

Stakeholders' Involvement and Awareness on the Choice of Early Childhood Education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku in River State

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Abstract

This study is designed to investigate the influence of Stakeholders awareness involvement on the choice of Early Childhood Education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. Three research questions were used to obtain the findings of the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all 856 students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku. Sample random sampling technique was used to select 5 five students from 30 departments making the sample size of 150 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Stakeholders Involvement and the Choice of Early Childhood Education in Federal College of Education, Omoku (SITCECEO) which was administered using descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the stakeholders' awareness and involvements influence students' choice of studying Early Childhood Care and Education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. Therefore, it was recommended that government, parents and community be involved in the awareness of the programme thereby creating a standard and better objective.

Keywords: Stakeholders, Government, Community, Parents, Early Childhood Care and Education

Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child and broad information for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Early childhood care and education has possibility to nurture and care for capable and responsible future citizens. In this way Early Childhood Care and Education is one of the best investments a country can make to promote human resources development, quality and social cohesion and to reduce the cost of later remedial programmes.

According to Universal Basic Education (2004) in Nigeria, Early Childhood Care and Education was introduced to increase the access of children to basic education. In order for the aim of the Early Childhood Education to be fully realized, the quality of the teachers will determine the strength of the educational system and the value of the learners. Early childhood care and education is an attractive career option for students who enjoy working with children. The ideal early childhood education profession has a varied skill sets, the early childhood education professions are able to be innovative and traditional, analytical and artistic, patient and commanding. Teaching young children requires a different approach than that applied to older children. Early Childhood Education professionals need to have a firm grasp on the developmental stages of early childhood.

According to FRN (2013) the objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education were stated as follows:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school.

- Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
- Provide adequate care, supervision, and security for the children while their parents are at work.
- Inculcate social, moral norms and values.
- Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, etc.
- Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit.
- Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits and
- teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colours, shapes, forms etc., through play.

These objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education cannot be achieved without the use of qualified and trained Early Childhood Care and Education caregivers. As the government have also started in the National Policy on Education that it shall: Set and monitor minimum standard for Early Child Care Centers, encourage both community and private efforts in the establishment of Early Childhood Care Development and Education Centers based on the set standard, make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in Early Childhood Care and Education, and for retraining of caregivers and so on. The government and other stakeholders should be involved in creating awareness of the programme. A good awareness brings and yields better results. Sending awareness to the public attracts their attention and makes them know the information available at that point in time. Stakeholders have a big role to play in the awareness of early childhood care and education because it is the bedrock of education.

Stakeholders have to do with people who have an interest in something or directly impacted by something. In education, stakeholders include those with an investment or vested interest in the success and welfare of a school or educational system. A stakeholder is synonymous to a partner or shareholder. Internal stakeholders are those who work or study in an educational institution. This includes those who receive remuneration for their contribution. Internal stakeholders focus more on the organization success because their income or education depends on it. Internal stakeholders include; students, parents, teachers, staff support, school administrators and the school board. External stakeholders are those who do not directly participate in the school system daily. They are not employees of the institution and do not realize any financial gain from it. They have a personal interest in the institutions' success as it could impact them one way or the other. External stakeholders include; Government and Local Authorities, Educational Policy Makers, The Community, Local Businesses, Unions, Tax Payers, Philanthropists, Universities, Voters and so on.

Government officials as stakeholders determine the protocols and objectives of the education system. Different ministries regulate educational strategies, including health and nutrition. Local authorities and officials want to ensure that the future workforces are essential knowledge and skills. Stakeholders want to ensure that students are ready to become productive members of their communities. Well-educated students are more employable and able to earn decent wages. This reduces the number of people relying on the benefits system and other government and council assistance packages. Involvement of government improve access to and quality of early education. According to Ford (2013), state investment in Early Education can be an important component of improving the overall education success and eventually future employment and earnings of children. Extensive evidence points to the ability to high-quality preschool to narrow the chance at success later life. Below are two primary actions that can put government on the right track to improving Early Childhood Education.

- Build early childhood education infrastructure and capacity. One way to expand access to early childhood education is ensure states have adequate infrastructures and capacity-that is, facilities and talents. In building infrastructure, state children without sacrificing quality.
- Increase early childhood education quality through training, high standard and incentives states can work towards higher-quality early childhood education in three ways:
 - i. First, they can develop a strong foundational approach to increase training and learning among early childhood care givers and educators.
 - ii. State can raise the bar by setting clear definitions and standards of quality.
 - iii. After developing evidence-based quality of standards for early care and education, states can incentivize programs to improve on those dimensions of quality.

Local communities are stakeholders because they are the ones who benefit from an educated community. Well-educated students are likely to become civic-minded, self-confident leaders. They may participate in community programmes and local campaigns. Community participation in school management has a great mistrust and distance between people and schools by nurturing transparency of information and a culture of mutual respect and by jointly pursuing improvement of school by sharing vision, process, and result (Henderson, 2006) consistent community involvement and engagement at all levels of the school have been shown time and time again to have significant short- and long-term benefits.

