

INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES ON SCHOOL ENROLMENT IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE NEXUS WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

The study was conducted to assess the influence of parental demographic variables on enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The ex-post facto research design was adopted for this study and a sample of 400 parents of pre-primary school children in the zone from the early child care centres in public primary schools was randomly selected for the study using stratified simple random sampling technique to take care of both urban and rural respondents. Questionnaire items were developed from the literature materials reviewed for the instrument. The instrument was subjected to face validation by two experts. A reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using Cronbach-Alpha method. Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions while t-test and ANOVA were used to test the formulated hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed among others that parents with tertiary education influence the enrolment of their children more than parents with a maximum of secondary education and parents with no formal education. It was recommended among others that just as the government made primary education free, equitable and qualitative in the National Policy on Education, same should apply to the pre-primary level to ensure the actualization of the sustainable development goals.

Introduction

The importance of the early years in the life of children has been widely acknowledged. Across the globe, the current trend is on the education of young children and governments across nations seem to be investing much in the education of young children. This may be in the realization of the fact that the future of any nation depends to a large extent on the quality of her young generation which also may depend on the quality of care and education children receive while growing up. In Nigeria, the education of young children below the official age of primary school which is six years has been incorporated in the National Policy on Education and therein referred to as pre-primary education (National Policy on Education, 2004). Pre-primary education is an important step which is meant to lay a solid foundation for education and overall development of the child. It serves as the foundation for formal education. In line with this, the Policy defined pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering primary school. This comprises ages 0-5 years made up of crèche (0-2 years),

playgroup (3-4 years) and nursery/kindergarten (3-5 years). One of the major objectives of pre-primary education according to FRN (2013) is to ensure a smooth transition from home to school.

Considering the need for this level of education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) also accommodated it among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were part of the movement for the eradication of poverty by 2030 (UNESCO, 2017). Out of the 17 SDGs, this study is mostly concerned with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 which is aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, the extent of actualization of the SDGs especially as it pertains to goal four is not encouraging. Some researchers (Eriba (2011), Tombowua, 2013) have observed poor and ineffective pre-primary education in Nigeria. Some attributed the poor state of pre-primary education to poor government participation, poor policy implementation and poor parental attitude among others (Adenipekun, 2004, Nakpodia, 2011, Tombowua, 2013, Mghasse & William, 2016).

Casual observation shows that many families, especially in rural areas, still keep their pre-school children at home until such children are up to six years when they will be registered in primary school. Such parents believe that pre-primary education is simply a waste of time, money and energy. Unfortunately, such parents fail to understand that young children need to interact with other children of their age to develop basic life skills such as cooperation, team spirit, empathy, self-assertion, turn-taking among others. According to (Conn-Powers, 2006, Ellis, 2004), it will be very difficult for any family to provide all the learning experiences and stimulations the child needs in terms of playmates, physical, social and emotional environments no matter their socio-economic status and or educational background. Therefore, implementing the fourth SDG demands that every child irrespective of age, gender, culture or race, should be enrolled in school appropriate for their age and developmental characteristics.

Enrolment is the process of initiating attendance to school. It is the placement of school-age children in school. It could also refer to the number of children of school age who are registered in school. In this study, enrolment is defined as the total number of preschoolers who are registered in and who attend pre-primary school regularly. Regularly here implies that the child attends school except in cases of health challenge or other serious issues as confirmed by the caregivers. In Nigeria, the NPE stipulates the teacher-pupil ratio in pre-primary education to be 1:25 (FRN, 2014). This teacher-pupil ratio seems an uphill task in many pre-primary schools, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Evidence from research (Kazeem, A., Jensen, L, & Stokes C. S. 2015) reveals a discrepancy in enrolment between urban and rural pre-primary schools in Nigeria.

A number of factors may be contributing to the poor enrolment of children in pre-school education (Leseman, 2002; and Connelly & Zheng, 2003). However, considering the role of parents in early socialization of children (Ngwoke & Eze, 2010), this study is restricted to family demographic variables influencing enrolment

of children in pre-primary schools. Such demographic variables include the parental level of education, gender, socioeconomic status, the location of residence, type of employment or occupation among others. In this study, demographic variables were taken to mean parents' level of education, the location of residence and parents' occupation. Parents in this study were also taken to mean mothers. Biologically a mother is a person who gave birth to a child. However, a mother in this study will include biological mothers as well as foster mothers who have the full responsibility of taking care of the child as a mother.

