Extent of Community Participation in Early Childhood Education in Ibadan South West Local Government, Oyo State

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Abstract

Early childhood education is the lowest level of formal education. It is so demanding that it has become problematic for the government to provide qualitative ones. In other developed and developing nations, communities have been found providing assistance and support for this level of education in terms of provision of human, material, and financial support. An observation of Early Childhood Education provision in Nigeria reveals that it has not been enjoying community participation, particularly in Ibadan South West Local Government area of Oyo State. The government and privately owned schools are almost empty in terms of resources availability despite the fact that there is always Parent-Teacher-Association in most of the schools. This then necessitated the involvement of the communities in which these ECE centres are domiciled. This study therefore, investigated the areas of school practices in which the communities have been participating. The problems facing community participation and how to improve it were also studied. Survey research design of the questionnaire type was adopted. The community leader, head teachers and classroom teachers of ECE centres in the local government area were the population of the study. Multistage sampling techniques were used to select 307 respondents in which 11% were head teachers, 24% were community leaders and 65% were classroom teachers. The results showed that there is community participation only in the area of decision making about ECE while other areas of Early Childhood Education practices lack community participation. Recommendations were proffered based on the findings of the study.

Introduction

The conditions that make children learn are quite different from those of youth or adults. Children learn less from lectures, direct instructions or any other teacher-centred methods of teaching. The only condition that makes children learn effectively is when they have direct contact with object of learning and this is the reason the business of making children learn is highly challenging. Learners are viewed as active agents who construct their own learning (Corsaro, 2005). Mac-Naughton (2004) posits that children make their own meanings but not under conditions of their own choosing. This assertion makes it clear that though children create their understanding, they are unable to create the conditions that bring about the understanding, hence the onus is on the adults saddled with the responsibility of making children learn to help them.

To many Early Childhood Education (ECE) practitioners in Nigeria, what it takes to teach children is memorisation of facts through rote learning, singing and/or rhymes. That is why in our pre-school centres, the strategy of 'say after me', rhymes and singing, drilling of different types are the common strategies adopted by the teachers. The National Policy on Education, section 2 sub-section 14d (FGN, 2004) stipulates that the method of teaching at early childhood education centres should be play. According to Melinda (2009), early childhood education often focuses on children learning through play, as postulated by Jean Piaget. This practice is centred on the power of play. It

is true that children learn more efficiently and gain more knowledge through play-based activities such as dramatization, art and social games. Bruce (2001), Moyles (2005) and Wood and Attfield (2005) submit that for young children, play is more than recreation – it is the foundation for learning. Children love to play, their behaviours during play is spontaneous, they spend time on their own and build their own concepts. Sometimes they act roles according to what they see in real life. The importance of play in the life of children is that it gives them satisfaction.

The National Policy on Education (2004) states further that teacher education will be overhauled to prepare teachers to be able to deliver preschool instructions using play but according to Aremu, Salami and Ishola (2012), majority of ECE teachers prepared in colleges of education and faculties of education in Nigerian universities are unable to deliver any pupil-centred instruction. Pre-school teachers are aware that the best method to teach children is play but very few of them are able to implement it in the classroom. The implication here is the need for constant retraining of the teachers of children for them to acquire the skills of using the right strategies.

A meaningful pupil-centred instruction is resources-driven (Adebanjo, 2007; Igwe, 2008). There should be adequate materials for children to choose from; there should be two to four adults in a class of 25 children- the class teacher, the assistant teacher, the caregiver and others depending on the age of the children in the class; there should be some professionals (medical doctor, child psychologist, social worker among others) on call; good sources of water (both for drinking and for play); regular power supply for some electronic gadgets such as fan, tv set, computer systems among others; enough toilet facilities; spacious classroom, play ground and outdoor play equipment; meal and health facilities and so on (NERDC, 2007). The ECE centres may include all these unaffordable if left unassisted.

