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THE INVESTMENT IMPLICATIONS OF CREATING FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE NIGERIAN CHILD

Adams O. U. Onuka*

This study defined and examined early childhood education, child friendly environment and investment. It was pointed out that without good investment in the sub-sector, the future of the country may be in jeopardy. This is because pre-school education provides the opportunity, not only for training a child academically, but also giving it an alternative motherly care when the mother otherwise engaged in economic activities.

An observation instrument with fifteen indicators was used to gather data from ten schools of the type under consideration in Ibadan Metropolis to evaluate whether or not they were child friendly. Data were analysed using percentages. The results show that though there were some minimally acceptable investment in the sub-sector, but the investment still fell short of what it should be. It was, therefore, recommended that more investment in terms of funds, time and money should be made in the sub-sector for improvement. It was also recommended that creating child friendly environment is not the responsibility of only one party, but of all the stakeholders in the sub-sector.

Introduction

The Nelson's Desk Dictionary (1961) simply defines environment as: "the surrounding which affects the growth and development of any living thing". However, Herzberg (1959) in his "Two Factor Theory" of motivation talked of environment in a dual sense: internal and external. In other words, there is an external surrounding and an internal surrounding. This theory of internal and external surroundings could create the kind of

* Adams O. U. Onuka, *Ph.D.*, Research and Publications Unit, Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

friendly environment, implies the pooling together of resources for early childhood education creating a child-friendly environment. To do this there must be a form of investment. For the purpose of clarity, the paper would approach the subject matter as follows:

- * Child Friendly environment
- * Early Childhood Education
- * Investment (Funding)
- * Practical Issues (Methodology, Findings and Discussions)
- * Conclusion and Recommendations

Child Friendly Environment

In this section, we will briefly define child friendly environment as relating to education in general terms and then relate it with the managerial sense as theorized by Herzberg (1968) in his "Two Factor (Hygiene) Theory before applying the Herzberg's theory of motivation which views environment at the work place in terms of context (external) and content (internal). This latter contextualization is then applied to investment which is also believed to be the same as funding.

What is, therefore, Friendly Environment?

According to Okebukola (2000), Child Friendly School (environment) is:

A place where the learning environment is conducive, the staff are friendly to the children, and the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met. Thus, the school, which is community based, takes cognisance of the rights of ALL children, irrespective of gender, religious and ethnic affiliation, physical and mental abilities/disabilities and other cultural dissimilarities.

He also opines that:

Child friendly school is defined with child and environment in mind with adequate human and material resources to enhance meaningful learning. It must also be safe and secure from violence and abuse and not located in an area where distraction could result.

Child friendly school (environment) must be accessible, with good sanitation and portable water and space for expansion and all other facilities that give comfort to the child, to create a conducive atmosphere for learning.

Module 5 of CFSI in Nigeria (undated) defines Child Friendly School (environment) as:

A school where the environment is conducive, the staff are friendly to children, the health and safety needs are adequately met. Thus, the school, which is community-based, takes cognizance of all the rights of ALL children, irrespective of gender, religious and ethnic affiliation, physical and mental abilities/disabilities and other peculiarities.

The implication of this postulation is that there would be the need to invest fund into the school environment to create child friendly environment conducive for learning. In the context of this work, we considered the following as components of child friendly environment:

- (a) The Home/Family
- (b) The Teacher
- (c) Curriculum and Curriculum delivery
- (d) The Community
- (e) The Government/Proprietor

(a) The home/family should create a child friendly environment for the child by:

- (i) being supportive of the child's education, by providing all that will enable the child to engage actively in school activities – curricula and extra-curricula.
- (ii) making the home a pleasant place conducive for encouraging the child to engage in activities that will enhance his educational accomplishment.
- (iii) encouraging the child to always strive to do better and to try again in case of non-accomplishment of desired goal the first time.
- (iv) providing at the home front those things that may help the child to be willing to engage in learning.
- (v) to give the child a helping hand in his learning exercise, whenever it is so necessary.

(b) Teachers constitute a component of child friendly environment if and only if:

- (i) they regard themselves as facilitators and guides to learning;
- (ii) possess the relevant education in childhood education;
- (iii) are accessible, sociable, friendly to the child and always ready to help the child;
- (iv) carry out correction of the child in a friendly manner;
- (v) communicate effectively at the level of the child's understanding;
- (vi) respect the rights of the child;
- (vii) use different instructional alternatives;
- (viii) be responsible guardian;
- (ix) be highly encouraged to perform through motivation;
- (x) must be resourceful and committed.

