

Parents' Socio-economic Background and Children's Enrollment in Early Childhood Education Programme in Rural Areas of Jos North, Plateau State

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Abstract. This paper investigated the influence of parental socioeconomic background on enrolment of rural children in early childhood education programme in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. Three research questions guided the study and a total of 60 respondents were used for the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and a researcher constructed questionnaire titled 'Parents' Socioeconomic Background and Children's Early Childhood Education Enrolment Questionnaire' (PSBCECEAQ) was used to collect data. Data collected was analyzed using simple percentage. From the analysis of data collected, it was found that parents' socioeconomic backgrounds determines the extent to which rural children were enrolled in early childhood education programmes and parents' incomes determine the extent to which they can afford to enroll their children in nursery schools. The study concluded that parents' socioeconomic backgrounds influence rural children's enrollment in early childhood education programmes and it was recommended that parents in rural areas should be enlightened on the importance of early childhood in the lives of their children and the need to enroll their children in nursery schools.

1. Introduction

Socioeconomic background is an economic and sociological term which describes the total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Socioeconomic status of parents

includes the income, education, and occupation of parents. Socioeconomic background is typically broken into three categories; high, middle and low (Bateman, 2006).

A family's socioeconomic background is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community (such as contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family). Birdsall, Levine, and Ibrahim (2006) point that across all socioeconomic groups, parents face major challenges when it comes to providing optimal care and education for their children. For families in poverty, these challenges can be formidable. Sometimes, when basic necessities are lacking, parents must place top priority on housing, food, clothing and health care at the expense of their children's early education.

Over the years, there has been public outcry over children's poor enrolment to early childhood education especially in rural areas. This has attracted the interest and concern of teachers, counsellors, psychologists, researchers and school administrators (Chua & Wing, 2007). Early childhood education; the care, stimulation, and protection of children from birth to five years, is important in children's lives (FGN 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2008). Children go through a huge variety of learning and make great developmental strides, and all that they learn create an important foundation for their learning in formal schooling and later life. Chua and Wing (2007) stressed the importance of child education and stated that there is need to

grant every Nigerian child equal access and enrolment opportunity to quality early childhood education but unfortunately, there is a growing concern about the low enrolment of children from low socioeconomic background to early childhood education. Many Nigerian children do not have opportunities to early childhood education; this may be due to the fact that their parents cannot afford to pay for this form of education.

A report from Plateau State Universal Basic Education Board shows that over 69% of children in Plateau state do not attend any form of early childhood education. Another study of primary schools by UNICEF in 2016 in Nigeria found that there is a general poor performance in the mean score of numeracy, literacy and life skills among primary school pupils who had no exposure to early childhood education. This in turn will lead to incompetence in social and emotional development of children in later life. Important as this education type is, why do children in rural areas not enroll despite its availability in all existing primary schools? This study sets out to examine the influence of parents' socioeconomic background on pupils' enrolment into early childhood education programmes in rural areas in Jos North, Plateau state.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (i) What percentage of parents think that children in rural areas in Jos North Local Government Area have access to early childhood education
- (ii) What are the factors responsible for low enrollment of children in rural areas in early childhood education?
- (iii) What influence does parents' socioeconomic status have on

children's enrolment in early childhood education programmes in Jos North Local Government Area?

3. Method

Descriptive survey research design was employed in carrying out this study. The descriptive survey assessed the influence that parents' socioeconomic status have on children's early childhood education enrolment in rural areas in Jos North Local Government Area. The target population for this study was parents of children in rural areas of Jos North Local Government Area. The sample consisted of sixty (60) parents who were randomly selected across five wards in Jos North Local Government Area. The research instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire titled 'Parents' Socioeconomic Background and Children's Early Childhood Education Enrollment Questionnaire' (PSBCECEA) developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts in the area of research, measurement and evaluation, early childhood education, and educational administration. The instrument was has two parts; part one consisted of personal data of the respondent, while part two sought information on the enrollment of children in early childhood education, factors responsible for children's low enrolment in early childhood education and parents' socioeconomic background. Sixty (60) questionnaires were administered and all of the instruments were retrieved. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages.

4. Results

Research question 1: What percentage of parents think that children in rural areas in Jos North Local Government Area have access to early childhood education?

