

INVESTIGATING GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION WITH THE CAREGIVERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SETTINGS IN ONDO STATE

¹**IKUENOMORE**, Mosunmola Grace Ph.D

E-mail:graceikus@yahoo.com

Phone:2348055827613

&

²**OLUWAFEMI**, Jesutofunmi Joy

E-mail:ifemih2020@gmail.com

Phone:+238165882715

&

³**OGUNLAJA**, Ayokunnumi Emilola

E-mail:kunnumi2007@yahoo.com

Phone:+238067667508

^{1&2}Department of Early Childhood Education

Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

³Department of Educational Foundation and Counseling (Early Childhood Unit).

Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

Abstract

This study examines government collaboration with caregivers in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ondo State, Nigeria, with a focus on supporting skill development through collaborative efforts. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through structured interview questions directed at a stratified sample of 100 caregivers across various ECCE settings. The findings reveal that a significant majority of caregivers perceive government collaboration as positive and supportive, particularly through professional development training programs such as Reggio Emilia and Jolly Phonics. However, challenges were also identified, including a lack of appropriate materials, ineffective supervision, and insufficient funding for public schools, which hinder the effective implementation of training outcomes. These obstacles underscore the need for enhanced government support and resource allocation to facilitate meaningful collaboration with caregivers. This study contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of government-caregiver partnerships and offers recommendations for improving collaboration and addressing the identified challenges.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education (ECE), Caregivers, Caregivers' Skill Development, Government Collaboration

Introduction

Government collaboration as a specific, formal form of multi-sector partnership in which the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to programs and services that support children's development and learning from birth to around age eight. These include various activities, including healthcare, nutrition, socialisation, play-based learning, and early literacy and numeracy education (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). ECCE can be centre-based, community-based, or home-based, and is also known as early childhood development (ECD) or early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Rao *et al.*, 2017).

ECCE is a crucial stage for a child's physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and motor development. The early years are critical for brain development, and high-quality ECCE programs provide the stimulation and support needed for optimal growth (UNICEF, 2017). This foundational period lays the groundwork for lifelong learning, behaviour, and mental and physical health, helping children develop essential cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills needed to navigate the world around them. Additionally, ECCE promotes equity and inclusion by providing all children, regardless of socio-economic background, with equal opportunities for learning and development (Rao *et al.*, 2017).

As pointed out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), investing in inclusive ECCE is a major investment in fostering social cohesion, gender equality, holistic development, and lifelong learning. This investment can improve workforce productivity, reduce the need for remedial education and social services, and contribute to long-term economic growth. A 2017 UNICEF report expresses that ECCE is important for individuals and societies to achieve their full growth potential. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise the importance of ECCE, with SDG target 4.2 aiming to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030 (UNICEF, 2017). To achieve these objectives, there must be an equilibrium between the caregivers, who are directly connected to the children, and government parastatals. ECCE settings aim to provide a strong foundation for children's development, encompassing crèches, nursery schools, and kindergartens that cater to children aged 0 to 5 years (Rachael-Waaka *et al.*, 2019). The success of these programs depends on several factors, including caregivers' skills, government policies, funding, and infrastructure.

Caregivers are responsible for providing care, support, and education to young children, significantly influencing their early learning experiences (Ogunyemi, 2019). Their skills must align with the objectives of early childhood education, as outlined in the National Policy on Education, which emphasises the importance of preparing children for primary education and instilling social norms. However, many caregivers in Ondo State lack access to adequate professional development opportunities, hindering their ability to provide high-quality education (Akintorimi & Olowe, 2016).

To effectively address the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of children, caregivers must be equipped with appropriate skills. The Glossary of Education Reform (2016) defines 21st-century skills as a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are critically important to success in today's world. Assessment Group 5 (2024) defines skill as an individual's ability to perform a specific task or solve a problem at a high level of proficiency. The World Economic Forum (2025) emphasises that adaptability and collaboration, alongside cognitive skills, play a critical role in this context. Regular professional development is essential for caregivers to enhance their skills and stay updated with best practices in early childhood education. Government collaboration is vital in facilitating this professional development training. Such ongoing learning enables caregivers to deliver exceptional care and support to young children. Caregivers in ECCE settings require a multitude of skills to effectively support children's development (Forus Training, 2025). They should excel in communication and listening, be patient, and manage behaviour to create a warm and welcoming environment. It is also important for them to help children express their feelings and develop social skills. Additionally, caregivers need physical abilities, like stamina and dexterity, to meet the children's needs effectively.