(c) The curriculum would be child friendly and thus conducive for encouraging early child education, according to Okebukola (2000), if:

- (i) it is child-centred and promotes active participation of all children;
- (ii) promotes child's rights;
- (iii) promotes the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes for healthy development of children;
- (iv) the curriculum must be effectively delivered: by which it is meant that the child must be taught in such a way that he both understands and comprehends the true import of the curriculum, so as to be of meaningful impact on his learning outcomes; and
- (v) the school time-table must be feasible and reflect the peculiarities of each community.

(d) The Community

The community must be actively involved in early childhood and in creating a child friendly environment conducive for learning by:

- (i) actively participating in the planning, implementing and management of child friendly schools. These must include monitoring and mobilization of resources (Okebukola, 2000);
- (ii) encouraging access to participation as well as retention of the children in the school system;
- (iii) encouraging and supporting the teacher in the provision of teaching materials;
- (iv) being interested in the teachers' welfare; and

(v) ensuring the safety and security of school property.

(e) The Government

At the moment, the government appears uninterested in pre-primary school education, which is the other name for early childhood education. This disinterest is revealed in its various policy statements on education (National Policy on Education 1977, 1981 and 1998 as well as the Presidential address on UBE in September, 1999). That is why the UBE programme covers only primary and the first-tier of the secondary education.

However, it is very necessary that government at all levels be involved, at least, in creating child friendly environment for the early childhood education, since this venture increases the man-hours available to the economy as mothers could be meaningfully engaged, rather than sitting idly, baby-seating at home.

The proprietor/proprietress is also important in creating the child friendly environment as the private sector is more or less the one running pre-primary schools in the country, except perhaps a few tertiary institutions which run schools on the same terms as the private owners - profit-making.

They, government and proprietors must, therefore, invest in those things considered to be vital to child friendly environment such as:

- (i) being involved in planning, implementing and management of child friendly schools;
- (ii) providing the infrastructures for a child friendly school (environment);
- (iii) providing the necessary instructional materials;
- (iv) taking adequate care of the teachers' welfare;
- (v) encouraging friendship between the children and the teachers;
- (vi) ensuring the safety and security of school property;
- (vii) ensuring the safety and security of the lives of the teachers and the children; and
- (viii) encouraging community participation, including Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

What is Early Childhood Education?

The book on Nursery Education co-authored by Onibokun et al (1981) defines early childhood education as follows:

“Pre-school education”: preparatory school for pre-school aged children. It is a situation whereby children receive the necessary custodial care in the absence of their parents, where they are also introduced to some learning activities as a preparatory ground for entry into the primary school.

Onibokun and her colleagues believe that because the government recognized the demands for pre-school education in Nigeria, it enunciated the following in its 1977 National Policy on Education:

- (a) effecting a smooth transition from the home to school;
- (b) preparing the child for the primary level of education;
- (c) providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work;
- (d) inculcating social norms;
- (e) inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities;
- (f) teaching co-operation and team-work;
- (g) teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc through play; and
- (h) teaching good habits, especially good health habits.

The import here is that everyone is now aware of the potent role early childhood education plays in the economic and social life of the nation. Therefore, its importance cannot be over-emphasized. There is no gainsaying that in the circumstance, early childhood education must be well managed and funded as funding is a management function. It, therefore, implies that a programme not well funded cannot be effectively managed.

The Vice President of Nigeria during the launching of the Universal Primary Education on August 30, 1999 identified poor management and inadequate funding as constituting the bane of the programme. Umoru-Onuka (2002): reports that the UBE was being under-funded by all levels of government, resulting in poor implementation and management of the programme.

Funding and Investment

It is necessary to state that fund provides the means for investment. Investment, which has a number of meanings, depending on the usage to which it is put at the material time, can be viewed as “the act of

investing”, i.e. putting money to make money (Umoru-Onuka, 1977). Hespos and Straussman (1977) opine that investment decisions are probably the most important and most difficult decisions that can control policy makers because:

- (i) they involve plenty money;
- (ii) they have long lasting effects;
- (iii) they are implements of strategy; and
- (iv) they are characterized with high degree of uncertainty.

