

## Investigating the Leadership Roles of Stakeholders in the Up-Scaling of Early Childhood Care Education in Rivers State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study investigated leadership roles of stakeholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State Nigeria. There were two research questions as well as two hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The design adopted was the descriptive research design. The population of the study was 210 junior senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State out of which 135 teachers were sampled for the study. The instrument used was a 15-item questionnaire titled "Leadership Roles of Stakeholders and Up-scaling of Early Childhood Care Education" (LRSUECCE). The questionnaire was validated by experts in the study area. The reliability was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha method deriving a co-efficient of 0.84. The research questions raised were answered using mean and standard deviation while T-test was used to test the hypotheses were at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that a positive relationship exists between the leadership roles of stakeholders and the up-scaling of early childhood care education in Rivers State. It was recommended that effective measures should be ensured in the training of early childhood/pre-primary teachers through adequate scholarships, approving the mounting of such programmes in all Universities, Institutes of Education and College of Education.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Roles, Stakeholders, Up-scaling, Early-childhood.

### Introduction

Early years in life are the most important to the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour of a child (Ho, & Tikly, 2017). The year before a child reaches Kindergarten are among the most critical in his or her life to influence learning. That is why modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones by providing needed support to prepare them to succeed later in school (Bagudo, 2021). It is common practice in most societies to make provision for early childhood education programmes of various sorts for children below the official school-going age (usually 6 years) mainly to prepare them for education in primary schools (Ang, 2017). The Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes the importance of early childhood education in Nigeria and as a result it was given prominence in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2004) as one of the programmes in the Nigerian educational system.

According to Arbour, (2016), Early Childhood Education (also known as Early Childhood learning and Early Education) varies in scope and seem to be closely linked to geographical locations. While the main thrust of some definitions is based on age bracket, some consider the environment within which the education is delivered, others combine both. ECE was considered by Arbour, (2016) to be a pre-school, semi-formal education outside the home. It includes the crèche, the nursery and kindergarten. This program was introduced for children between the ages of 0 – 5 years. In Nigeria, ECE came into being in order to assist and bring early child care within the reach of majority of Nigerian children, particularly those in rural and low socio economic areas.

Dennis, and O'Connor, (2017) refers to early childhood care and Education as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. He further maintained that it is a semi-

formal education arrangement, usually outside home where by young children from about the age of 3 years are exposed through play like activities in a group setting through mental, social and physical learning suited to their developmental stages, until the mandatory age of government approved formal schooling. FRN (2004) refers to early childhood care and Education (pre-primary education) as an education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school.

The objectives of early childhood education according to FRN (2004) are:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices)
4. Inculcate social norms
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.

The involvement of stakeholders in early childhood development education programmes therefore is vital, since it forms the child's foundation for learning (Ball, 2017). Meaningful stakeholder engagement is not an end in itself, nice to have, or just a good way to manage crises when they come along. It may start as an activity to help solve a problem but as the continuous loop of engagement develops and matures over time, stakeholder engagement becomes an essential and mutually beneficial strategic function that results in better- informed staff and constituents as well as more effective policies, projects, programs and services. Ball, (2018) posited that stakeholders' involvement influences success or failure of Early Childhood development and educational programmes performance in Nigeria.

A report by UNICEF (2017) shows that the responsibility of child rearing and early childhood education development projects in Nigeria has in many places remained unsuccessful in the hands of individual families and communities without a proper and competent institution and stakeholder involvement in education development programmes to provide for their continued needs of education and development. Early childhood education program in Nigeria operates on the basis of partnership, collaboration and networking (Hua, 2018). The main stakeholders in ECE are the parents, the community and the private sector. Other partners include Government of Nigeria and its constituent ministries coordinated by Ministry of Education (MOE). Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) such as, community-based organizations (CBOs), Faith-based organizations have been providing support to ECE as well as bilateral and multilateral partners including UNICEF, World Bank, and UNESCO (Hujala, 2016). The roles of these stakeholders and the coordination mechanism were defined in the National ECDE Policy Framework developed in 2005 by UNESCO in collaboration with the MoE and standard guidelines launched in 2007. The Ministry of Education on the other hand provides policy guidelines on capacity building of ECDE personnel, develops curriculum, supervises ECDE programs and registers ECE centres.

In the up-scaling of early childhood education in Nigeria, various stakeholders play critical leadership roles to ensure its success.