Grey and Purdy (2018) consider government is involved. The involvement of the government plays a crucial role in encouraging caregivers to incorporate professionalism. According to Oduolowu (2020), effective collaboration fosters the sharing of resources, best practices, and innovations, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes for children. Governments are increasingly aware of the importance of investing in ECCE and often encourage skill development through collaborative efforts (UNESCO, 2025). These efforts may include funding and resources, policy frameworks, partnerships with NGOs, and the implementation of training programs (Care India Welfare Trust, 2025). For instance, the government of Georgia, with support from UNICEF, developed national standards for preschool education and a professional competency profile for educators in 2017 (UNESCO, 2021). The Healey-Driscoll administration in Massachusetts released the Massachusetts Workforce Agenda in 2024, which includes caregivers among its key strategies (Massachusetts Healthy Ageing Collaborative, 2024).

Despite these government efforts, caregivers may face challenges in collaborating with the government (Research Gate, 2024). These challenges can include a lack of consistent funding, insufficient infrastructure, restrictive policies, and communication barriers (Research Gate, 2024). These things are necessary for effective delivery of government investment contributed through collaboration; without them, the labour of skilful caregivers may still be of little or no effect. All of these challenges cut across different levels. For example, in some countries, the role of the caregiver remains unrecognised by the state, leading to a lack of support and integration into health care systems (American Association of Retired Persons, 2024). This paper will

investigate government collaboration and the skills of caregivers in ECCE settings in Ondo State, calling attention to the importance of these relationships in fostering quality early childhood education.

Statement of Problem

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is crucial for a child's development, with skilled caregivers playing a key role in creating supportive environments. Despite various government initiatives aimed at providing training programs to collaborate with caregivers in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), significant inconsistencies remain in how effectively caregivers implement the knowledge and skills imparted to them. This discrepancy raises serious concerns regarding the overall effectiveness of such collaborations in fostering high-quality child development. Caregivers may be facing substantial challenges that hinder their ability to translate training into practice, thereby impacting the quality of education provided in ECCE settings. These obstacles may include insufficient access to resources, inadequate materials, lack of ongoing support, and ineffective communication with government agencies. Such barriers not only impede caregivers' ability to implement effective educational practices but also diminish the potential benefits of government programs designed to enhance their skills.

Without a comprehensive understanding of caregivers' experiences and perceptions related to government collaboration, it becomes increasingly difficult to formulate effective policies and strategies that can strengthen these partnerships. This study aims to investigate the nature of government support for caregivers, explore caregivers' perceptions of this collaboration, and identify the specific challenges they encounter. By addressing these issues, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations that can enhance the effectiveness of government-caregiver partnerships in ECCE, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes for children.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective is to investigate government collaboration with the caregivers in early childhood education settings in Ondo State, while the specific objective is to:

1. Investigate the government's collaboration in skill development
2. To estimate the challenges faced by caregivers in collaborating with the government

Research Questions

1. Does the government encourage skill development through collaboration?
2. Do caregivers have challenges in collaborating with the government?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. The population consisted of all participants in the workshop in Ondo State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on the government's role in supporting skill development through collaborative efforts. Data were collected through structured interview questions directed at caregivers working in diverse ECCE settings. To ensure a representative sample, participants were selected using a stratified sampling method, allowing for a comprehensive cross-section of caregivers across various demographics and locations within Ondo State. A total of 100 caregivers participated in the study, which provides a robust dataset for analysis. The interview questions were designed to assess caregivers' skills, their perceptions of government collaboration, and the challenges they face in this partnership. By employing open-ended questions, the study aimed to capture nuanced perspectives and rich qualitative data that could inform the understanding of caregivers' experiences. To facilitate high response rates, interviews were conducted during training sessions and workshops attended by the caregivers. This strategic timing ensured that participants were engaged and more likely to provide thoughtful responses. Once the data were collected, they were analysed thematically to identify key patterns and perspectives. The findings were organised into themes that reflect caregivers' skill levels, perceptions of government collaboration, and the challenges encountered in their interactions with governmental bodies. This comprehensive approach ensures that the findings are reflective of the caregivers'

lived experiences and provides a foundation for recommendations aimed at improving government collaboration in early childhood education.