Parental level of education may directly or indirectly influence enrolment of children in pre-primary school. According to George (2001), level of education refers to the degree or kind of education acquired by parents. It is the height of education attained by parents which can be described in terms of high or low. In this study parents' level of education is described in terms of 'no formal education' (NFE) for those who did not go to school at all; 'maximum of secondary education' (MSE) and Tertiary education (TE). Literate parents may value education more than non-literate parents and as such are likely to enroll their pre-primary school children in school than non-literate parents (Carneiro, Menighir, & Parey, 2011). Parents' level of education may have some link to the kind of occupation parents engage in.

Parents' occupation may be defined as a parent's source of livelihood. Parents usually engage in different occupations so as to sustain their families. Karl (2005) defines the parent's occupation as the work that parents do which serve as a means of income for them. Mba (2013) asserted that occupation can be grouped into two, namely, civil service and non-civil service. However, by occupation, parents in this study are grouped into self-employed and paid-employed as the researchers' conjecture that being self-employed may provide more time for parents to remain with their children till primary school age while on the other hand engaging in paid employment may provide higher resources to cater for the child's education. In view of the above, this study sought to ascertain the influence of occupation of parents on the children's school enrolment. In addition to the level of education and occupation, the family location of residence is another demographic variable that may influence children's enrolment in pre-primary schools.

Location may refer to a region, state, town, or neighbourhood one lives in.. According to Unamma (2003), a location is a place or places where things, buildings, schools, market, among others are situated. It is believed that competitions are usually high in the urban locations and as such ignite parents in these areas to enroll their children of pre-primary school age than those in the rural areas. It is for this reason that this study also sought to investigate the influence of location on children's enrolment at the pre-primary school level. Location in this study is categorized into rural and urban areas.

In a study conducted by Katwii (2016) on the parental characteristics influencing the enrolment of pre-school children in Mwingi Zone, Mwingi-Sub-county, Kitui County, Kenya, it was stated that parental level of education affected their children's enrolment in preschools such that non-literate parents did not see the importance of school. They hardly pay attention to whether their children go to school

or not while some do not even check or supervise their children 's homework and progress in school. However, the study was conducted in Kenya while the present study was conducted in Nigeria. Similarly, Connelly and Zheng (2003) carried out a study titled the analysis of school enrolment and graduation rates in China using the 1990 Chinese Census. It was stated that the location of residence and sex highly correlated with enrolment and graduation, with rural girls being especially disadvantaged in terms of both enrolment and graduation rates. Parental education, the presence of siblings, county-level income and village level in-school rates also have consistent effects on enrolment and graduation milestones. However, this study was carried out in China, thus the need for this present study.

In another development, Ngeno (2012) conducted a study on the influence of parental characteristics on enrolment of preschool children in Kuresoi Division, Nakuru County, Kenya. It was opined that majority of the parents are peasant farmers who get too little from their occupation to be able to support their children's preschool education and thus causing low enrolment in the district. Similarly, Olaniyan (2011) conducted a study on the determinants of child schooling in Nigeria. The findings of the study showed that the enrolment figure differed with the location of residence. Usually, urban areas seemed to be favoured because of higher access to public utilities and other government activities. This can be traced to the disparity in attendance rates between urban and rural areas. The persistence of rural-urban disparities in access to schools can prevent a large number of rural children from exploiting educational opportunities.

In Ebonyi State of Nigeria and Ikwo LGA in particular, the researchers casually observed that Ikwo LGA is thickly populated and yet many of the pre-primary schools do not meet up with the stipulated teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 for pre-primary schools in Nigeria. The researchers, therefore, conjectured that parental demographic variables may be responsible for the poor enrolment of children in school. This development should not be allowed to continue if the SDGs of UNESCO is to be actualized by the year 2030. Without adequate preparation of children for the primary level of education, the hope of effective and efficient education of the Nigerian youths at the secondary and even in the tertiary level will remain a mirage. It is this worrisome background that spurred the researchers into taking up this study. The problem of this study put in question form, therefore, is: what is the influence of parental demographic variables on school enrolment in pre-primary schools and its implications for sustainable educational goals?

Purpose of the study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the influence of parental demographic variables on pre-primary school children's enrolment in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Determine the influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state;

- ii. Determine the influence of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state; and
- iii. Ascertain the influence of parents' location of residence on school enrolment of pre-primary school children in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

- i. What is the influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state?
- ii. What is the influence of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state?
- iii. What is the influence of parents' location of residence on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

HO₁: There is no significant influence of parental educational qualification on enrolment of pre-primary school children in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state.