In terms of teachers' qualifications, it seems only a few of the nursery schools, most especially, demonstration schools in higher institutions or those owned by private companies, that can afford to engage the services of qualified teachers who are either university degree holders or holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Most privately-owned nursery schools employ a few NCE teachers, Grade II as well as secondary school certificate holders who are usually underpaid. The public pre-school sections in the existing primary schools are handled by those teachers working in the primary schools. The privately owned nursery schools that employ qualified teachers charge high fees while those who engage less qualified teachers charge less but almost everything in such schools are sub-standard.

The classroom environment is very important in Early Childhood Education. Berk (2000) submits that environment can either provide social and physical conditions that help children develop and form new ideas or the environments can suppress them. The Reggio Emilia approach as reported by Salami (2011) illustrates how powerful the environment may be in helping children construct knowledge. The environment is seen as an additional teacher. The importance of the environment lies in the belief that children can best create meaning and make sense of their world through interaction with their environment (Cadwell, 1997). The environment in the classroom is bound to affect the feelings and actions of the children. An inviting environment makes the children to love the classroom, give comfort to the children and affects brain development (Grantham-McGregor et al, 2007). Therefore, creating educative environment for children is another challenge for early childhood education centres in Nigeria.

Instructional materials are those materials that help the teachers to teach and the learners to learn without stress (Salami 2011). Instructional materials are materials that enhance or facilitate

effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. The lessons are made more interesting to the learners. Adebanjo (2007) reported that using instructional materials in teaching and learning makes learners learn more and retain better what they have been taught; it also promotes and sustains students' interests and that it helps the teacher in making lessons more interesting to the learners and the classroom quite lively. Igwe, (2008) was of the view that instructional materials help to promote greater acquisition and higher retention of factual knowledge and contribute to the development of attitudes and behaviour change. Unfortunately, very few of early childhood education centres in the public schools and many of those in private schools teach without instructional materials and resources. This is another challenge facing the education of children in Nigeria.

To have an ideal and functional early childhood education, all these facilities cannot be handled by the government or individual school owners alone. This calls for collaboration between the education providers and the communities that will enjoy the education. It was on this basis that this country developed a policy titled National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007) which advocated for collaboration between schools and communities. It was suggested in the document that a committee should be set up in every community where there is ECE with the following functions:

i. Providing conducive environment for families, caregivers to facilitate ECE practices,
ii. Monitoring ECE practices in the community and
iii. Monitoring for effective participation and sustenance of ECE programmes through the community forum. (*Note: IECD was used in the document instead of ECE. IECD means Integrated Early Childhood Development which is the same as ECE- Early Childhood Education as used in this document*).

A visit to any Early Childhood Education centre in Nigeria will reveal that there is always school-community partnership, most of the time, under the name Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This body creates a forum whereby the parents or people in the community, school owners, school administrators, classroom teachers and other school workers come together to discuss issues concerning the school. It is therefore worthwhile investigating whether or not the school/community partnership are well organized as stipulated by the national policy; in what area of the educational needs of the school is the partnership giving assistance; and how can this school/community partnership be improved?

It is established in literature that in other developing and developed nations, communities have played significant roles in the early childhood education provisions. Salami (2011) reported a community intervention in Italy that led to the Reggio Emilian Approach in ECE today. This approach has caught the attention of the whole world and other nations have been sending their ECE scholars to learn the new approach. Machen, Wilson & Notar, (2005) submit that improving parental involvement in the classroom can also improve schools in general. They further describe how everyone within the school community can benefit when parents and teachers work as partners. Research carried out at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, found that children whose parents participated in the Peers Early Education Partnership (a programme geared towards supporting families of children ages 0-5) made significantly greater progress in vocabulary, language comprehension, understanding of books and print and number concepts. In addition, these children also exhibited higher self-esteem in comparison to children of non-participating parents (Evangelou & Sylva, 2003). There are many community intervention programmes for Early

Childhood Education around the world. Some of these are funding assistance, care and support, help for those deemed at risk of failing in public school, fight against poverty, provision of educational, social, medical, dental, nutritional and mental health services to low-income pre-school children. An example of these is Reggio Emilian Approach in Italy. There has not been any documented evidence of these types of efforts in Ibadan South West Local Government Area of Oyo State.