Results

Research Question 1: Does the government encourage skill development through collaboration?

Responses to question 1 from the respondents conclude that government collaboration on a large proportion was good and encouraging, as 58 reported how much the government encourage collaboration, and 32 reported government collaboration was on average, while 10 of the caregivers had poor reports about government collaboration. This shows that the government collaborates enough with the caregivers of ECCE in Ondo State. Caregivers responded to how the government has been collaborating with them through professional development training, including Reggio Emilia yearly training and Jolly phonics, they also reported that the likes of these training give good support to them and aid the improvement of what they understand.

Research Question 2: Do caregivers have challenges in collaborating with the government?

Responses to question 2 from the respondents indicated that caregivers have challenges in collaborating with the government. In fact, 50 caregivers have more challenges, while 50 equally have greater challenges with government collaboration. No respondent is free from challenges with government collaboration. Some of the challenges that were repeatedly reported includes lack of appropriate materials to implement training outcome, some respondents emphasize the need for provision of some appropriate materials for creativity especially to the preprimary classes while some discussed about effective supervision of the government to these preprimary classes to ensure the standard of delivering learning to the young ones according to the policy of education, some also complained bitterly on the keeping of necessary materials that is meant to use for facilitating learning reporting that even when these materials are available, access to them are denied. Other challenges mentioned was that some of the school head are uninformed about most items in the policy of education, like the usage of the language of the immediate environment to teach children, the inability of the government to fund public schools appropriately, which encapsulates insecurity issues like dilapidated buildings, and little or no materials to facilitate a standard learning process for children.

The responses to the first research question demonstrate a generally favourable perception of government collaboration in skill development among caregivers in Ondo State. A notable 58 respondents expressed satisfaction with government initiatives, particularly professional development training programs like Reggio Emilia and Jolly Phonics. These programs are not merely instructional; they serve as transformative experiences that empower caregivers with essential pedagogical skills and foster a deeper understanding of effective teaching methodologies. The enthusiasm surrounding these initiatives indicates that government efforts are making a significant impact on enhancing caregiver competence and building confidence in early childhood education.

However, the presence of 32 respondents rating government collaboration as average, alongside 10 reporting poor experiences, shows a significant area for improvement. This disparity points to an uneven landscape where not all caregivers benefit equally from government initiatives. Factors contributing to these mixed experiences may include variations in program accessibility, differing levels of engagement among caregivers, and the specific needs of diverse educational contexts. Addressing the concerns of those who feel underserved is essential; targeted outreach and particular support could enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of these programs, ensuring that all caregivers have access to the resources they need to thrive.

In stark contrast, the findings regarding the second research question reveal that challenges in collaboration are not only prevalent but also deeply entrenched among caregivers. The fact that half of the respondents indicated significant difficulties places interest on the systemic obstacles that persist despite government efforts. Key issues such as the lack of appropriate materials and ineffective supervision emerge as critical barriers to successful collaboration. These challenges suggest that professional development alone is insufficient; without the necessary tools and resources to implement learned strategies, caregivers may struggle to translate their training into practice.

The caregivers' calls for improved resources, particularly for fostering creativity in pre-primary education, reflect a growing recognition of the importance of a well-rounded educational experience for young children. It is crucial that government initiatives not only deliver training but also ensure that caregivers have

access to high-quality materials and resources that support creative learning environments. This holistic approach would empower caregivers to engage children more effectively and nurture their developmental needs.

Moreover, the concerns regarding uninformed school heads and inadequate funding express deeper systemic issues within the educational framework. The lack of awareness among leadership about key educational policies, such as the use of local languages in instruction, can significantly hinder the implementation of effective teaching practices. Furthermore, the challenges posed by insecurity and deteriorating infrastructure, including dilapidated buildings, exacerbate the difficulties faced by caregivers. These issues not only affect the learning environment but also contribute to caregiver burnout and frustration, ultimately impacting the quality of education provided to children.

