
CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the challenges to effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state. Two research questions and two hypotheses were posed for the study. The research design was descriptive survey. The population of the study comprised all the pre-primary schools in Rivers state. The head teachers of pre-primary schools were the respondents. There were altogether 1149 head teachers of which 878 and 271 were for public and private schools respectively. The sample of 287 head teachers which is 25% was selected for the study using proportionate stratified sampling. The instrument used was a 13- item structured questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation were used to address the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at .05 significant levels. Findings showed, among others, that lack of interest on the part of government, non-recognition of the index notation of early childhood education, not making early childhood education compulsory, no proper awareness for joint participation, are challenges to effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State. The study therefore concluded that if these challenges are identified and arrested, early childhood education will be better repositioned to provide optimum benefit for the recipients. It therefore recommended, among others, that early childhood education should be made compulsory.

Early childhood education was defined by Akpan in Uya (2004) as that education which is concerned with the young child from the time his informal learning is augmented by a group experience with his peers under a teacher's guidance. The child occupies a very important place in the future development of the nation. As such one must realize that to neglect the child in the development and future resourcefulness of that nation is to destroy the future of that nation. The importance of giving the child this early childhood education cannot be overemphasized. The content of the

knowledge which the child is exposed to early in life are bedrock to later education and life (Osakwe, 2009).

In spite of the immense benefits which early childhood education has for both the child as well as the entire human development it seems enough attention in terms of proper management is not given to it. Management here has to do with adequate provision of quality human and material resources to schools. A lot of reviews have attested to the fact that in most pre-primary schools these resources are lacking. For instance Ntem (2006), in his study on the state of nursery education in rivers state found out that most of the facilities ranging from space, learning areas, learning materials and textbooks are lacking in schools. Ejieh (2006) also remarked that the quality of teachers in nursery schools is generally very low. This poor provision of resources implies that there is no effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

If pre-primary schools therefore, continue to function without effective management in terms of provision of adequate resources, it will affect the academic performance of children negatively as they get in to primary schools. In spite of the negative effect, proper management is still not given to early childhood education. There is this feeling that certain challenges are facing the proper management of early childhood education in Rivers State and except certain strategies are taken to achieve a better management of this important level of education, pupils will still be performing badly as they get to primary schools. It is against this background that the researcher is out to investigate the challenges to effective management of early childhood education and the possible strategies that can be adopted to achieve a better and effective early childhood education in rivers state.

Statement of the Problem

Early childhood education, as an important step in the educational development of the child is supposed to be benefitted by every child irrespective of their socio-economic background. Unfortunately many children do not directly benefit from this programme not because they are not exposed to the early childhood education centres but because proper management is not given to it as reviewed from various studies. This poor management may be as a result of certain challenges. Thus the worry in this study therefore is what are the challenges affecting effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state. If they are identified, handled and arrested to an extent, no doubt, it will go a long way to achieve effective management of early childhood education. This will affect the children academic performance positively especially as they get to primary schools. Therefore this study is aimed at identifying the factors that hinder effective management of early child hood education and examine the strategies that can be adopted to achieve its effective management.

Research Questions

1. What factors hinder effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state?
2. What are the strategies for achieving effective management of early childhood education in River state?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of responses of public and private school heads on the factors that hinder effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of responses of public and private school heads on the strategies to achieve effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state.

Methodology

The research design for the study was descriptive survey while the population is made up of all the pre-primary schools in Rivers state. The head teachers of pre-primary schools were the respondents. There were altogether 1149 head teachers of which 878 and 271 were for public and private schools respectively. A sample size of 287 head teachers which is 25% was selected for the study by using proportionate stratified sampling. The instrument used was a 12 item structured questionnaire. A modified likert type scale was set against each item. The response options were graduated and weighted as follow; strongly agreed (4-points), agreed (3-points), disagreed (2-points) and strongly disagreed (1-point). To ensure its validity the instrument was presented to some experts especially in the field of educational administration for evaluation. To establish the reliability of the instrument a test was carried out on ten (10) head teachers who were part of the population of the study but not part of the main sample. The cronbach's correlation was carried out and the result was highly positive with a correlation coefficient of 0.93. A total number of 290 questionnaires were administered and 274 were retrieved. The data gathered were analysed using mean and standard deviation. z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant levels. To establish the criterion mean the modified likert scale with weighted points of 4, 3, 2, and 1 were added together to give 10points and was divided by 4 to get a mean of 2.5. This was used to take decision on research questions. If the calculated mean of an item is less than the criterion mean, it is disagreed but if the calculated is higher than the criterion mean, it is agreed. For the hypotheses, the calculated z value was compared to the critical value and if the calculated is higher than critical the hypothesis is rejected and when the calculated z value is less than z critical value the hypothesis is accepted.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the challenges for the effective management of early childhood education in rivers state?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Public and Private School Head Teachers' Scores on the Challenges for Effective Management of Early Childhood Education in Rivers state.