According to Heikka, and Hujala, (2019), here are some key stakeholders and their leadership roles: (i) Government: Policy formulation and implementation: The government sets policies and regulations to improve early childhood education standards, including curriculum development, teacher training, and infrastructure development. Funding allocation: Government allocates resources and funding to support early childhood education programs, including subsidies for low-income families and grants for early childhood education centers. Monitoring and evaluation: Government agencies oversee the implementation of early childhood education programs, ensuring compliance with quality standards and assessing the impact of interventions. (ii) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

Advocacy and awareness-raising: NGOs and CSOs advocate for increased investment in early childhood education and raise awareness about its importance among policymakers, communities, and parents.

Capacity-building: NGOs and CSOs provide training and support to early childhood educators and caregivers, enhancing their skills and knowledge in child development and education.

Service delivery: Some NGOs and CSOs directly implement early childhood education programs, particularly in underserved or marginalized communities, filling gaps where government services may be lacking

(iii) Education Professionals: Curriculum development: Teachers, curriculum developers, and education experts

collaborate to design age-appropriate curricula that promote holistic child development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills.

**Training and professional development:** Education professionals receive training and ongoing professional development to enhance their teaching skills, pedagogical approaches, and understanding of early childhood development principles.

**Classroom management:** Teachers create supportive and stimulating learning environments that foster children's curiosity, creativity, and love for learning, while also addressing individual learning needs. (i) **Parents and Caregivers:** Parental involvement: Parents and caregivers actively participate in their children's early childhood education by engaging in activities at home, volunteering at schools, and attending parent-teacher meetings and workshops.

**Advocacy:** Parents advocate for improved access to quality early childhood education services in their communities and collaborate with educators and policymakers to address concerns and priorities.

The leadership roles of stakeholders in the up-scaling of early childhood education in Nigeria encompass policy formulation, funding allocation, advocacy, capacity-building, service delivery, curriculum development, parental involvement, resource mobilization, and collaboration (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2021). By working together, these stakeholders can create an enabling environment that ensures every child has access to quality early childhood education, setting the foundation for lifelong learning and development.

### Statement of Problem

Since the commencement of the implementation of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria which seeks to ensure an optimal and qualitative ECE, stream of concerns have been raised by stakeholders in respect of the quality of education in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) and its actual implementation. Despite all measures put in place by the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria, there are still some lapses in the implementation and non-implementation of this program. There is no doubt that the implementation of Early Childhood Education requires the collaborative effort/input of all stakeholders, including the government, parents/guardians, and school authorities. While the government is expected to provide necessary teaching and learning resources, the stakeholders at different levels are expected to know their various roles and play them adequately. Now the problems are, do these stakeholders know the roles they are supposed to play? If they truly know these roles, what is the extent to which these roles have aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education. It is on this premise the study tends to investigate the leadership roles of stakeholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- investigate and analyze the specific leadership roles played by stockholders in the up-scaling of early childhood care education in Rivers State, Nigeria
- assess the extent to which the leadership roles of stakeholders contribute to the up-scaling of early childhood care education in Rivers State, Nigeria

### Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study

- What are the leadership roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria
- To what extent does the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria

### Hypotheses

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State, Nigeria
- H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the extent to which leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Distributed Leadership Theory by James P. Spillane (2006)**

Spillane (2006) argued that leadership is not just about individuals in formal leadership roles (like principals or directors), but about the interactions between people, their actions, and the situations they are in.

Distributed Leadership Theory suggests that leadership is shared across multiple individuals rather than being concentrated in a single leader. It emphasizes collaboration, collective responsibility, and shared decision-making within an organization or institution.

This theory moves away from the traditional top-down leadership model and focuses on how leadership functions are spread across a group of people. In an educational setting, for example, leadership responsibilities are distributed among teachers, administrators, staff, and even students and parents, rather than solely resting with the principal or headteacher.

This theory is relevant to this study because the theory plays a crucial role in improving and expanding Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) by promoting shared responsibility, collaboration, and sustainability as well, it encourages innovation by using diverse skills and perspectives.

