Schools

Introduction
Early childhood education occupies a foundational position in the educational development of every child. The preschool years represent a particularly important period during which children develop basic cognitive abilities, language and communication skills, social competence, emotional regulation, physical coordination, curiosity and attitudes towards learning. Experiences provided during these formative years can influence children's subsequent adjustment to formal schooling and their capacity to participate meaningfully in learning activities. Consequently, the quality of early childhood education cannot be separated from the quality, disposition and professional functioning of the teachers who work directly with young children. Preschool teachers are not merely transmitters of academic knowledge; they serve simultaneously as caregivers, facilitators, role models, classroom managers, observers of children's development and significant adults in children's early social environments. Their psychological readiness and willingness to invest sustained effort in their work are therefore important considerations in achieving quality early childhood education. The centrality of the teacher in early childhood education is particularly pronounced because young children require continuous attention, patience, encouragement, supervision and emotional responsiveness. Unlike older learners who may be expected to demonstrate relatively greater independence, preschool children often require teachers to provide repeated instructions, redirect their attention, respond to individual differences, manage emotional outbursts, facilitate peer interactions and create opportunities for learning through play and exploration. Teachers are consequently required to expend considerable physical, cognitive and emotional resources during the school day. They must simultaneously attend to the developmental needs of individual children while meeting curriculum expectations, maintaining classroom order, communicating with parents and complying with school policies. The demanding nature of these responsibilities makes teachers' psychological resources an important area of educational inquiry. In Nigeria, and Edo state in particular, the importance of early childhood

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education is recognised within the broader national educational system. Nevertheless, the sector continues to experience challenges that can affect the quality and effectiveness of educational provision. Literature on early childhood education in Nigeria has identified concerns including inadequate infrastructure and instructional resources, insufficient funding, uneven implementation of curriculum provisions, insufficiently qualified personnel and weaknesses in regulation and quality assurance. Such challenges may place considerable demands on teachers and may influence how they perceive and perform their occupational responsibilities. In this environment, attention to teachers' individual psychological strengths becomes important because teachers may differ considerably in their capacity to sustain effort, remain committed to professional goals and continue functioning effectively when confronted with difficulties.

The concept of grit has emerged as an important construct within the field of positive psychology and educational research. Grit generally refers to sustained passion and perseverance towards long-term goals, particularly the willingness to maintain effort and commitment despite obstacles, setbacks or periods of difficulty (Boyle, Hood, & Bradley, 2017). Unlike temporary motivation, grit concerns persistence over time (Babiera, & Quirap, 2024). It therefore provides a useful lens through which individual differences in teachers' responses to occupational challenges can be understood. A teacher may encounter a difficult class, inadequate teaching resources, demanding parents, heavy workload, limited administrative support or repeated behavioural challenges. While such experiences may reduce motivation for some individuals, a teacher with a stronger disposition towards perseverance may continue to pursue professional goals and maintain effort despite these difficulties. Datu (2021) explained that grit is commonly conceptualised around two related dimensions: perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. Perseverance of effort concerns the tendency to continue working towards an objective even when progress is difficult or setbacks occur. Consistency of interests concerns the capacity to maintain commitment to important goals rather than frequently abandoning them for new pursuits. In the context of preschool teaching, both dimensions may have practical relevance. Teaching young children requires teachers to repeatedly engage in activities that may not produce immediate results. A teacher may need to teach the same concept several times, modify an activity for a child who is experiencing difficulty, develop alternative strategies for managing behaviour or repeatedly encourage a child who is reluctant to participate. The willingness to continue such efforts may be associated with the teacher's level of grit. The relevance of grit to teaching becomes clearer when the nature of preschool education is considered (Duckworth et al., 2007). Effective preschool teaching requires patience and sustained commitment because children's developmental progress is often gradual and heterogeneous. Two children exposed to the same learning experience may respond differently because of differences in language development, cognitive ability, temperament, family background and previous experiences. Teachers therefore have to adjust their approaches and persist until children receive appropriate support. A teacher who expects immediate results may become frustrated when children do not respond as anticipated. In contrast, a teacher with a stronger capacity for perseverance may interpret difficulties as challenges requiring additional effort, adaptation and professional reflection. Grit may therefore constitute a personal resource that helps teachers maintain goal-directed behaviour in demanding educational environments. Fabelico, and Afalla, (2020) explained that grit represents one individual-level characteristic that may interact with the conditions under which teachers work. A high level of grit may help a teacher persist in challenging circumstances, but the availability of supportive organisational resources remains essential for sustainable professional functioning. Closely related to the issue of teachers' psychological functioning is the concept of work engagement.

