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PRIVATIZATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ITS GAINS AND PAINS

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Dr. M.D. Amosun, Okoroafor, N. C & Ikuenomore, M.G.

Abstract

Privatization of education and especially the early childhood education has been perceived as the breakdown of the social ethos of education, cost cutting, making profits from children and negligence on the part of the government. The fact is that the running of private early childhood education in an effective way depends on a number of factors which call for collaborative efforts of both government and other stakeholders to make this level of education achieve its goals as in developed countries of the world. In this paper, the writers look at the perception of Nigeria people towards privatization, the status of early childhood care and education privatization in Nigeria, its gains and pains as well as the way forward.

Key words: Privatization, Early Childhood Care and Education, Efficiency, Quality Control

Word count: 118

Introduction

Privatization is one of the global issues being debated in the education sector. It is considered as part of education reform because it eases the pressure on government increasing demand and relieves government of excessive costs. In developed countries, provision of school either by government or individuals or institutions and maintenance of standard to make children and pupils achieve maximally are issues at hand. The reason is that privatization can be advantageous to parents, who are given more freedom and choice when deciding on schools for their children, and greater control over the way their children are educated (Belfield and

Levin, 2002).

The fact is that there are different structures of privatization reform in the developed and developing countries. The motives for privatization vary and the form of privatization adopted is also specific to the country and its economic and demographic situation (Belfield and Levin, 2002). Thus, privatization movement is a complex issue. It can take many forms:

- i. An increase in the number of fully privately managed and funded schools.
- ii. Privately managed schools financed by public funds.
- iii. Public schools fully or partially financed by private funds
- iv. Public schools run as private institutions which compete for public funds etc.

The issue in developed world is not so much financing, but rather freedom of choice, management flexibility, private regulation and accountability. However, in this paper, the writers look at the situation in Nigeria in relation to early childhood care and education.

In Nigeria, there have been increase in the number of privately managed and funded pre-primary schools. This is the situation in Nigeria and it is in accordance to the National Policy on Education (2004, revised) which states that “government shall encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education”.

This paper therefore addresses the following questions:

1. What is privatization?
2. What is the perception of people towards privatization?
3. Why does government encourage privatization of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). in Nigeria?
4. What is the status of Private ECCE in Nigeria?
5. What are the gains ad pains of private ECCE in Nigeria?
6. How can Nigeria achieve the goals of ECCE ?

What is Privatization

It is the transfer of activities, assets and responsibilities from government/public organizations and institutions to private individuals and agencies (Belfield and Levin, 2002). It also means liberalization i.e. where agents are freed from government regulations or as marketization- where new markets are created as alternatives to government services or state allocation systems (Levin, 2001). However, it must be borne in mind that

privatization does not mean threatening connotations such as cost cutting, making profits from children, and the breakdown of the social ethos of education. This is an unhelpful distortion which must be corrected. Privatization programmes are varied and they can be designed to meet many educational objectives. Private school may promote the social good of the people.

In Nigeria, Uwakwe, Falaye, Emunemu and Adelore (2008) quoting Tooley and Dixon (2006:450) said that private schools in Nigeria can be categorized into the private (aided) unrecognized/unregistered and private (unaided) recognized/registered. This implies that unrecognized private establishments are unregistered and unapproved by government agencies, while the registered ones are recognized ones. The third category is emerging which is private aided schools and Rochas foundation is playing a leading role in this category.

Reasons for Privatization of Education in Nigeria

The driving force behind privatization of education in Nigeria is not really clear however, in the area of early childhood education, it is obvious that the government of Nigeria solely leaves its provision in the hand of private efforts as written in the official document (NPE, 2004 revised). This has allowed individuals, communities, NGOs, and private and public institutions to run pre-primary schools.

Apart from the above reason, some scholars believe that poor quality of education provided in government schools informed the many proliferation of private pre-primary schools in Nigeria (Uwakwe et al, 2008). Another factor is the reduction in funds available to the public sector. Government always claim that education is capital intensive and that other sectors such as health, power, agriculture etc should also be catered for.