In conclusion, while the positive aspects of government collaboration in skill development for caregivers are acknowledged, the findings reveal a landscape riddled with significant challenges. A multifaceted approach is essential, one that not only enhances training programs but also addresses the systemic barriers that impede effective collaboration. By investing in resource provision, ensuring informed leadership, and prioritising infrastructural improvements, the government can create a more supportive environment for caregivers. Such efforts will not only enhance the professional development of caregivers but also ultimately benefit the young learners they serve, fostering a brighter future for early childhood education in Ondo State.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a commendable level of skill among caregivers in Ondo State, indicating that many are equipped to foster children's developmental needs effectively, this attest that the government truly collaborate with them for skill development. In summary, while government collaboration in skill development for caregivers in Ondo State shows promise, significant challenges were investigated which must be addressed for meaningful progress. The positive impact of initiatives like Reggio Emilia and Jolly Phonics highlights the potential for effective training, but disparities in access and resources reveal a need for a more inclusive approach. Caregivers face systemic barriers, including inadequate materials and uninformed leadership, which hinder their ability to implement learned strategies effectively. To foster a truly supportive environment, the government must not only enhance training programs but also invest in resource provision, informed oversight, and infrastructural improvements. By doing so, they can empower caregivers and significantly elevate the quality of early childhood education, ultimately benefiting the young learners who are the future of the community.

Recommendations

1. The government should implement continuous professional development programs for caregivers to enhance their skills.
2. Government should allocate adequate resources to ECCE settings to provide necessary teaching materials.
3. The government should conduct campaigns to educate caregivers about educational policies, especially regarding the use of the mother tongue.
4. Pre-primary school heads should be adequately exposed to mastery of policies of education
5. Feedback Mechanisms should be established for regular feedback systems and to assess government collaboration and incorporate caregivers' input into policy-making.
6. Caregivers should be encouraged to understand, integrate and utilize no cost, low-cost materials as improvisation for creative materials.

References

- America Association of Retired Persons, (2024). AARP Foundation Paid4Care™ hub supports family caregivers. Published by UnitedHealthcare Community & State.
- Akinrotimi, A. A. & Olowe, P. K. (2016). Challenges in implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria: The way forward. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(7).
- Care India Welfare Trust. (2025). Education programs. Published by Care India Welfare Trust.
- Forus Training. (2025). What you need to work as a caregiver in Ireland. Published by Forus Training.
- Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange, (2020). What GPE does to strengthen early childhood care and education. Published by Global Partnership for Education.
- Glossary of Education Reform (2016). 21st Century Skills Definition. Retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills/>
- Gray, & Purdy, (2018). Collaborating for our future: Multistakeholder partnerships for solving complex problems. Oxford University Press.
- Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative. (2024). Healey-Driscoll Administration's 2024 State Workforce Agenda includes older workers, caregivers. Published by Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative.
- Oduolowu, E. (2020). Enhancing caregiver skills through government collaboration in Nigeria. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 26(3), 215-230.
- Ogunyemi, T. (2019). Appraisal of health and safety standards in preschool centres: Caregivers' perspective. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(15), 12-23.
- Rao, Yang, & Bala, (2017). Early childhood care and education: Landscape review 2010–2022. UNESCO.
- Research Gate. (2024). Governance of early childhood education and care: Recent developments in OECD countries. Published by ResearchGate.
- Research Gate. (2024). Early childhood care and education: Policies, programmes and schemes in India. Published by ResearchGate (Priyanka Malik, Swarnaprava Behera).
- UNESCO. (2021). Inclusion, investment and strengthening legal framework: Key takeaways from the UNESCO World Conference and Declaration on ECCE. Published by Right to Education Initiative.
- UNESCO. (2025). Investing in early childhood care and education yields lifelong benefits.
- UNESCO. (2025). Early childhood care and education. Published by UNESCO.
- UNICEF. (2017). 2017 Status report on early childhood care and education in Pacific island countries.
- World Economic Forum. (2025). The Future of Jobs Report 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>