It is therefore considered a worthwhile endeavour to examine the extent to which the communities where ECE centres are established have been supporting this crucial education; what area of the school practices is being supported and what area can be improved through community participation. If this is achieved, with awareness campaign in our communities, there should be tremendous improvement in the Early Childhood Education given to our younger ones.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the activities of the research:

1. To what extent do communities in Ibadan South West Local Government Area participate in the following areas of Early Childhood Education:
    a. Provision of land and/or classroom blocks?
    b. Provision of learning resources?
    c. Decision making on ECE centres?
    d. Provision of human resources?
    e. Financial assistance to the centres?
    f. Provision of necessary facilities such as water, electricity, toilet, health services?
    g. Assistance in classroom instructions?
2. What are the problems facing community participation in Early Childhood Education?
3. How can community participation towards Early Childhood Education improve?

Methodology

The design of this study is a descriptive survey research design. Questionnaire was administered to collect data which was analysed to give the findings. The population of this study comprise the Head teachers, teachers and community leaders in the local government. The head teachers, teachers and community leaders were involved because they have first hand information concerning the relationship between the school and the community, and information from both sides (school and community) could be accessed which will give the true picture of the community participation.

Multistage sampling technique was adopted for this study. Ibadan South West Local Government was zoned into five. Selection of schools was done using disproportionate stratified random sampling technique whereby all the zones were represented. Three schools were randomly selected from each zone and from each school; all the teachers handling pre-school sections and lower primary classes (Pry I to III) were selected. The head teachers of the selected schools were automatically involved in the study. In the community where each selected school is located, ten community leaders were purposively selected based on their positions in the community, ability to read and write and their readiness to participate in the completion of the questionnaire. At the end of the sampling, 34(11.1%) head teachers, 200(65.1%) classroom teachers and 73(23.8%) community leaders were sampled.

A self-designed questionnaire titled "School Community Relations Questionnaire which was validated and reliability tested using Cronbach alpha with coefficient of 0.86 was used to gather data. The instrument had ten sections (A-J). Section A contained items that measure demographic information of the respondent. Section B has 8 items which

seek information on community involvement in the provision of structures in the school. Section C contains 6 items which measure participation of the community in the provision of learning resources in the school. Section D was an open-ended type of question, which sought information on cases of intervention by the communities towards the education of the pre-school children and those in primaries 1-3. Section E contains 4 items which sought information on community participation in decision-making in the schools. Section F with 8 items measured community participation in the provision of human resources. Section G has 4 items which sought information on communities' participation in financing other school needs. Section H has 3 items designed to measure information about community participation in financing other school needs. Section I sought information on challenges facing community participation in the education of young children while section J is designed to measure how better community participation can be ensured.

The questionnaire adopted 4-point Likert's Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) rated 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positive statement and the reverse for negative.

Data collected were analysed using the descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Line and pie charts were also used where necessary.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do communities in Ibadan South West Local Government Area participate in the following areas of Early Childhood Education:

a. Provision of land and/or classroom blocks?
b. Provision of learning resources?
c. Decision making on ECE centres?
d. Provision of human resources?
e. Financial assistance to the centres?
f. Provision of necessary facilities such as water, electricity, toilet, health services?
g. Assistance in classroom instructions?