S/N	Items	X	Public SD	X	Private SD	XX	Mean Rank Order
1.	Government is not fully interested in early childhood education	3.74	0.46	3.56	0.58	3.65	1st
2.	Non recognition of the index notation of early childhood Education	3.66	0.75	3.63	0.76	3.64	2nd
3.	Enough fund is not made available	3.73	0.60	3.27	0.81	3.50	3rd
4.	Early childhood is not made compulsory	2.86	1.05	2.50	1.15	2.68	4th
5.	Teachers are on temporal appointment	3.02	1.006	1.75	0.42	2.38	6th
6.	Communities are not given proper awareness for full participation	3.49	0.86	3.49	0.79	3.46	4th

The results in table 1 showed all the calculated mean scores of all the 6 items for both public and private school head teachers. All the mean scores apart from items 6 fell above 2.50 (criterion). This showed that government's lack of interest, none recognition of index notation of early childhood education, lack of fund, not making early childhood education, lack of proper awareness and teachers on the voluntary appointment are all factors that hinder the effective management of pre-primary schools. Conclusively, lack of interest by government ranks first, among other factors, in hindering the effective management of early childhood education in rivers state.

In answering research question 1, the challenges for effective management of early childhood education among others is none recognition of index notation of early childhood in the official term of the system of education in Nigeria.

Research Question 2

What are the strategies for achieving effective management of early child hood education in Rivers state?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Public and Private School Head Teachers on the Strategies for Achieving Effective Management of Early Childhood Education in Rivers state.

S/N	Items	Public		Private		XX	Rank Order
		X	SD	X	SD		
1.	Government should show more interest	3.93	0.16	3.96	0.15	3.94	1st
2.	Early childhood education should be made compulsory	3.81	0.56	3.83	0.44	3.82	4th
3.	Formal recognition of digital index notation of early childhood education	3.94	0.18	S 3.74	0.43	3.84	2nd
4.	Government should run pre-primary schools like provisional schools	3.33	0.82	3.24	0.70	3.28	6th
5.	Special heads and teachers should run pre-primary schools	2.83	1.014	2.89	1.016	2.86	7th
6.	Enough funds should be made for pre-primary schools.	3.81	0.71	3.84	0.76	3.82	3rd
7.	There should be enlightenment and awareness campaign	3.70	0.59	3.40	0.75	3.55	5 th

The results in table 2 showed the calculated mean scores of all the items for public and private school heads as 3.93, 3.81, 3.94, 3.33, 2.83, 3.81 and 3.70, and mean scores of 3.96, 3.82, 3.74, 3.24, 2.89, 3.84 and 3.40 respectively. All the means scores fell above the criterion level 2.50. This showed that both public and private school head teachers agreed with all items. This therefore indicate that to achieve effective management of early childhood education, government should show more interest; early childhood education should be made compulsory, there should be a formal recognition of digital index of early childhood education, there should be enlightenment campaign, government should run pre-primary school like provisional schools, special head teachers and teachers should mind pre-primary schools.

In answering research question 2, the strategies for achieving effective management of early childhood education among others, is that early childhood education should be made compulsory.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school heads on the challenges of effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

Table 3:

z-test Analysis on the Challenges for Effective Management of Early Childhood Education in Rivers State

	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Sig Lev	z-cal	z-crit	Result
Public	212	3.46	0.787	276	0.05	8.398	1.96	Sig Diff
Private	66	2.52	0.751					

Table 3 showed the z-test analysis of the responses of public and private school heads to the questionnaire items on the perceived factors that hinder the effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state. From the table the z-value calculated was 8.398 which is greater than the z-critical of 1.96 at .05 significant level. The null hypothesis of no significant difference is therefore rejected showing that there is significant difference between the public and private pre-primary schools on the perceived factors that hinder effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school heads on the strategies for achieving effective management of early child education in Rivers State.

Table 4

z-test Analysis on the Strategies for Achieving Effective Management of Early Childhood Education in Rivers State.

	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Sig Lev	z-cal	z-crit	Result
Public	212	3.64	0.514	276	0.05	1.105	1.96	Not Sig
Private	66	3.55	0.548					

Table 4 showed the z-test analysis of the responses of public and private school heads to the questionnaire items on the strategies for effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State. From the table the calculated z-value is 1.105 which is less than the critical z-value of 1.96, thus the null hypothesis of no significant difference is accepted. This shows that there is no significant difference between the public and private schools heads on the perceived strategies to achieve effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

Discussions and Implications

Challenges to Effective Pre-Primary School Management

Research Question 1

What are the challenges for the effective management of early childhood education in rivers state?