## **Methodology**

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population of the study was 210 stakeholders made up of parents, community and private sector, Government officials, Non governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as, community-based organizations (CBOs) and Faith-based organizations etc. Stratified sampling techniques was used and a sample size of 135 stakeholders was derived. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Leadership Roles of Stakeholders in the Up-Scaling of Early Childhood Care Education in Rivers State, Nigeria (LRSUECCE). The instrument provided response to the two research questions with 15 items; Item 1-7 addressed research question one and item 8-15 addressed research question two in a 4-point rating scale weighted as "Strongly Agreed" (SA) – 4 points, "Agreed" (A) – 3 points, "Disagreed" (D) – 2 points and "Strongly Disagreed" (SD) – 1 point. To establish the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by two experts from the department of Childhood Care Education in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State and the department of Business education in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt. The data analysis was done using the mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses. The mean was obtained by the summation of all responses as assigned to a rating scale in an item divided by the total number of responses:  $4+3+2+1/4 = 2.50$ . The mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted, while those below 2.50 were rejected. Also, the decision rules for the hypotheses was that any hypothesis which the t-calculated value is less than the t-critical table value of 1.96 is considered accepted whereas if it is more than the critical table value is considered rejected.

## **Results**

The results of the study were presented based on the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

**Research question 1:** What are the leadership roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria?

**Table 4.2.1:**  
**Mean and standard deviation on the leadership roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education**

S/ N	leadership roles of stockholders in the up- scaling of early child- hood care education	Female Stakeholder s		Male Stakeholders		Remark
		X	STD	X	STD	
1.	<b>Government:</b> Policy formulation, Funding allocation, Monitoring and evaluation	3.23	1.05	2.90	0.90	SA
2.	<b>NGOs and CSOs:</b> Advocacy, Capacity- building, Service delivery	3.34	0.90	2.76	0.50	SA
3.	<b>Education Professionals:</b> Curriculum development, Training and development, Classroom management	2.53	0.96	2.80	1.09	A
4.	<b>Parents and Caregivers:</b> Parental involvement, Advocacy	2.87	0.95	2.98	0.86	A
5.	<b>Community Leaders and Businesses:</b> Resource mobilization, Collaboration and partnerships	3.93	0.92	2.97	1.12	SA
6.	<b>Religious and Community-Based Organizations:</b> Outreach and community engagement, Values-based education	3.23	0.99	3.09	0.89	SA
7.	<b>Academic Institutions and Researchers:</b> Research and innovation, Knowledge dissemination:	3.80	1.16	3.18	1.10	SA
8.	<b>Media and Communication Platforms:</b> Awareness-raising, Advocacy and public engagement	3.32	1.02	3.50	0.78	SA
<b>Grand Mean/STD</b>		<b>3.28</b>	<b>0.99</b>	<b>3.02</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>SA</b>

*Source: Field work (2024)*

The data presented in the above table shows that respondents strongly agrees with a grand mean score of 3.28 and SD of 0.99 for female and grand mean score of 3.02 and SD of 0.92 for male that items 1-8 as listed above are the leadership roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria.



**Research Question 2:** To what extent do the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early childhood care education in rivers state, Nigeria?

**Table 2:**

**Mean and standard deviation on the extent to which the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria**

S/N	extent to which the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early childhood care education in rivers state, Nigeria	Female Stakeholders		Male Stakeholders		Remark
		X	STD	X	STD	
9.	School-community relationship and implementation of effective teaching methods	3.56	1.11	2.80	0.88	SA
10.	Improved learning outcomes and a supportive home environment	3.26	0.67	2.83	0.66	SA
11.	Improved institutional organizational partnership	2.78	0.89	2.74	0.84	A
12.	Attracting private sector involvement for corporate sponsorship and partnership	2.98	0.87	2.90	0.95	A
13.	Promoting the importance of ECE through the involvement of research-based organizations	3.29	0.92	2.70	0.79	SA
14.	Improved infrastructure, teacher training and quality curriculum development	3.21	0.87	3.03	1.02	SA
15.	Improving children's physical well-being and their general health	3.29	1.09	3.13	1.05	SA
16.	Inclusion of digital learning tools, educational apps and online resources	3.79	0.89	3.00	0.98	SA
<b>Total Mean/STD</b>		<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>SA</b>

*Source: Field work (2024)*

The data presented in the above table shows that respondents strongly agree with a grand mean score of 3.27 and SD of 0.91 for female and grand mean score of 2.97 and SD of 0.90 for male that the items 9-16 as listed

above are the extent to which the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria

**Hypotheses 1:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State

**Table 4:**

**t-test analysis of the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State**

Gender	N	X	Std Dev	Df	T-cal	T-tab
Female	56	3.28	0.99	118	1.96	1.09
Male	92	3.02	0.91			

Result in table 4 shows that the t-tabulated 1.09 is less than the t-calculated 1.96 thus we accept the null hypothesis. This implies that at 0.05 level of significance there's no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State.