Besides, many parents want privatization especially in the developed countries of the world and the developing countries are not exception. In many countries, education is viewed as an important way to gain social and economic advancement. Therefore, the demand for education is high and if government cannot afford to provide and fund all the education that parents expect for their children, then those parents will seek private suppliers.

In addition, many parents want for their children an education different from that offered in public schools. In many countries the state education system reflects a particular religion, ideology or morality; while in some countries the education may tend to be secular. Parents may be

dissatisfied with either of the case and seek a private education system that suits them (Belfield and Levin, 2002).

The global economic and social change is another factor. Globalization, linked with market liberalization can pressure and encourage governments to seek more efficient, more flexible, and more expansive education system. For example, there is a great international pressure for expansive and comprehensive early childhood education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. This is a priority in Education For All goals for all the countries of the world.

Also, World aid agencies like World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO have been encouraging reforms which lean towards privatization of the education system by giving assistance to many countries. For example Nigeria has benefited from these agencies in funding education of children over the years.

Status of Private Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria

After the Jomtien Conference in 1990, Nigeria has witnessed great pressure to get involved in education of all children. This has led to Education For All goals and most importantly the first goal which deals with early childhood care and education. Early Childhood Care and Education started in Nigeria as a special field of focus for developmental intervention in order to create enabling environment for the Nigeria child to thrive and develop to his or her fullest potential in line with national goal (FGN, 2007).

Prior to Basic Education Act of 2004, The Federal Government of Nigeria and UNICEF have established the project of ECCDE in 10 UNICEF assisted states for 1991-1995 and between 1997-2001 country programme of co-operation with emphasis on early child care in all its ramifications. At this level, one form of early childhood education and pre-schools have emerged in almost all nooks and cranny of Nigeria especially with the UBE Act (2004) which has an expanded scope which includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development. The so called UBE programme has made provision for every public primary school to have a pre-primary school linkage to cater for children aged 3-5 years. However, the act is silent on early childhood education and development in the age group 0-3 years.

On the provision of early childhood care and education, the act states that::

- a. Private (private individuals, NGOS, the civil/ society including religious organizations).
- b. Public (Federal, State and Local Governments)
- c. Local Communities will be encouraged to provide ECCE.

The implication of the above provision on ECCE is that government is not directly involved in the establishment of day to day running of ECCE but encourages private efforts to do so. It makes provision for teachers to specialize in early childhood education and also:

- Sets the minimum standards, regulates and controls the operation of pre-primary education.
- Ensures that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.
- Develops the orthography of many more Nigeria languages.
- Produces textbooks in Nigerian languages
- Ensures that the main method of teaching in this level is activity or play method and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this.

In relation to the above are the main sources of financing ECCE in Nigeria. Since the global awareness of the need for this level of education in Nigeria, the sources of financing ECCE in Nigeria include:

- a. UBE Intervention Fund from the Federal Government of Nigeria's Consolidated Revenue
- b. Complimentary funding from state and local governments.
- c. Funds or consolidated contributions in form of Federal guaranteed credits.
- d. Local individual. corporate, as well as international donor grants.
- e. Contributions from privately owned ECD centres, Nurseries and Pre-Primary schools, by Communities, NGOs and private individuals.

Since the early childhood care and education in Nigeria is majorly run by private efforts, as stipulated by NPE, (2004), they have to source for fund other than through public funding.. The privately-owned centres are run

on a commercial, fee-paying basis and the fees charged usually depend on the quality of the teachers and facilities provided. The implication of the above is that Nigeria government is not funding pre-primary schools that are privately owned. This is not the case in some developed countries of the world like Netherlands, Czech Republic, and England where private schools are run and are being funded by government. An inventory of early childhood care facilities in Nigeria conducted by FGN/NERDC/UNICEF in 2003 showed that the most of the ECC facilities are privately owned (42% of the sample population) and 34% by the government, followed by 21% by local communities. These findings are said to be consistent with the ESA 2003 study, which also indicated a greater private ownership (57%) of ECC facilities, compared to ownership by the government (42%).