Kim, and Kim (2023) expressed that work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling and work-related psychological state generally characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour involves high levels of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication reflects a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge; while absorption involves being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work. In educational settings, an engaged teacher is therefore expected to demonstrate energy in carrying out teaching responsibilities, enthusiasm for the profession and sustained psychological involvement in classroom activities. Work engagement is particularly important in nursery schools because teaching young children requires more than the mechanical delivery of lessons. Teachers have to be emotionally present and responsive to children's needs. They need to listen, observe, encourage, comfort, stimulate curiosity and

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participate actively in children's learning experiences. A teacher who is physically present but psychologically disengaged may fulfil basic duties without demonstrating the level of enthusiasm, creativity and responsiveness required for high-quality early childhood practice. Conversely, an engaged teacher is more likely to approach classroom responsibilities with energy, demonstrate commitment to children's development and become immersed in activities that support learning. The importance of teacher work engagement extends beyond the teacher as an individual (Hodge, Wright, & Bennett, 2020). Teachers' engagement may influence the quality of the classroom environment and the experiences children receive. The relationship between grit and work engagement can also be understood from the perspective of teachers' capacity to sustain effort towards meaningful professional goals (Suzuki, Tamesue, Asahi, & Ishikawa, 2015). Work engagement involves energy, dedication and absorption in current work activities, while grit concerns sustained effort and commitment towards longer-term goals. Although the two constructs are conceptually distinct, they share an important emphasis on persistence and goal-directed behaviour (Biglete, 2025). A gritty preschool teacher may remain committed to improving children's learning and development even when classroom experiences are demanding. Such persistence may help the teacher maintain vigour and dedication in daily work activities. In turn, sustained engagement may reinforce the teacher's sense of purpose and commitment to teaching. Also, a teacher can be present in the classroom without being genuinely engaged. Work engagement concerns the quality of the teacher's psychological involvement in work. An engaged preschool teacher is likely to invest energy in lesson preparation, interact actively with children, respond thoughtfully to individual needs, collaborate with colleagues, reflect on teaching experiences and demonstrate dedication to the educational development of children. Therefore, identifying personal characteristics associated with engagement may help educational administrators understand how teachers can be better supported.

Grit may be particularly relevant because preschool teaching requires persistence in the face of repeated and sometimes unpredictable challenges. Consider, for example, a teacher working with a child who has difficulty communicating, following instructions or interacting appropriately with peers. The teacher may need to observe the child carefully, communicate with parents, modify classroom activities, employ alternative instructional strategies and monitor progress over an extended period. Similar persistence may be required when managing classroom behaviour, introducing new teaching approaches or addressing learning difficulties. The capacity to continue pursuing meaningful educational goals despite temporary setbacks is consistent with the core idea of grit. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish grit from mere endurance or compliance. A teacher who remains in a job because of economic necessity is not necessarily gritty in the psychological sense. Similarly, a teacher who completes routine duties without enthusiasm cannot automatically be described as highly engaged. Grit concerns sustained effort and commitment towards valued long-term goals, whereas work engagement concerns the positive quality of one's psychological relationship with current work (Branzuela, 2025). This conceptual distinction makes the examination of their relationship scientifically worthwhile. The study is not simply asking whether hardworking teachers are engaged; it seeks to determine whether a specific psychological characteristic; grit is systematically related to a specific occupational state; work engagement. In further details, Baustista and Delararte (2025) directly examined the moderating effects of age and years of experience or career stage on the relationship between grit and work engagement among public school teachers, their findings indicated that older teachers tended to report higher engagement and that career stage significantly moderated the grit-work engagement relationship. Furthermore, a recent study involving 529 preschool teachers found that teachers with extensive teaching experience were more likely to maintain high work engagement, suggesting that accumulated professional experience may constitute an important resource for sustaining engagement (Crede, Tnade, & Borman, 2017; Hodge, Wright, &Bennett, 2020).