According to Karen (2016), Volunteering is one of the most common and popular ways to encourage community involvement in schools. Volunteers should connect with local business, civic organizations, charities, non-profit foundations and other groups in the community to enlist volunteers to come in before, during or after the school day. Volunteering can come in many different shapes and forms. School management invites leaders and individuals in the community who have the time or capacity to participate in-person and on-premise. That is why it is important to also prioritize community involvement in the form of sponsorship and donation programs. Do the Early Childhood teachers need iPad or smart boards to engage children with new technologies? Create and publicize sponsorship and donation need throughout your community, give local organization and businesses the opportunity to partner with your school. The responsibility for raising a well-educated and civic-minded generation of children cannot rest solely with schools.

Parents are key stakeholders because they pay for their children's education. In return, they want their offspring to receive a solid education that prepares them for leaving home and embarking on a career. Parents ensure children attend classes and comply with the school's policies. They complement their children's formal education by ensuring they complete their homework, study for exams and follow healthy diets and sensible sleep patterns. Parents expect the school to keep their children safe and reinforce the values taught at home.

Parents are the first educators of their children. According to Hurley (2015), parental support includes direct learning before and formal education, as well as monitoring and facilitating factors that are indirectly linked, such as nutrition, behaviors, health and hygiene. Also, Wagner, (2006) further said that Early Childhood Education programmes should focus on child-parent interaction and promote whole-child development including parenting skills and knowledge to ensure proper child nutrition, health, and hygiene. Communicating to improve parental involvement in schooling communication between teachers and parents can be facilitated through home/school link programs. Such programmes may be implemented by special school staff who are responsible for connecting families with schools, building relationship, encouraging school attendance and linking the curriculum in the home with school instruction.

According to UNICEF, Early Childhood Care and Education is the most cost-effective investment to start a lifelong path of learning and ensure all children have a fair chance to reach their potentials. Also, Gage (2013), states that Early Childhood is a concern to the government, community and the parents.

Statement of the Problem

The state of Early Childhood Care and Education Department of Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in terms of students is very poor as the rate of student's enrollment is low. Early childhood Care and Education Department is under School of Early Childhood and Primary Education which is well equipped with infrastructure, as well as qualified and seasoned lecturers. From observation and questioning, it found out that 80% of the population of people in the school and community are unaware that a course like Early Childhood Care and Education does exist. Some people asked questions like what is the course all about? Efforts have been made by the head of administration of the department alongside teaching and non-teaching staff of the school in campaigning, advertising and working hand in hand with the college in promoting the course to the public. Despite the provision of the standard curriculum, conducive classrooms, learning materials and so on, students' enrollment is still poor. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate the stakeholders' awareness involvement and the choice of Early Childhood Education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between stakeholders' involvement and the choice of Early Childhood Care and Education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- determine the relationship between government involvement and the choice of Early Childhood Care and Education as a course of study in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State;
- ascertain the relationship between parental involvement and the choice of Early Childhood Care and Education as a course of study in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is the level of awareness among stakeholders about the importance of early childhood education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?
- To what extent are stakeholders involved in the decision-making process regarding the choice of early childhood education programmes in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?
- How do stakeholders perceive the quality of early childhood education programmes offered in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. Through simple random sampling technique, a total of 150 students were selected from 30 departments. A structured questionnaire titled "Stakeholders Involvement and The Choice of Early Childhood Education (SITCECE)" was used for the study. The modified four (4) point likert relating to strongly Agreed (SA-4) Agreed (A-3), Disagree (DS-2) Strongly Disagree (SD-1), as optional on the questionnaire were used. The instrument was a structure design self instrument with fifteen (15) items on the research questions raised for the study. The instrument was divided into (2) sections A and B respectively. Section A elicit information on personal data of the respondents while section B, contains the questions which were answered by each respondent. The questionnaire was subjected to criticism by specialists in Early Childhood in Education who read through it and corrections were made. All the comments and corrections made by the experts were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument before it was finally administered. This process ensured the content validity of the instrument. Therefore, it was subjected to content reliability using Cronbach Aloha. The reliability coefficient was 0.85 which was considered high for a new developed instrument. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents by the researchers. The researchers were able to obtain 92% returned of the instruments distributed. Data collected for the purpose of the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. To take decision with respect to accepting or rejecting research outcome the midpoint of 2.5 was accepted.