Umoru-Onuka (1977) opines that investment includes investing time and energy as well as other forms of resource, but all of them could be quantified in monetary values. David-West (1983) sees education as both a consumer good and as investment in human resources for some anticipated set of dividends to the economy. Umoru-Onuka (1997), citing Kidd (1962), reports that “the development of the educated person is the most important capital formation. Kidd (1962) opines that education is an investment because it yields positive economic results.

Education is the most meaningful index of the wealth producing capacity of a country. When education is viewed as investment, then the funds will be provided to run and manage education enterprise, including the early childhood education. There is no amount of ingenuity of the early childhood education managers that would result in the envisaged ends, unless it is seen as investment and funds provided for the managers to use. The effective management of the early childhood education through friendly environment is a function of investment.

The Problem

The foregoing has highlighted that funding may be the bane of creating a child-friendly environment for our children. This study, therefore, focuses on the investment implications of providing an early childhood friendly environment.

Data Collection

Data was collected using an observation instrument developed by the researcher based on the following indicators of proper funding or investment in the sub-sector: quality facilities and teachers in some ten private nursery schools in Ibadan Metropolis. The following are some indicators of child friendly environment that were observed:

1. Availability of Games materials/Space
2. Adequacy of these materials

3. Adequacy of classroom space
4. Content of Curricula
5. Teachers' Welfare
6. Availability of Relevant Instructional Materials
7. Quality of Relevant Instructional Materials
8. Adequacy of Relevant Instructional Materials
9. Condition of school building
10. Location of the school
11. Teachers' Qualification
12. Quality of teachers' qualification
13. Friendly Teacher Disposition
14. School management efficiency
15. School management effectiveness

Each of the above indicators was rated 1 to 3 denoting Fairly, Good, Very Good, (or Barely Adequate, Adequate, and Very Adequate or Barely Appropriate, Appropriate and Very Appropriate). These were analysed using percentages.

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A SPECIMEN OF THE OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT
Child Friendly Environment Investment Observation Checklist

S/No	INDICATORS	RATINGS		
		1	2	3
1.	Availability of Games Materials/Space			
2.	Adequacy of Games Materials/Space			
3.	Adequacy of Classroom Space			
4.	Content of Curricula			
5.	Teachers' Welfare			
6.	Availability of Relevant Instructional Materials			
7.	Quality of Relevant Instructional Materials			
8.	Adequacy of Relevant Instructional Materials			
9.	Condition of the School Building			
10.	Location of the School Building			
11.	Teacher Qualifications			
12.	Quality of Teacher Qualifications			
13.	Teachers' friendly Disposition			
14.	School Management Efficiency			
15.	School Management Effectiveness			

These indicators were denoted as X_1 ; X_2 ; X_3 ;..... X_{15} in serial order as in the above specimen.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: The Result of the Observation of the Child Friendly Environment Investment Indicators

SCHOOL	INDICATORS															TOTAL	%
	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀	X ₁₁	X ₁₂	X ₁₃	X ₁₄	X ₁₅		
A	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	32	70
B	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	3	1	3	3	3	30	66.7
C	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	2	3	26	57.8
D	1	2	1	1	3	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	26	57.8
E	2	1	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	3	2	31	67.8
F	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	3	26	57.8
G	3	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	3	2	27	60
H	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	1	2	27	60
I	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	26	57.8
J	1	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	1	3	32	71
TOTAL	15	17	18	16	17	21	17	20	17	20	18	18	24	22	26		
%	50	56.7	60	53.3	56.7	70	56.7	66.7	56.7	66.7	60	60	80	73.3	86.7		

The results of the study are shown in the table above.

Table 1 above shows that school A made up to 70% of the expected level of investment necessary for a totally child friendly environment conducive for learning of the child. In other words, it funded its school up to 70% of the level required for the best and friendly environment for the early childhood education. School B was able to do so to 66.7% level that is required to meet child friendly school environment. Four schools (C, D, F, and I) funded or invested in their various early childhood schools to the tune of 57.8%, the least in the study, which indicates that they are to do much more to meet the standard required. School E and J invested up to 67.8% and 71% respectively in their two schools to make them conducive for the education of the pre-school aged child. However, schools G and H funded their respective schools up to 60% of what is the standard environment for early childhood education.