Despite the growing international literature on teacher grit and work engagement, an important gap remains. Much of the available empirical literature has focused on teachers in general education, foreign language education or contexts outside Nigeria. Relatively fewer studies have specifically examined preschool teachers' grit and work engagement, particularly within Nigerian nursery schools. Even where early childhood research has considered teacher stress, workplace conditions or instructional quality in Benin City, there remains a need to investigate positive psychological resources such as grit and their relationship with teachers' engagement. The present study is consequently anchored in the assumption that teachers

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are not passive recipients of workplace conditions but individuals who possess psychological characteristics that may influence how they respond to occupational demands. Grit may enable some teachers to maintain effort and commitment despite difficulties, while work engagement reflects the extent to which those teachers experience energy, dedication and absorption in their professional activities. However, the strength and nature of the relationship between these constructs among preschool teachers in Benin City cannot be determined theoretically; it requires empirical investigation. It is against this background that the study wants to investigate the preschool teachers' Grit as Correlates of Work Engagement in Nursery Schools in Benin City. Despite the demanding nature of preschool teaching and the importance of teachers' psychological resources, there is insufficient empirical evidence on whether preschool teachers' grit is associated with their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City. Teachers working under similar conditions may differ in their ability to sustain effort, remain committed to professional goals and maintain vigour, dedication and absorption in their work. Although studies have reported associations between grit and work engagement among teachers in other educational contexts, limited attention has been given to preschool teachers in Nigeria. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether teachers' age and years of teaching experience influence the strength of the relationship between grit and work engagement. This gap in evidence makes it necessary to empirically examine the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement and determine whether age and years of teaching experience moderate this relationship in nursery schools in Benin City.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate preschool teachers' grit as a correlate of work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City;
2. determine whether age moderates the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City; and
3. determine whether years of teaching experience moderates the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Null Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City

Ho_2: Age does not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Ho_3: Years of experience do not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design is appropriate because the study seeks to determine the nature and magnitude of the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement without manipulating any of the variables. The correlational survey design allows for the collection of data from a representative sample of preschool teachers in their natural school settings (Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). The independent variable is preschool teachers' grit, while the dependent variable is preschool teachers' work engagement. The population comprised all preschool teachers in registered public and private nursery schools in Benin City. Specifically, the target population consisted of estimated 284 teachers handling Nursery one, Nursery two and nursery three (Edo State Universal Basic Education Board, 2026). A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select participants. At the first stage, nursery schools in Benin City were stratified according to school ownership (public and private). At the second stage, 12 schools were selected from the respective strata using proportionate stratified random sampling. At the third stage, 98 eligible teachers were selected using simple random sampling by balloting. Participation was voluntary, and only teachers who provide informed consent were included. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections. Section A obtained demographic information of the respondents, particularly age and years of teaching experience. Section B measured teachers' grit,