To answer this question, the responses from the participants were analysed and the mean scores were used to calculate the weighted averages. Since 4-point likert scale of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree was used, the remarks give the translations of the weighted average in this line. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Extent of Community Participation in ECE in Ibadan South West

Area of ECE that Require Participation	Weighted average	Remark
Provision of land/block of classrooms	2.00	Disagreed
Provision of learning resources	1.76	Disagreed
Participating in decision making	2.5	Agreed
Provision of human resources	2.12	Disagreed
Financial support to the school	2.21	Disagreed
Provision of necessary facilities (water, electricity, toilet)	1.68	Disagreed
Participating in classroom instruction	1.31	Strongly Disagreed

Table 1 shows that it is only on decision making that community do participate in the early childhood education given to their children (Weighted Average = 2.5), the respondents disagreed that the community participated in other area of the education such as provision of land/block of classroom (Weighted Average = 2.00); provision of learning resources (Weighted Average = 1.76); provision of human resources (Weighted Average = 2.12); giving financial support to the schools (Weighted Average = 2.21); provision of necessary facilities like water,

electricity, toilet and so on (Weighted Average = 1.68) and participating in classroom instruction (Weighted Average = 1.31). Figure 1 depicts the extent of community participation in ECE in Ibadan South West of Oyo State, Nigeria.

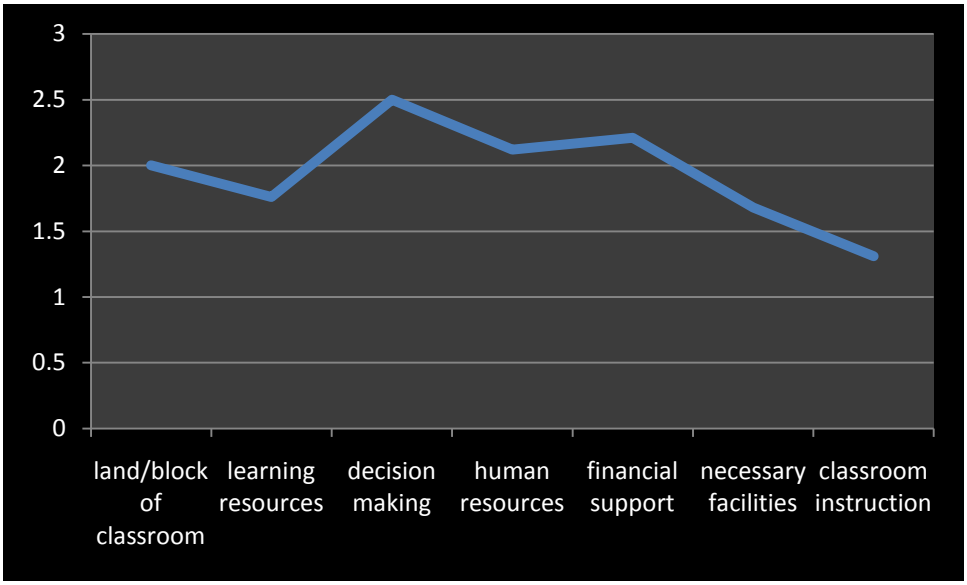


Fig. 1: Line Graph Showing Extent of Community Participation in ECE

The finding that communities do participate in the decision making could be as a result of the outcomes of various PTA meetings held in the schools. Most of the time decisions various issues like how to handle the expected contributions from the parents like the purchase of school uniform, textbooks and other stationeries, preparation of the children for school and most importantly how to get money out of the parents are taken. This action of the community is supported by the policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD), section 7, sub-section 4 (NERDC, 2007) that community IECD steering committee should be set up and one of the responsibilities of the committee is to ensure effective planning for community ownership, families and sustenance of IECD centres. This bears reference to Cochran (2007) submission that parents have found that they have a lot of power and say about what goes on in the school and that the administration listens to them and respects their concerns.

The finding that the communities do not participate as expected in other areas of Early Childhood Education could be as a result of lack of awareness on the part of the community people. Besides, some school administrators do not welcome ideas, assistance and supports from the members of the community. This could be as a result of some rules and regulations in Oyo State that forbid collection of money from pupils in the public schools by the school administrators. Again, some schools, most especially the privately owned ones only invite the parents to school when the school fees have not been duly paid but not for meaningful collaborations. Majority of the teachers do not know at what level or in what area could the community be of assistance to the education of the young children. These findings are not in support of the views of Delgado-Gaitan, (2004) and Carlisle et al (2005) who believe in families volunteering to assist in classroom activities, provision of resources and share their expertise and interest as guest speakers in the school.