Table 1: Percentage of parents who think that children in rural areas in Jos North Local Government Area have access to early childhood education

s/n	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Children in rural areas have access to early childhood education	15	25%	45	75%
2	Early childhood education is affordable for all parents in rural areas	18	30	42	70%
3	Majority of children in rural areas are enrolled in nursery schools	16	26.7%	44	73.3%

Table1 shows that 15 respondents representing 25% agreed that children in rural areas have access to early childhood education while 45 respondents representing 75% disagreed. 18 respondents representing 30% agreed that early childhood education is affordable for all parents in rural areas while 42 respondents representing 70% disagreed. 16 respondents representing 26.7% agreed that majority of children in rural areas are enrolled in nursery schools while 44 respondents representing 73.3% disagreed.

Research Question 2: What are the factors responsible for low enrollment of children in early childhood education in rural areas in Jos North Local Government Area?

Table 2: Factors responsible for low enrollment of children in early childhood education in rural areas in Jos North LGA

s/n	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
4	Low socio-economic status of parents	39	65	21	35
5	Lack of enough nursery schools in rural areas	34	56.7	26	43.3
6	Poor enlightenment of parents on the importance of early childhood education	42	70	18	30

Table 2 shows the responses of the respondents on the factors responsible for low enrollment of children in rural areas in early childhood education. 39 respondents representing 65% agreed that low socio-economic status of parents is responsible for low enrolment of rural children in early childhood education programme while 21 respondents representing 35% disagreed. 34 respondents representing 56.7% agreed that lack of enough nursery schools in rural areas is responsible for low enrolment of rural children in early childhood education programme while 26 respondents representing 43.3% disagreed. 42 respondents agreed that poor enlightenment of parents on the importance of early childhood education programme is responsible for low enrolment of rural children in early childhood education programme while 18 respondents representing 30% disagreed

Research Question 3: What influence does parents' socioeconomic status have on children's enrollment in early childhood education programmes in Jos North Local Government Area?

Table 3: Influence of parents' socioeconomic status on children's enrolment in early childhood education

s/n	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
7	Parents' socioeconomic background determines the extent to which parents enroll their children in nursery schools (early childhood education)	43	71.7%	17	28.3%
8	Parents' socioeconomic background determines their level of enlightenment on the importance of early childhood education	39	65%	21	35%
9	Parents' socioeconomic background determines the extent to which they pay their children's fees in early childhood education programmes	45	75%	15	25%

The analysis on table 3 above shows that 43 respondents representing 71.7% agreed that parents' socio-economic background determines the extent to which parents afford to pay enroll their children in nursery schools (early childhood education) while 17 respondents representing 28.3% disagreed. 39 respondents representing 65% agreed that parents' socio-economic background determines their level of enlightenment on the importance of early childhood education while 21 respondents representing 35% disagreed. 45 respondents representing 75% agreed that parents'

socioeconomic background determines the extent to which they pay their children's fees in early childhood education programme while 15 respondents representing 25% disagreed.

5. Discussion

The findings from of the study revealed that the factors responsible for low enrollment of rural children in early childhood education programme include poor socioeconomic background of parents, lack of enough nursery schools in rural areas and poor enlightenment of

parents on the importance of early childhood education. This finding is consistent with Chua and Wing's findings who discovered in their research that the major factors responsible for poor enrollment of rural children in early childhood education include poverty and lack of enlightenment of parents on the importance of early childhood education.

The findings also revealed that parents' socioeconomic background determines the extent to which parents afford to pay the fees to enroll their children in nursery schools (early childhood education), it also determine the level of their enlightenment on the importance of early childhood education. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Egwu (2009) who discovered that parents' socioeconomic background¹ is a major factor militating against provision of quality education for young children.

6. Conclusion

From findings of the study, it is obvious that parents' socio-economic background determines the extent to which children have access to early childhood education in rural areas, and parents' income determines the extent to which they can afford to enroll their children in nursery schools. Also, parents' educational level determines the extent to which they are enlightened on the importance of early childhood education. The study concludes that parents' socioeconomic background influences rural children's enrolment in early childhood education in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Parents in rural areas should be enlightened on the importance of early childhood education and the need to enroll their children in nursery schools
- Nursery, primary and secondary education should be made free of charge for all Nigerian children

- More nursery schools should be established in rural areas to meet the educational needs of the low socioeconomic class.

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