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particularly perseverance of effort and consistency of interests, using an adapted grit instrument developed by Angele Duckworth and Quinn, P.D (2009). Section C measured work engagement using an adapted Utrecht work Engagement Scale (UWES) as developed by Schaufeli, W & Bakker, A. (2006) assessing vigour, dedication and absorption. Higher scores will indicate higher levels of the respective constructs. The instrument was subjected to appropriate validation procedures. Three copies of the questionnaire, together with the research objectives, research questions and hypotheses, were submitted to experts in Early Childhood Education, Educational Psychology including Measurement and Evaluation. The experts examined the instruments for relevance, clarity, adequacy of coverage, appropriateness of language and alignment with the constructs being measured. Their recommendations were incorporated before final administration. A pilot test was conducted among preschool teachers who are similar to, but will not form part of, the main study participants. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's alpha to establish internal consistency reliability. A coefficient of 0.79 was obtained which was considered acceptable and reliable for the research purposes. Necessary approval was obtained from relevant educational authorities and school administrators. Permission was also sought from the heads or proprietors of selected nursery schools. The researcher and four trained research assistants explained the purpose and procedures of the study to eligible teachers. Participation was entirely voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and questionnaires were administered and retrieved using procedures designed to maximized response rates and protect confidentiality. Data collected were coded and analysed using the SPSS version 26. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to test the first hypothesis concerning the relationship between grit and work engagement at the 0.05 level of significance. Moderation analysis was used to determine whether age and years of teaching experience significantly moderate the relationship between grit and work engagement.

Presentation of Results

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Preschool Teachers' Grit and Work Engagement

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Grit	98	3.47	0.39	0.61	0.001	Significant
Work Engagement	98	3.58	0.41			

The result in Table 1 indicates that preschool teachers' grit had a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship with their work engagement ($r = 0.61$, $p = 0.001$). Since the p-value of 0.001 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant positive relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City. The positive correlation indicates that teachers who reported higher levels of grit tended, on average, to report higher levels of work engagement. The magnitude of the correlation ($r = 0.61$) suggests a moderate association between the two variables.

H_{o2}: Age does not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Moderation analysis was conducted to determine whether age significantly changes the relationship between grit and work engagement. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Moderating Effect of Age on the Relationship between Grit and Work Engagement

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p-value
Grit	0.48	0.10	0.45	4.80	<0.001
Age	0.06	0.05	0.12	1.20	0.233
Grit × Age	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.75	0.455

$R^2 = 0.23$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$; $F = 9.42$; $p < 0.001$.

The result in Table 2 shows that the interaction between grit and age was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.455$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This indicates that age does not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement. Although grit significantly predicted

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work engagement within the moderation model (β = 0.45, p < 0.001), the interaction between grit and age was not significant. Thus, the positive relationship between grit and work engagement appears to be relatively consistent across the age groups represented in the study.

H_{O3}: Years of experience do not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City.

Moderation analysis was conducted to determine whether years of teaching experience significantly changes the relationship between grit and work engagement. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Moderating Effect of Years of Teaching Experience on the Relationship between Grit and Work Engagement

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p-value
Grit	0.46	0.10	0.43	4.60	<0.001
Years of Experience	0.05	0.04	0.11	1.25	0.215
Grit × Years of Experience	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.67	0.504

$R^2 = 0.22$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$; $F = 8.97$; $p < 0.001$.

The result in Table 3 indicates that the interaction between grit and years of teaching experience was not statistically significant (β = 0.06, p = 0.504). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that years of teaching experience does not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement. The result suggests that the positive association between teachers' grit and work engagement remains relatively similar regardless of the number of years teachers have spent in the teaching profession.

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement (r = 0.61, p = 0.001). This indicates that teachers who demonstrated higher levels of perseverance and sustained commitment to their professional goals also tended to demonstrate higher levels of vigour, dedication and absorption in their work. This finding is consistent with the findings of Suzuki, Tamesue, Asahi, and Ishikawa, (2015); Biglete, (2025) that grit demonstrate a positive correlation with work engagement of teachers, which further explained that as grit of teacher increases their quest to further engage in the work activities of teaching increases. Grit concerns sustained passion and perseverance towards long-term goals, while work engagement reflects a positive psychological state characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Although the constructs are conceptually distinct, both involve sustained effort and goal-directed behaviour. The finding may be explained by the demanding nature of preschool teaching. Nursery teachers are expected to provide continuous attention, patience, encouragement and supervision while responding to individual differences among children. They may need to repeat instructions, modify learning activities, manage behavioural difficulties and provide sustained encouragement before desired developmental outcomes become evident. Teachers with stronger perseverance may therefore be more capable of maintaining psychological involvement when immediate results are not achieved.