Research Question 2: What are the problems facing community participation in Early Childhood Education in Ibadan South West Local Government?

Table 2: Problems Facing Communities Participation in Early Childhood Education.

Problems	Frequency	Percentage	Rate
Poverty/Lack of financial Resources	74	24.8	1st
Illiteracy on the part of parents	59	19.8	2nd
Absence of cooperation between parent/Guardian and Teachers	39	13.1	3rd
Lack of Motivation for Teachers and Parents	29	9.7	4th
Parents' over Reliance on Government	25	8.4	5th
Lack of Parents' understanding of value of Education	24	8.1	6th
Broken Homes	19	6.4	7th
Untrained Teachers	18	6.0	8th
Unhealthy Relationship between parents and Teachers	11	3.7	9th

Table 2 shows the problems facing communities in Ibadan South West Local Government area about participation in Early Childhood Education. The table shows that the major problem facing the communities' participation in Early Childhood Education is Poverty cum Lack of Financial Resources. About 25% of the respondents claimed this. This is followed by illiteracy on the part of the parents (19.8%); absence of cooperation and unhealthy relationship between parents/guardian and the teachers (16.8%); Lack of motivation for teachers and parents that participated (9.7%) and parents over-reliance on government (8.4%). Other problems are lack of parents understanding of the value of education (8.1%); problems of broken homes (6.4%) and untrained teachers (6.0%). Figure 2 presents this information in pie chart.