HO₂: There is no significant influence of parental occupation on enrolment of pre-primary school children in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state.

HO₃: There is no significant influence on the parental location of residence on school enrolment of pre-primary school children in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state.

Method

This study adopted an ex-post-facto research design. Ex-post-facto research design, according to Nworgu (2015) is concerned with establishing cause-effect relationships but usually, the researcher has no control over the independent variables of interest and therefore cannot manipulate them. The independent variables of this study include parental educational qualification, occupation, and location. The study was carried out in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi State with a population of 57 Early Child Care Centres with a population of 4443 children from about 4000 parents. Out of this population of parents whose children are in these

schools, a sample of 400 parents was drawn using a stratified simple random sampling technique to take care of the urban and rural school.

The researchers used the existing statistical records obtained from the Local Government Education Area Secretary (for the available pre-primary schools within the LGEA) as well as the statistical record from the head teachers of the 57 public primary schools that have pre-primary education section. The two statistical records enabled the researchers to complete the proforma designed for the study which requested for the biodata of parents as well as the enrolment distribution of children by schools. The proforma used was certified by experts in childhood education and measurement and evaluation from University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Results

The results were presented based on the research question and the hypotheses that guided the study

Research Question One: What is the influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in Ikwo Local Government Education Authority of Ebonyi state?

Table 1: Mean analysis of the enrolment of pre-primary pupils based on parental educational qualification

Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
NFE	45	30.37	9.67
Sec Edu	140	28.33	10.36
Tertiary Edu	215	40.68	18.26
Total	400	35.20	16.18

Table 1 shows that the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils whose parents have no formal education (NFE) is 30.37 with standard deviation of 9.67; those whose parents have a maximum of secondary education (Sec Edu) had mean enrolment of 28.33 with standard deviation of 10.36 while those whose parents have higher education (Tertiary Edu) had mean enrolment of 40.68 with standard deviation of 18.26. This means that the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils whose parents have a higher education is higher than those whose parents have NFE and Sec Edu.

H₀₁: There is no significant influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils.

Table 2: Analysis of variance of the influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14119.270	2	7059.635	30.985	.000
Within Groups	90453.920	397	227.844		
Total	104573.190	399			

Table 2 reveals that the associated probability value for the calculated value of F (30.985) for the difference in the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils based on parental educational qualification is 0.000. Since the probability value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning that there is a significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils.

Table 3: Post Hoc multiple comparison tests for the significant influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils

(I) Education	(J) Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
NFE	Sec Edu	2.04	2.58	.732
	Tertiary Edu	-10.31	2.47	.000
Sec Edu	NFE	-2.04	2.58	.732
	Tertiary Edu	-12.35	1.63	.000
Tertiary Edu	NFE	10.31	2.47	.000
	Sec Edu	12.35	1.63	.000

Table 3 shows pairwise comparison tests for the significant influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils. It reveals that the mean difference between the Tertiary education and secondary education had the highest positive mean difference among others. This shows that the mean difference between tertiary education and secondary education contributed most to the significant influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils, followed by the mean difference between tertiary education and NFE.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils?

Table 4: t-test analysis of the influence of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils

Occupation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig
SE	180	29.04	10.23	398	-7.324	.000
PE	220	40.24	18.30			

Table 4 shows the mean enrolment of pupils whose parents are self-employed (SE) and those whose parents have paid employment (PE). It shows that the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils whose parents are self-employed is 29.04 with a standard deviation of 10.23 while those whose parents have paid employment had a mean enrolment of 40.24 with a standard deviation of 18.30. This implies that the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils whose parents have paid employment is higher than those whose parents are self-employed.

Ho₂: There is no significant influence of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils.

Table 4 reveals that the associated probability value for the calculated value of t (-7.324) for the difference in the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils based on parental occupation, is 0.000. Since the probability value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning that there is a significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of parental occupation on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in favour of the pupils whose parents have paid employment (PE).

Research Question Three: What is the influence of location on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils?

Table 5: t-test analysis of the influence of location on enrolment of pre-primary pupils

Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig
Urban	250	38.19	18.21	398	8.906	.000
Rural	150	19.22	10.35			

Table 5 shows that the mean enrolment of the pre-primary school pupils in urban school location is 38.19 with a standard deviation of 18.21 while the mean enrolment of the pre-primary school pupils in the rural school location is 19.22 with 10.35. This indicates that there is a higher mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in urban school location than the rural school location.