Results

Research Question1:

What is the level of awareness among stakeholders about the importance of early childhood education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

Table 1
Mean responses of awareness among stakeholders about the importance of early childhood education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Response Score	X	Mean Response	Remark
1.	Government is providing scholarship for early childhood	20	15	30	35	220	2.5	2.2	Rejected
2.	Government campaigns for early childhood education.	15	30	25	15	175	2.5	1.8	Rejected
3.	Government provides jingles to arouse people's interest to make early childhood education a choice in university	14	16	26	50	206	2.5	2.0	Rejected
4.	Government has established pre-primary sections in existing public schools	45	35	15	5	320	2.5	3.2	Accepted
5.	Government approved early childhood education programme in every university	15	5	40	40	195	2.5	2.0	Rejected
Total								2.2	Rejected

From the above analysis in the table above it is observed that the grand mean 2.2 of all the questionnaire item (1-5) is below cut off point of 2.5. Therefore, the level of awareness among stakeholders about the importance of early childhood education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State is low.

Research Question 2:

To what extent are stakeholders involved in the decision-making process regarding the choice of early childhood education programmes in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

Table 2

Mean Response stakeholders involved in the decision-making process regarding the choice of early childhood education programmes in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Response Score	X	Mean Response	Remark
6.	Communities announce the availability of early childhood education programmes in their churches.	25	15	30	45	220	100	2.2	Rejected
7.	Community involve s in posting bills or advertisement of early childhood education programmes	20	5	40	30	205	100	2.0	Rejected
8.	Community send s town criers to send information on the importance of early childhood education as a career.	5	10	50	35	185	100	1.9	Rejected
9.	Community provides scholarship for early childhood student teachers	20	15	35	30	225	100	2.2	Rejected
10.	Community has established relationship with early childhood education organization.	30	35	15	5	260	100	2.6	Rejected
Total								2.1	Rejected

From the above analysis in the table above it is observed that the grand mean 2.1 of all the questionnaire items (6-10) is below the cut-off point of 2.5. This implies that stakeholder's involvement in the decision-making process regarding the choice of early childhood education programmes in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State is low.

Research Question 3

How do stakeholders perceive the quality of early childhood education programmes offered in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

Table 3
Mean Response of stakeholders perceive the quality of early childhood education programmes offered in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Response Score	X	Mean Response	Remark
11.	Parents are involved in the campaign awareness of early childhood education	10	20	10	45	165	2.5	1.7	Rejected
12.	Parents encourage their children studying early childhood education in university.	15	5	20	5	120	2.5	1.2	Rejected
13.	Parents are aware of early childhood education as a course in university	15	25	20	20	195	2.5	2.0	Rejected
14.	Parents are involved informing committees in school.	40	30	10	5	275	2.5	2.8	Accepted
15.	Parents are involved in educating their children of early childhood education programme.	10	20	25	25	175	2.5	1.8	Rejected
Total								2.0	Rejected

From the above analysis in the table above it is observed that the grand mean 2.0 of all the questionnaire items (11-15) is below the cut-off point of 2.5. This implies that stakeholders perceive the quality of early childhood education programmes offered in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State?

Discussion of Findings

Findings in the work from result of table 1, revealed that there is need for stakeholder awareness on the importance of early childhood education in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. It is the primary responsibilities of the government to announce to the public about the importance of Early Childhood Education and encourage people into it, this is in line with the assertions of Janice Ford (2013) who opined that involvement of government improve access to and quality of early education and investment in early education can be an important component of improving the overall education success and eventually futures employment and earnings of children.

Also, the results of table 2, revealed that there is a need for stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process regarding the choice of early childhood education programmes in Federal College of Education

(Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. This is evidenced by the calculated grand mean of 2.1 below the cut-off point 2.5. McWilliam and Baily (2018) stated that involvement of community helps in children's development and provide a platform for Early Childhood Education services, schools and other early years services to work together in supporting local children. Possibilities include collaboratively planning transition programs, and planning for the needs of children arriving at school. Early childhood educators can discuss their community results with a range of stakeholders to engage them in action that seeks to improve outcomes for the children of their community.

From table 3 of this work, it is observed that the mean score of the questionnaire items is below 2.5 bench mark, meaning that stakeholders perceive the quality of early childhood education programmes offered in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State. Epstein J. L, (2009), Research shows that parental involvement is more important to children's academic success than their family's socio-economic status, race ethnicity, or educational background.

Conclusion

Early childhood care and education has a global scope and caring for and educating young children have always been integral part of human societies. From the result of the findings, it is concluded that awareness factors affect the choice making of every childhood education as a course in Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku in Rivers State. It is time to be involved in the early childhood education to give it a quality standard to achieve a better objective. It is a powerful tool for early childhood education services to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and the lead action towards improving outcome for children.

Recommendations

Based on the research the following recommendations were made:

- Government should provide scholarship for early childhood student-teachers
- Awareness should be done about early childhood education to the public.
- Implementation on policy of the National Policy on education should be implemented in schools by the governments, community, parents, teachers as being stated.
- Increase early childhood education quality through consistent training.
- Build early education infrastructure and capacity.
- Government should only employ teachers with Early Childhood Care and Education qualification in Early Childhood Care Centers.

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