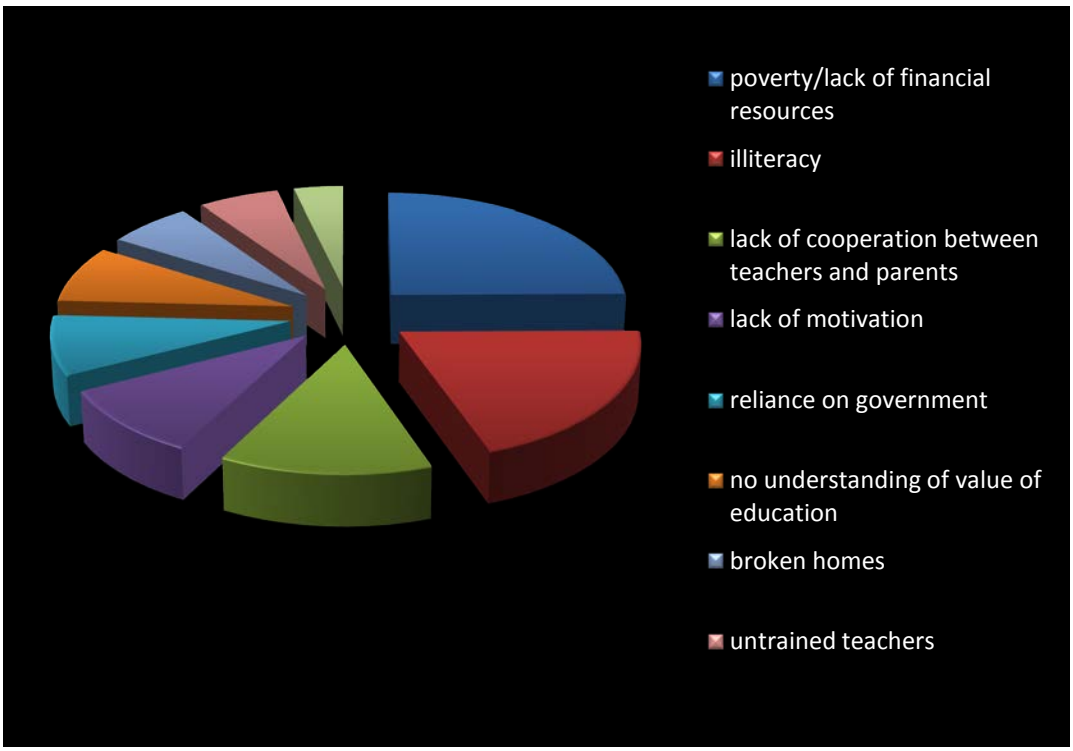


Figure 2: Pie Chart Showing Problems Facing Community Participation

The finding that the major reasons for lack of participation in ECE by the community people is lack of financial resources and illiteracy could be as a result of the fact that the economic status as well as the literacy levels of most Nigerians is low. This finding corroborates the opinion of Akinwumi (2003) who identified low literacy and financial capacity of parents amongst other things as factors influencing their involvement in the school activities of their children. This is also supported by Bennett (2001) and Penn (2007). This situation is so severe in Ibadan South Local Government too where the largest proportion of the population engaged in petty trading and artesian. Besides this, that lack of cooperation between the parents or community people and the teacher on issues about the education of the children is also major one. The parents are of the opinion that as soon as the children are in the schools, the education and the development of the children are in the hands of the teachers while the teachers, most of the time, see themselves as 'expert' about education and the parents are 'novice about education'. These beliefs are seriously affective the collaboration between the community and the school in a negative way. Another cogent problem facing community participation in the education of children is this over reliance on the government. This notion affects the public ECE centres mostly. Since Oyo State government has been operating this free basic education, parents and the community people have put all the responsibilities on the shoulders of the government even when it was glaring that the government is doing very little. Those parents that are not satisfied with the public schools then take their children to privately owned schools. Other problems as revealed by this study such as lack of motivation for the parents/community that participate; broken home and untrained teachers about the involvement of community in ECE programmes are just fall out of the major problems discussed earlier.

Research Question 3: How can community participation towards Early Childhood Education be improved?

To answer this question, respondents were asked to suggest how they think community participation in ECE can be improved. Their responses are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Ways of Improving Communities' Participation in Early Childhood Education

Ways of Improving Communities Participation	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Rate**
Schools should involve community members	50	20.6	1st
Through orientation of community members	45	18.5	2nd
Parents and teachers should show interest.	23	9.5	3rd
Through Parents Teachers Association	22	9.1	4th
Parents should be motivated	21	8.6	5th
Government should provide fund	21	8.6	6th
Means of transportation should be provided for schools	18	7.4	7th
Adequate security	17	7.0	8th
Provision of social amenities	14	5.8	9th
Provision of Education for Special Children.	12	4.9	10th

Table 3 shows the suggestions of the respondents on ways by which better community participation could be ensured in Early Childhood Education. The table shows that supported the fact that school' managements should be involving community members (20.6%). This is followed by those who supported that orientation of the community people (18.5%), those that suggest that parents and teachers should show interest in the education given to the younger ones is 9.5% while some suggest that community participation could be encouraged through parents teachers association (PTA) (9.1%). Some respondents also suggest that those people that participated in one way or the other should be motivated (8.6%). Other suggestions raised by some respondents are not so relevant to the issue at hand. Some of these are that government should provide fund (8.6%); means of transportation should be provided for schools (7.4%) and adequate security should be provided (7.0%). Figure 3 presents this information.

