

QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION: CHALLENGES OF OWNERSHIP AND FUNDING PRACTICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE IN EDO STATE

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Abstract - This paper investigates challenges of ownership and funding practices in early childhood centers in Edo State, Nigeria, and their impact on quality basic education. Quality basic education is essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it helps reduce poverty and inequalities, promotes gender equality, and empowers individuals to lead healthy and sustainable lives. The paper examines the concept of quality basic education, challenges of ownership, and funding practices in early childhood centers in Edo State, Nigeria. The paper reveals that ownership and funding practices influence quality basic education. The paper concludes that government regulation of private ownership and ensuring adequate funding access are crucial to improving quality basic education. It was concluded that quality basic education empowers individuals to live healthy and sustainable lives, and its success depends on various factors, including ownership and funding practices. This paper highlights the need for policymakers to address these challenges to ensure accessible and quality basic education for all.

Keywords: Quality basic education, funding practices, early childhood education centre

Introduction

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) defines Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE) as care, protection, stimulation, and learning for children aged 0-4 years in crèches or nurseries. ECCDE is a holistic education that enhances pupils' potential for future careers (Obidike, 2012) and prepares them for primary education. The Universal Basic Education Commission describes ECCDE as a care protection and stimulation center aimed at enhancing learning in children from zero to five years. Nigeria's intervention in early years learning and development is rooted in the national philosophy on education, emphasizing individual development into sound and effective citizens and equal educational opportunities for all (FRN, 2014). The Integrated Early Childhood Development Approach views young children's survival, growth, and development as inter-dependent, utilizing multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral interventions to promote good outcomes and support early learning, psycho-social development, and families and caregivers. Nigeria signed the Jomiten Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, committing to comprehensive Early Childhood Education and Care for all pre-

primary scholars (UNESCO, 1990). Although ECCDE is included in the National Policy on Education (1981, 1998, and 2004), the Federal government showed increased commitment with the 2004 Early Childhood Education Policy inauguration. To achieve ECCDE objectives, quality basic resources like qualified teachers, caregivers, and appropriate learning environments are essential (Adebayo, 2017). Adequate funding is necessary to provide these resources (World Bank, 2019). This paper explores challenges of ownership and funding practices in early childhood centers in Edo State for quality Basic Education, examining the concept of quality basic education, ownership challenges, funding practices, and providing conclusions and suggestions.

Concept of Quality Basic Education

Quality education is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects of the learning process. It empowers learners with the skills and knowledge necessary to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual well-being. Therefore, the concept of quality basic education refers to the fundamental level of education that provides individuals with the essential skills, knowledge, and values necessary for: personal development and growth; social integration and citizenship, economic productivity and employability and lifelong learning and adaptability. Basic Education typically includes literacy and numeracy skills, basic scientific knowledge and understanding, social studies and citizenship education and life skills and values education. It is the foundation upon which further education and learning are built, and is essential for individuals to thrive in their personal and professional lives. Some of the indices of quality basic education include the quality of the learner, school facilities, teachers' behaviors, curriculum content, life skills, teacher competence, visionary leadership, regular attendance, and family support. These are discussed as follows:

- The quality of the learner is crucial. This includes factors such as good health and nutrition, early childhood experiences, and home support. Learners who have access to healthcare, nutritious food, and clean water are better equipped to succeed academically. Positive early childhood experiences and supportive home environments also play a significant role in shaping learners' abilities and attitudes towards learning.