Ho₃: There is no significant influence of location on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils.

Table 5 reveals that the associated probability value for the calculated value of t (8.906) for the difference in the mean enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in urban and rural school locations, is 0.000. Since the probability value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant influence ($p < 0.05$) of location on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils in favour of the pupils in urban school location.

Discussion of Results

Results show that there is a significant influence of parental educational qualification on school enrolment of pre-primary school pupils. This means that parents with tertiary education influence the enrolment of their children more than parents with maximum of secondary education and those with no formal education. Parents with tertiary education, maximum of secondary education and those with no formal education differed significantly on the enrolment of the pre-school children. This is in consonance with the findings of Connelly and Zheng (2003), who conducted a study to find out the determinants of school enrollment and completion of 10 to 18-year-olds in China. The finding of the study showed that parental education has been shown to be highly correlated with enrollment and graduation milestones. This view was also supported by Katwii (2016) in a study titled Parental characteristics influencing the enrolment of pre-school children in Mwingi Zone, Mwingi-Sub-county, Kitui County, Kenya. In this study, it was found that parental level of education affected their children's enrolment in preschools such that illiterate parents did not see the importance of school, they hardly pay attention to whether their children go to school or not while some do not even check or supervise their children's homework and progress in school.

From the results, parents who have paid employment influence the enrolment of their children better than parents who are self-employed. This means that parental occupation has an influence on school enrolment of pre-primary school children. Parents who have paid employment and self-employed parents differed significantly in the enrolment of the pre-school children. This view was supported by Ngeno (2012) who carried out a study on the influence of parental characteristics on enrolment of preschool children in Kuresoi Division, Nakuru County, Kenya. In that study, it was posited that majority of the parents are peasant farmers who get too little from their occupation to be able to support their children's preschool education and thus causing low enrolment in the district.

The findings of the study show that parental location influences the enrolment of their children. However, urban parents influence school enrolment of pre-primary school children better than rural parents. Urban parents and rural parents differed significantly in the enrolment of the pre-school children. This is in consonance with the findings of Connelly and Zheng (2003) who conducted a study to find out the determinants of school enrollment and completion of 10 to 18-year-olds in China. The finding of the study is that the location of residence is shown to be highly correlated with enrolment and graduation; with rural girls being especially disadvantaged in terms of both enrolment and graduation rates. Corroborating this,

Olaniyan (2011) who conducted a study on the determinants of child schooling in Nigeria stated that child schooling can differ with the location of residence. Usually, urban areas are favoured because of higher access to government activities. This can be traced to the disparity in attendance rates between urban and rural areas. The persistence of rural-urban disparities in access to schooling can prevent a large number of rural children from exploiting educational opportunities.

Conclusions

From the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn;

Parental educational qualification has an influence on school enrolment of pre-primary school children. Although, parents with tertiary education influence the enrolment of their children better than both parents with maximum of secondary education and those with no formal education.

Parents with tertiary education, maximum of secondary education and those with no formal education differed significantly in the enrolment of their pre-school children.

Parental occupation plays a role in school enrolment of pre-primary school children. However, parents who have paid employment influence the enrolment of their children more than self-employed parents.

Parents who have paid employment and self-employed parents differed significantly on the enrolment of the pre-school children.

Parental location influences school enrolment of pre-primary school children. In addition, urban parents influence the enrolment of their children better than rural parents.

There is a significant difference on the influence of location on the enrolment of pre-primary school children in favour of urban parents' responses.

The link the results have with the Sustainable development goals is that goal 4 targets among others that by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality Early Childhood Development Care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. And to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes. Therefore, parents should be encouraged to see the usefulness of this level of education as a foundation for successful completion of their schooling endeavour. This, in the long run, will help to achieve this Goal 4.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

The government should initiate adult education to help those parents with no formal education so that they can appreciate the importance of preschool education.

Just as the government made primary education free, equitable and qualitative in the National Policy on Education, the same principle should apply to the pre-primary level to ensure the actualization of the Sustainable Development goal.

Parents with tertiary education, urban parents and who have paid employment that already know the importance of this level of education, should be encouraged by providing favourable conditions in terms of better pay while rural parents, those with no formal education and self-employed whose mean score is less, should also be encouraged by making this level of education affordable, accessible and qualitative by carrying out appropriate monitoring of schools.

Parents irrespective of location, occupation and educational qualification should strive to enroll their children of pre-primary school age in school, as it is a known fact that children who go through this level of education tend to do better academically at the other levels of education,

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