From the above analysis, it is obvious that none of the schools met the required investment level to provide the acclaimed standard environment for the pre-school child education. However, while some had invested up to 60% and above in education of the early child, the schools in this category are six, four schools fell below that standard. This portends the fact that all the schools need to redouble their efforts to provide the best enabling environment for the child of pre-school age to learn effectively. When we examine the investment level in each of the indicators by the entire sample, the results show that availability of games materials/space amounted to only 50% of the expected level of investment on that indicator in the sub-sector of education where government is virtually a non-participant. It is, therefore, almost entirely a private sector driven investment and service.

Investment in the sub-sector as indicated by adequacy of games materials/space, quality of relevant instructional materials, quality of content of curricula and condition of school buildings shows that only 56.7% level of what is required for a child friendly environment was achieved, while the investment indicator of Teachers' Welfare shows that only 53.3% of what is required was provided.

The levels of availability of relevant instructional materials, adequacy of relevant instructional materials and location of the school were 70%, 66.7% and 66.7%; while the levels of teachers' qualifications, quality of teachers' qualifications, teachers' friendly disposition, school management efficiency and school management effectiveness indicated 60%, 60%, 80%, 73.3% and 86.7%; the highest area of investment so far. The implications of these results are that investment should be intensified n

games materials and provision of more spaces for games in the various schools makes these essential ingredients of child education more adequate and thus readily available; provision of relevant instructional materials makes them more qualitative and readily available to engender greater level of the education of the pre-school child. Teachers need better training and retraining. Teachers' friendly disposition towards the child provides evidence of being fairly satisfied with the welfare package and close monitoring. Management efficiency and effectiveness which rated 73.3% and 86.7% respectively show that though the management in the various schools may not be trained in the art and science of management, yet they are committed because they are mostly also the entrepreneurs of the schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion:

It is no gainsaying that early childhood education has come to stay in Nigeria and that it is a thriving education enterprise. Pre-school education is available all over the place because both working mothers and market women now use it as a means of not only educating their children at an early age, but as a form of relief of the burden of taking care of their young, which may in turn disturb them from earning their own personal livelihood. The need to therefore fund or invest in this sub-sector of the Nigerian education enterprise cannot be overemphasized.

Well funded early childhood education would increase the man-hour available to the economy as more mothers would be in a position to work. The return on investment in early childhood education would be in form of available man-hour and well developed human resources in the future of the economy.

Recommendations:

Having seen the need to provide friendly atmosphere for the pre-school aged child for proper learning, the following recommendations are made:

Parents should be much involved in providing enabling environment for the education of their pre-school aged children through greater investment in the provision of the relevant texts, games materials, instructional materials, among others, which they could use at home to rehearse what has been taught them in the school.

Parents should also assist in helping their children to learn by investing time and energy in the academic welfare of their children.

Proprietors/proprietresses should invest more in games and space for the games, invest more in teachers' welfare, make more seats for the use of the child to avoid overcrowding. They should also locate their schools in uncrowded areas so as to create avenue for expansion, an atmosphere convenient for play and learning; and to avoid unnecessary distraction of the child's attention.

Schools should possess, in adequate quantum, instructional materials, invest in the training of their teachers and in the teachers' welfare, so that they could be attracted and retained. Unqualified teachers should either be assisted to improve or be required to go if they fail to do so.

Religious and other voluntary organizations should get more involved in this enterprise of providing education for the under-aged children, so that some morals can be inculcated in them at the early stage to make them better citizens.

Government and institutes of education in Nigerian Universities should help in the evaluation and monitoring of the activities of every nursery/primary school to ensure that standards are maintained. This implies that government must spell out the minimum standards required of any such schools for them to be recognized.

It follows, therefore, that no one should be allowed to operate any such schools until an application has been made, site and facilities inspected and approval given. All nursery/primary schools should be registered by the government so as to ensure that a minimum child friendly environment in everyone of the school in the sub-sector prevails.

These recommendations portend investment of funds, time and energy on the parts of the school owners, teachers, parents, voluntary organizations, government and other stakeholders that may be involved in the evaluation and monitoring process of the sub-sector.

There must be increased investment in the provision of good and effective teaching aids, decent school buildings with good furnishings and games materials and spaces, to engender effective teaching and learning at that stage of education.

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