- Quality school facilities are essential. Safe and well-maintained buildings, access to technology and digital resources, and inclusive learning environments all contribute to a conducive learning atmosphere. Learners deserve to learn in environments that are free from harm and distraction, and that provide opportunities for exploration and discovery. School facilities should have safe buildings, access to technology, and inclusive learning environments (Hattie, 2012), creating safe environments, promoting social-emotional learning, and encouraging participation (Black & Wiliam, 2009).
- Teachers' behaviors and attitudes significantly impact the learning process. Teachers who create safe and supportive learning environments, promote social-emotional learning, and encourage active participation and engagement are more likely to inspire learners to reach their full potential.
- The curriculum content must be relevant, contextualized, and inclusive. Learners should be exposed to a range of subjects and topics that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Opportunities for hands-on learning and experimentation should also be provided to enhance learners' understanding and retention of concepts.
- Life skills such as psycho-social skills, interpersonal skills, and practical skills are essential for learners' success, psycho-social skills, interpersonal skills, and practical skills for everyday interactions and decision-making (Bandura, 2001). These skills enable learners to navigate everyday interactions, build positive relationships, and make informed decisions.
- Teacher competence is critical. Teachers should possess subject matter expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and effective classroom management skills. They should also be able to adapt to diverse learning needs and styles, and engage in ongoing professional development.
- Visionary leadership is necessary for implementing reforms and empowering college networks. Leaders should have a clear vision and goals for quality education, and should foster collaborative and inclusive relationships with teachers, learners, and the community.
- Regular attendance is crucial for learners' success. Consistent attendance and punctuality enable learners to keep pace with their peers, and opportunities for make-up work and support should be provided for learners who miss school.

- Family support is vital. Parents and guardians should be involved in learners' education, and should have access to resources and support for learning at home. Positive relationships between parents, teachers, and learners also contribute to a supportive learning environment.

Challenges of Ownership of Early Childhood Centre in Quality Basic Education

There is a strong variation in the share of public and private provision in the ECCE sector amongst countries. While some countries rely mostly on state-run provision, others favour networks of private settings more or less strictly framed by state regulations (OECD, 2017). In some countries, many privately managed settings are mostly publicly funded, while in other countries, privately managed settings rely mostly on fees from parents/guardians. In the case of Nigeria, Edo State in particular, the running of the ECCE was left solely in the hands of private both individual and organizational proprietors for a very long time. Private ECCE Centre especially when they require fees from parents/guardians, may concentrate children from similar socio-economic backgrounds in the same settings. In the United States, a study of selection in ECEC centres found that children who are from minority and low socio-economic backgrounds and rural families were less likely to enroll in private settings (Coley, Jenkins & Engle, 2014). Studies led in the Netherlands and the United States showed that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who attended preschool with a larger proportion of children from similar backgrounds displayed lower progress in language and literacy skills than similarly disadvantaged children in socio-economically mixed classrooms or playrooms (Schechter & Bye, 2007; De Haan, De Pauw & Peters, 2013). This study examines the impact of preschool attendance on the school career of disadvantaged children. The researchers found that: preschool attendance positively affects the school career of disadvantaged children; particularly in terms of language and literacy skills; children from low-income families and those with mothers having a lower educational level benefit more from preschool attendance; and preschool attendance reduces the risk of grade retention and special education placement. The study highlights the importance of early childhood education in supporting the development of disadvantaged children and promoting their future academic success. Some observation shown that lower

levels of staff emotional support and classroom/playroom management and control could explain this association

In the case of Nigeria, Edo State in focus, parents were not having choice as it was many private sector that were providing ECCE for a very long time. Thus, most parents could not afford to take their children through ECCE. Many ECEC centres may also aim to generate a profit. For-profit education settings raise controversial questions over their incentives and the quality of the services they offer.

In Canada and the United States, a study found that for-profit centres exhibited consistently lower quality due to differences in input choices (salaries, professional development, etc.), as compared to non-profit centres (King, Nazaruk & Dore (2016). This study explores the concept of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. The researchers argue that: quality ECEC is critical for children's learning, development, and well-being; an integrated approach to quality, considering both education and care, is essential; actors such as teacher qualifications, staff-child ratios, and family engagement contribute to quality ECEC; and policy and practice should prioritize an integrated approach to quality, supporting the diverse needs of children and families. The study emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive understanding of quality in ECEC, encompassing both educational and care aspects, to ensure optimal outcomes for children. However, these structural differences did not impact staff-child interactions in centres for children under age 3 in Portugal and the United States, contrary to what was found for children in pre-primary settings (Barros & Aguiar, 2010; King et al., 2016).