**Hypotheses 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the extent to which leadership roles of stockholders enhance the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State

**Table 5:**

**t-test analysis of the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the extent to which leadership roles of stockholders enhance the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers state**

Gender	N	X	St. dev.	Df	T-Cal	T-Tab
Female	56	3.27	0.91	118	1.63	1.96
Male	92	2.97	0.90			

Result in table 4 shows that the t-tabulated **1.96** is less than the t-calculated **1.63** thus we accept the null hypothesis. This implies that at 0.05 level of significance there's no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the extent to which leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State.

## Discussion of Findings

The result of the data analysed in table 2, show that the respondents to a very high extent agreed Policy formulation, Funding allocation, Advocacy, Capacity-building, Service delivery Curriculum development, Training and development, Classroom management Parental involvement, Advocacy etc. are the leadership roles of stockholders in the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in rivers state, Nigeria

This finding agrees with a study by Dacre and Sewell, (2018) who found out that leadership roles of stockholders fosters improvement in the upscaling of early childhood education in Nigeria. This goes a long way to show the importance of the stakeholder in the early childhood programme in Nigeria. The identified leadership roles are needed not just for the upscaling of the programme but for sustainability of the programme.

The result of the study in table 5 also revealed the extent to which the leadership roles of stockholders aid the up-scaling of early child-hood care education in Rivers State, Nigeria. Some investigated indicators include: Improved learning outcomes and a supportive home environment; improved learning outcomes and a supportive home environment; improved institution-organizational partnership; attracting private sector involvement for corporate sponsorship and partnership; promoting the importance of ECE through the involvement of research-based organizations; Improving children's physical well-being and their general health etc. This investigation is in line with the findings of Atakpa, (2019) who found out that leadership roles of stockholders enhances early

self awareness in children and quick open mindedness. And with that of Okorafor, (2011) who established that, the leadership role of stockholders facilitates knowledge and awareness and critical reflection on the general public a regards early childhood education and upbringing. This also goes a long way to justify the research question two hence, leadership roles of stockholders should be taking seriously in various level of participation.

### Conclusion

The importance of a solid foundation in education is obvious. Early Childhood education is where the foundation is laid. Poor performance in the other levels of academic can be traced to this foundation level. So a thorough knowledge of what, and how education is been handled at this level is imperative. Therefore, government needs iron determination to implement the strategies that will necessarily enhance quality development of early childhood/pre-primary education in Nigeria. Leadership plays a central role in supporting and sustaining quality in ECEC settings. This review of the ECEC leadership roles suggests that effective leadership establishes a set of organisational conditions that have a positive impact on process quality, and thereby fosters children's learning, development and well-being. Based on the view of this paper, it has been asserted that for effective implementation of ECE programme in Rivers State, stakeholders have vital roles to play. Effective curriculum implementation is not just dependent on the classroom teacher alone. It requires collaboration between all stakeholders. If all stakeholders are aware of their roles and willingly perform them, then the implementation of the ECE programme would be effectively done with quality results.

### Recommendations

For effective implementation of ECE by the stakeholders in Nigeria, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Effective measures should be ensured in the training of early childhood/pre-primary teachers through adequate scholarships, approving the mounting of such programmes in all Universities, Institutes of Education and College of Education.
- The government should provide conducive learning environment and good working condition as well as providing adequate resources necessary to offer quality education that will guarantee quality assurance in the system.
- Government (Federal, State and Local) in collaboration with other stakeholders should provide adequate funds through their annual budgets to strengthen teacher's motivational needs. The importance of staff training, retraining and development should be noted and strengthened.
- Teachers and counselors alike should take motivation seriously in the teaching and learning process. Teachers should be involved in the communication and in decision making process of the school.
- Parents should embrace the teachers and lay complaints in a cordial tone and as well contribute to education development in their local communities. Stakeholders should always be contacted when there is need for an important decision to be made. This would give them a sense of belonging as sustained confidence in the system. It would also command their commitment towards the system for success.

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