Early Child Care and Education Privatization and Access

Unlike the unhelpful distortion that privatization is cost-cutting, making profits from children, breakdown of the social ethos of education and serves the educational needs of the minority especially the rich (Belfield and Levin, 2002, Tooley and Dixon, 2006), many children are benefiting from the private schools that have been established in both urban and peri-urban towns (Uwakwe et al , 2008). Thus, privatization of early childhood education in the area of expanding access to schooling for all children irrespective of their socio-economic status is a major advantage. It is on record that school census data disseminated by FGN/UBEC (2003) showed increase in participation in early years programmes with more than 1.4 million young children enrolled nation wide.

Also, UNICEF intervention and support in 111 focus LGAs has increased access to early childhood care and development especially to remote communities, which now have at least an Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) facility, home/centre based to cater for their young children. However, a large proportion of Nigeria's children still lack access to or participate in early years development programmes in the country (FGN, 2007).

The Federal Ministry Education (FME) Baseline 2003 revealed that barely 20% of Nigerian children aged 3-5 years were attending some form of organized early childhood education. The United Nations Agency for International Development (UNAD) also reported that 1.8m children are orphaned by AIDS in Nigeria and that majority of these children lacked early year education.

Apart from access, privatization has also extended provision of education and services to the poor. Uwakwe et al, (2008) opined that the concept underlining privatization especially when viewed in relation to access to education and provision of basic education for a large number of the populace, has gone a long way to provide many children in rural and urban Nigeria with some forms of education.

Also, privatization eases the pressure on governments to meet increasing demand from other sectors and relieves them of excessive costs.

Privatization also helps parents to have more freedom and choice when deciding on schools for their children and greater control over the way their children are educated.

In addition to the above, private ownership and private management are considered to be more efficient than government ownership and management leading to substantial efficiency and gains across a number of domains (such as profitability, labour productivity and workplace performance)in industries, such as mining, telecommunication and even education.

Challenges facing Privatization of Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria

Some of the challenges/pains facing privatization of ECCE in Nigeria are:

- a. Majority of Nigerian Children are still denied access to Early Childhood Care and Education. Since government is not yet fully involved. It is largely institutionalised. The fees they charge, and their other requirements in terms of food, snacks and uniforms are usually beyond the reach of majority of Nigerians (Obanya, 2004).
- b. Wrong idea of privatization of ECCE.
- c. Wrong perception of ECCE as early childhood schooling.
- d. Provision of low quality and sub-standard ECCE in term of facilities, personnel and products.
- e. Language issues: Majority of pre-primary schools that are privately and publicly owned use English language as medium of instruction.
- f. Curriculum issues: Most proprietors/teachers do not follow curriculum recommended.
- g. Method of Instruction is lecture method and teacher-centred, instead of play way method.

- h. Majority of ECCE centres are unregistered/unrecognized and unapproved. Thus control and supervision is weak.
- i. Lack of financial support of the private schools by the government.

Strategies for Achieving the Goals of Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria.

The following points are suggested in order to achieve the objectives of ECCE in Nigeria.

- i. All stakeholders in ECCE, not government alone should encourage private efforts in the provision of quality ECCE in Nigeria by:
 - a. calling on government to support privately-owned and managed pre-schools in term of finance and also advocating for full government involvement in term of managing and financing ECCE for high access and enabling learning environment.
 - b. practise true privatization like the other developed countries of the world to meet our nations' educational objectives, economic and demographic situations to make educational access a reality for all children.
 - c. doing what is right i.e. pay our tax, children school fees in good time, special donations etc, so that government and school owners can have sufficient fund to manage the schools.
- ii. Ensure that ECCE curriculum or framework that is holistic and designed to meet the educational, developmental, nutritional, health and individual needs of children are provided and implemented.
- iii. Quality Assurance and Monitoring: To ensure uniformity of practice and maintain standard quality assurance, monitoring mechanisms that are presently grossly inadequate need to be seriously addressed.
- iv. Government and other stakeholders should provide initial preparation and induction programmes and continuous professional development in order to make staff training and pedagogical programmes strong.

Conclusion

The view of the writers is that privatization of early childhood care and education in Nigeria has been able to extend provision of education and services to many children including the less privileged in relation to access to education. However, in view of the great number of private efforts in this sector of education practicing without government approval, the

quality of ECCE has been seriously compromised in Nigeria and this calls for government concerted effort and full involvement in ensuring its quality.

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