Challenges of Funding and its Practices in Early Childhood Centre

Fund needs to be given maximum consideration because it is very crucial for achieving success in any educational enterprise inclusive of ECCE Centre. In ECCE, adequate funds need to be made available for provision of resources and activities which include stimulating materials for teaching, training and re-training of staff (teachers and caregivers), enrichment and sensitization of programmes through regular workshops, monitoring, feeding, immunisation, supervision and inspection, report writing, publications, school meals and training manuals among others (Alabi & Ijaiya, 2014). This indicates that the importance of funding for successful implementation of ECCE in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Funding is very crucial to achieving success in any public

service. In a study conducted by Alabi (2003) on Evaluation of Universal Basic Education Process on Primary School Enrolment in Kwara state, Early Childhood Education was not implemented at all. Among the reasons for zero percent implementation had to do with funding policies. In Early Childhood Education, adequate funds need to be made available for provision of many resources. These resources include: facilities and stimulating materials for teaching, training and re-training of staff (teachers and caregivers) in appropriate institutions such as colleges of education and universities), enrichment and sensitization of programmes through regular workshops, monitoring, uniforms, feeding, immunisation, supervision and inspection, report writing, publications, school meals and training manuals. As rightly observed by Ijaiya (2001), with adequate resources, access to education can be increased while quality suffers with poor funding. In recent times in Nigeria, Edo State in particular, funding practices for ECCE is both public and private proprietors. The Government makes budgetary allocation for publicly owned and management ECCE Centres for the provision of the needed resources, either human or material resources. Pupils are not expected to pay any fee at this level of education. However, the privately owned and managed ECCE Centres are collecting fees and other charges from parents and guidance to fund their centres termly. Since the private ECCE Centre is more than the state ECCE Centres, one may be tempted to make an assumption that the funding of ECCE in Edo State is majorly private.

Private ECCE centres main aim is to generate profit. For-profit education settings raise controversial questions over their incentives and the quality of the service they offer. While proponents of for-profit ECCE argue that increased competition could foster quality in the field, critics underline that profits may not be invested in the improvement of the service, generating a deadweight loss. In Canada and the United States, a study found that for-profit centres exhibited consistently lower quality due to differences in input choices (salaries, professional development, among others), as compared to non-profit centres (King et al., 2016). With permission granted for private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education in Nigeria, the resultant Day Care centres and Nursery/primary schools are profit-oriented and self-financed. Proprietors run the schools with finances from school fees and other levies charged the parents. The fees could range from ₦10,000 to ₦50,000 or above per term especially in the urban metropolis in Edo State. The better the facilities, the higher the fees they

charge. The issue of quality basic education may be limited by the profit making tendency of the privately owned ECCE Centre. However, from observation, it appears that most privately owned ECCE Centres tend to maintain a good teacher pupils ratio with some classes having between 10 to 20 pupils per class. While the caliber of teachers is a significant concern that warrants thorough investigation, a comprehensive study can help address this issue and inform strategies to enhance teacher quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings.

Conclusion

The importance of a quality foundation in education is obvious. Early childhood education is where the foundation is laid. Performance in the other levels of academic can be traced to this foundation level. So a thorough knowledge of what, and how education is been handled at this level is imperative with ownership and funding issues inclusive. It is a worthwhile step in the right direction for the Nigerian and Edo State government to have agreed to have full participation in the education of early childhood education in recent times. All Nigerian children deserve the best, and education is the only legacy that can be given to set them on the road to optimal development.

Suggestions

From the discussions articulated in this paper, the following suggestions were made

1. Private ownership of ECCE Centres should be closing monitored to ensure their profit making tendency is not overriding the overall quality goals of ECCE
2. To ensure an effective implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria and Edo State in Particular, central training and retraining of caregivers/teachers both in public and private ECCE Centre should be made a vital part of the education process
3. Edo State Government should provide adequate funds for public owned ECCE Centre and give grant in aid to private ECCE centre in other to have great stalk regulating the ECCE sector
4. Government should regulate salary of all teachers in early childhood education as well as school fees to encourage teachers and parents.

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