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school heads on the challenges of effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

From the study it was found that the perceived factors such as lack of interest by government, non recognition and inclusion of the digital index notation of early childhood education in the official term of Nigerian educational system, not making early childhood education compulsory, lack of proper awareness to communities for full participation etc. are all the challenges for the effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state. This finding especially in the area of poor interest by the government agrees with Ogbuleka (2002) who stated that due to contradiction and ambiguities in the policy of early childhood education which originally prescribed attachment of pre-primary schools to primary schools, and later excluded the government from its implementation arrangements has weakened the interest of the government in early childhood education. It also agrees with Osaat (2001) who listed the obstacles to policy implementation among others is the complete government deviation from expected direction. The implication of this finding is that the governments less interest in the affairs of early childhood education would result to any of the other factors such as poor awareness campaign for full participation in the communities. Apart from that the less interest by government is also a factor to non recognition and inclusion of the digital index of early childhood education in the official term of the system of education in Nigeria. However in the area of unemployed voluntary teachers teaching in pre-primary, the public schools agreed it was a hindrance to effective management while the private heads disagreed. Voluntary teachers might not be found in the private school because of the fact that no teacher would love to teach voluntarily in a private institution whose objective is basically profit maximization. Also from the information gathered through the interview conducted by the researcher, revealed that in the public schools those voluntary teachers who teach in the public schools use such strategy as a means to be employed into the system. But the question is for how long can this continue to take place? The implication is that, since these voluntary teachers are not paid like other permanent teachers which could serve as incentives they cannot perform at their best and this could continue to affect the learning hence poor academic achievers.

The null hypothesis stated no significant difference between the public and private school head teachers on the challenges for effective management of early

childhood education was accepted. This showed that there was no significant difference between the public and private school heads.

Strategies for the Management of Early Childhood Education

Research Question 2

What are the strategies for achieving effective management of early childhood education in Rivers state?

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of public and private school heads on the strategies for achieving effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

The study also revealed that public and private school head teachers agreed on the perceived strategies to achieve effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State such as government full interest, recognizing and including the index notation of early childhood education in the official system of education, making early childhood education compulsory, enlightenment campaign to communities, running pre-schools as provisional schools, provision of special teachers to mind pre-school and making enough fund for pre-schools. This finding especially in the area of government 's interest and participation as strategy to achieve effective management of early childhood education agrees with Maduemesi (2005) who states the guidelines on pre-primary education as prepared by federal Ministry of Education, among which is Government attitude towards pre-primary as that of direct participation rather than advocating active participation by private sector. This concept of direct participation would be built on full interest by the government and when there is full interest implies that every other strategy would be easily adopted for the effective management of early childhood education.

However in this issue of interest one may have to recommend the First lady of the Rivers state, Dame Judith Amaechi for her effort and interest in early childhood education. The only issue is how many of these nursery centres by the first Lady are in the riverine areas of the state? How many children from the riverine areas are parts of the beneficiaries?

Infact, the importance of government's interest as a strategy for achieving effective management of ECE cannot be over emphasizing. If government interest is high, there will be recognition of the digital representation of the index of early childhood education. This formal recognition would give room for interest in the early education of the child. It is a vicious circle. Instead of emphasizing 6-3-3-4 it will rather be 3-6-3-3-4. This implies that all the people concerned for the management of this level of education will all know that early childhood education is part of educational system formally and will all work towards proper management of this early education in order to achieve its goals.

The null hypothesis stated no significant difference between the public and private schools on the strategies for effective management of early childhood education in Rivers was accepted. This shows that there was no significant difference between the two groups of head teachers on perceived strategies for effective management of early childhood education in Rivers State.

Conclusion

Early childhood education in Rivers state is seen to have been facing a lot of challenges which has made the management ineffective. These challenges if handled and addressed as recommended above will go a long way in changing the status of early childhood education in Rivers state as it will also positively affect our young and future generation of children.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions of the findings of this study the following recommendations are made.

1. There should be a formal recognition of the digital representation of the index of early childhood education in the official term of the system of education in Nigeria as that may attract the interest of the government in participation in this level of early childhood education.
2. Enlightenment campaigns committee should be formed by the government to conduct proper enlightenment and awareness campaign to communities for the need for full participation in early childhood education.
3. Government should make early childhood education compulsory for all pre-school children.
4. Special heads and special teachers should mind the pre-primary schools.
5. There should also be enough funding of early childhood education programmes by the Local, state and federal governments

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