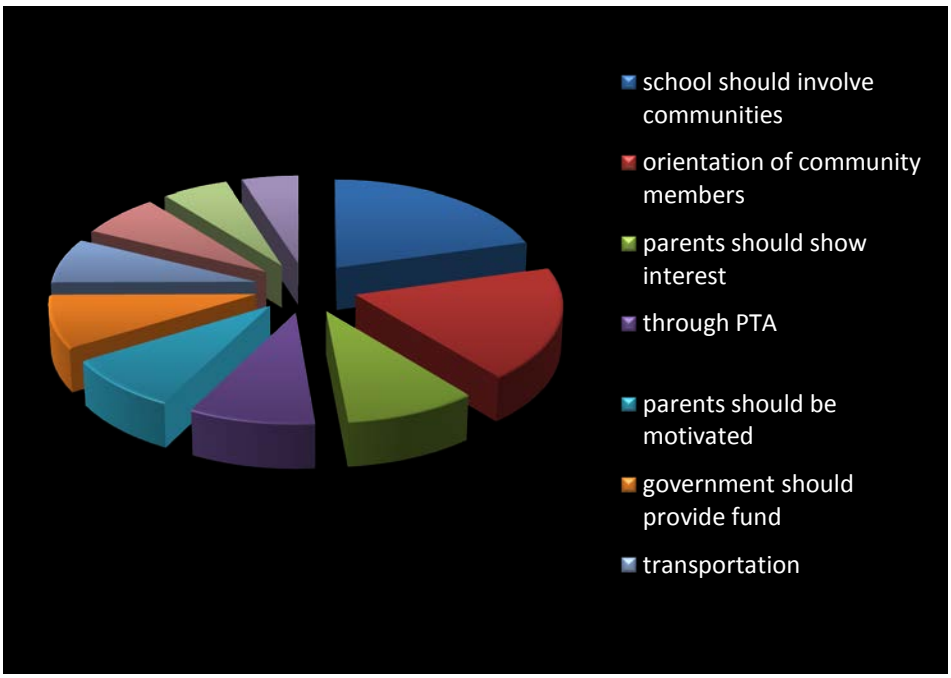


Fig. 3: Ways of Improving Community Participation in ECE

If schools call for community participations and the community people are given orientation on why this is necessary and well informed about those things they could do (at no much cost) that can improve tremendously, the Early Childhood Education; therefore, more participation will be experienced. This finding is in line with what happened in Mississippi five years ago when the community people in the state discovered that their ECE is the worst across the whole nation. The business people, philanthropists, and corporate sponsors raised money and built 500 building blocks for ECE (Monaghan, 2012). With little contributions and human efforts, community people in Ibadan South West Local Government Area can also support the Early childhood in a numerous ways. For instance, additional classroom blocks could be build; local materials that can be used as learning resources could be supplied with little or no cost; borehole as source of water, small size generating plant for electricity for the few electric gadgets in the school; experienced early childhood teachers in the community could give valuable ideas as to classroom instructions; assistance in employing other school workers and so on. Most of these assistances only require commitment and the cost, by the time it is spread on all adults in the community, will be so small. This is possible because in Typical Yoruba community, there is a strong belief that children are the future of the society and also there is a strong value for the education of children. If only the people can be guided on how to go about getting meaningful, functional and quality Early Childhood Education.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that the poor quality of almost all the Early Childhood Education schools in Ibadan South West Local Government Area was as a result of the lack of meaningful participation of the community in the provision of this essential education. The common PTAs that exist in some of the schools are doing little to improve the school practices so as to ensure ideal school environment and learning for the children. Various reasons were given as militating against the community participation but if the communities in the local government area could be orientated about this and the schools are allowed to collaborate with the community the more, there will be

improvement in the Early Childhood Education in the area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended for better Early Childhood Education in the local government, Oyo State and Nigeria as a whole:

- There is the need to first carry out a workshop for the pre-school and primary school head teachers and teachers in the local government on how to collaborate with the community to have a quality Early Childhood Education schools and centres. This could be organised by the Local Government Education Authority in conjunction with the local government. Experts in the field of Early Childhood Education from reputable institutions could be invited to do the training. The implementation of ideas and skills learnt from the workshop should be monitored too.
- Awareness campaign should also be carried out in the local government to educate the people about why and how they can be of tremendous assistance to the education of their children. It should be made clear that the collaboration is not of the parents of children in the school alone but the entire community. During this campaign, it should also be made clear that everybody is relevant in the participation programme; it is not for educated, elite or rich people alone.
- The community people are enjoined to set up a committee that will coordinate their collaboration activities. The activities of the committee should be guided by the policy provisions as stated in the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NERDC, 2007).

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