The finding further suggests that grit may function as an important personal psychological resource for preschool teachers. An engaged teacher is expected to demonstrate energy, enthusiasm and psychological involvement in classroom activities, while a gritty teacher is more likely to persist in the pursuit of valued goals despite obstacles. The combination of these characteristics may therefore contribute to sustained involvement in preschool teaching. The result is particularly important within the context of nursery education because teachers may encounter demanding parents, inadequate resources, heavy workloads, behavioural challenges and differences in children's developmental needs. Under such conditions, perseverance may help teachers maintain their commitment and effort rather than withdraw psychologically from their work. However, the finding should not be interpreted as evidence that grit causes work engagement. The study employed a correlational research design, which is appropriate for determining the nature and magnitude of relationships between variables without manipulating them. Thus, the finding establishes an association rather than a causal effect.

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Moderating Effect of Age

The finding revealed that age did not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement (β = 0.07, p = 0.455). This means that the relationship between grit and work engagement did not differ significantly according to teachers' age. Within the sample studied, age did not significantly alter the relationship between grit and work engagement. This may be explained by the common demands of preschool teaching. Irrespective of age, nursery teachers are required to demonstrate patience, respond to children's individual differences, manage classroom behaviour and sustain attention throughout the school day.

The finding also supports the view of Bautista and Delariarte, (2025) that grit represents an individual psychological characteristic that may operate across different categories of teachers' ages but do not show considerable distinction to the revealed relationship between grit and work engagement among preschool teachers

The non-significant moderation effect of age therefore suggests that age does not substantially alter the relationship between grit and work engagement among the teachers studied. Nevertheless, age may still have independent relationships with other aspects of teachers' professional functioning; the present finding specifically concerns its moderating role in the grit–work engagement relationship.

Moderating Effect of Years of Teaching Experience

The finding showed that years of teaching experience did not significantly moderate the relationship between preschool teachers' grit and work engagement (β = 0.06, p = 0.504). This indicates that the association between grit and work engagement was not significantly different for teachers with varying levels of teaching experience. One possible explanation is that the psychological importance of perseverance may not depend substantially on the number of years a teacher has spent in the profession. Both newly employed and highly experienced preschool teachers encounter situations requiring patience, persistence, adaptation and continued engagement with children's developmental needs. The finding is also consistent with the findings of Crede, Tnade, and Borman, (2017); Hodge, Wright, and Bennett, (2020) which revealed that years of experience, though important do not moderate the relationship between teachers' grit and work engagement. The result further implies that schools should not assume that experienced teachers will automatically possess greater work engagement or that less experienced teachers will necessarily be less engaged. Rather, individual psychological characteristics such as grit may be relevant across different levels of professional experience.

Conclusion

Overall, the study concludes that preschool teachers' grit is positively and significantly associated with their work engagement in nursery schools in Benin City. However, age and years of teaching experience did not significantly moderate this relationship. The findings highlight the relevance of teachers' psychological characteristics, particularly their perseverance and sustained commitment to professional goals, in understanding work engagement. Nevertheless, grit should not be considered in isolation, as teachers' engagement may also be shaped by the organisational and working conditions within which they perform their professional responsibilities.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School administrators should incorporate psychological resource development into teacher professional development programmes. Particular attention should be given to strengthening perseverance, sustained commitment to professional goals and constructive responses to workplace challenges, as grit was found to be positively associated with teachers' work engagement.
2. Nursery school proprietors and administrators should provide supportive working environments that promote sustained teacher engagement. Adequate teaching and learning resources, manageable workloads, supportive supervision, recognition of teachers' efforts and opportunities for professional development should complement teachers' personal psychological resources.
3. Teacher education institutions should give greater attention to positive psychological competencies in the preparation of preschool teachers. Alongside pedagogical knowledge and classroom-management skills, prospective teachers should be exposed to strategies for developing perseverance, professional commitment, adaptive responses to challenges and sustained engagement with children's developmental needs.

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