

**BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE
IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD-FRIENDLY
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN A PERIOD OF SOCIO-
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
UNCERTAINTY IN EZEAGU LGEA, ENUGU
STATE**

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Abstract

The study explored the barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in Enugu State. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The entire population of 529 primary school teachers in the existing 80 public primary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State was studied without sampling. A four point rating scale containing 20 items was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. Cronbach alpha method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument which yielded coefficients of 0.87 and 0.71 for the two different clusters respectively with an overall coefficient of 0.79. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that the listed teachers-related and infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. The researchers concluded that the physical, social, emotional, and psychological developments of normal pupils and pupils with disabilities will not be catered for if the teachers-related and infrastructural-related barriers are not comprehensively minimized by teachers, head teachers, state ministry of Education responsible for the facilitation of child-friendly school initiative in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. Therefore, it was recommended among others that there should be constant in-service training of teachers on child-friendly pedagogies and on special education practices to enable them acquire relevant pedagogic, disciplinary, classroom management and conflict resolution skills for effective management of behavioural problems emanating from normal and special needs pupils in primary schools.

Key words: Convention on the Right of a Child, Child Right and Child-Friendly Environment

Introduction

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by most of the world's countries promoted the concept of child friendly schools which was introduced in 1999 by the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF). The child-friendly school initiative is not an abstract concept or rigid blueprint but rather a pathway towards quality in education that reflects three key and inter-related principles derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2012). The three key and inter-related principles are child-centeredness, democratic participation and inclusiveness. According to UNICEF, child-centeredness involves all decision-making in education for safeguarding the interest of the child. Democratic participation entails that children and those who facilitate their rights should have a say in the form and substance of their education. Inclusiveness is central to the fact that all children's access to education is not a privilege that society grants to children but a duty that society must fulfill. The implementation of these principles facilitates the formation of child-friendly schools where children can have a learning environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically sound.

Child-friendly schools initiative is an attempt to secure the potentials of children for the future. According to UNICEF (2012), child-friendly school is one where the learning environment is conducive and welcoming for children. According to Janguza, et al (2012), child-friendly school is a learning environment that protects children from abuse and violence, maintains the health of children, loves and treats children with respect and supports the education of children by allowing them to be free to express their opinions. The researchers see child friendly school as a learning environment that is safe, clean, healthy, green, inclusive, and convenient for children's physical development, cognition and psychosocial, including those with special needs or disabilities. For the purpose of this study, child-friendly school and child-friendly learning environment are used interchangeably to accommodate public primary schools. The decision to anchor this study on public primary schools because the child-friendly schools initiative in Nigeria was an outgrowth of Universal Basic Education reform introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1999 (UNICEF, 2009). According to UNICEF, to continue the process of transforming education across Nigeria, the UNICEF Nigeria office worked with General Abdulsalami Abubakar and other key stakeholders to devise a blueprint for the child-friendly schools initiative to foster the rights of the Nigerian child to experience quality primary education in a conducive learning environment. In support, Saleem, et al (2020) stated that when UNICEF launched the concept of child-friendly schools initiative, primary schools were the main target of child-friendly school setups.

In addition, child-friendly schools fall within the context of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which call for the achievement of universal primary education. In child-friendly schools, the head teachers, teachers and non-academic staff must be friendly to children and the health and safety needs of the pupils are adequately met (Anwar, et al, 2016). In such learning environment, the school is community based, recognizes and promotes the rights of all children irrespective of gender, religious and ethnic differences, family status, physical and mental abilities/disabilities (Oliver & Charles, 2016). This set-up guarantees and respects children rights and protects them from violence, discrimination, and other maltreatment, and also supports child participation especially in the

planning, supervision and reporting mechanism related to child rights fulfillment and protection in education (Cheruto, et al 2021).

In a nutshell, the child-friendly learning environment focuses on qualitative education and the moral, social and emotional development of pupils. This framework puts children at the centre of a holistic teaching and learning environment in primary schools with six key dimensions. According to UNICEF (2012), the dimensions include; (i) Inclusive of children, which respects diversity, guarantees opportunities and meet the needs of children (based on vulnerabilities, social class, and ability level). (ii) Secure and protective, which helps to defend children from abuse and aggression, promote psycho-socio-emotional wellbeing of teachers and learners. (iii) Healthy, this assures proper hygienic conditions by adequate water and sanitation facilities and implementation of healthy practices. (iv) Effective with children, which upholds good teaching and learning processes, quality learning outcomes, provides approved content, materials and resources, support teachers' capacity, commitment, income and their recognition of child rights. (v) Sensitive to gender, which advocates for gender equality in enrolment and success, guarantees girl-friendly facilities, environment and teaching, promote respect for other's rights and dignity and (vi) Involved with communities to strengthen families, help stakeholders establish collaborative relationships with other actors to fulfill children's rights.

From the aforementioned dimensions, one can infer that child-friendly learning environment is a multi-dimensional practice that comprehensively addresses the academic and non-academic needs of children. Recognising the inherently interactive and integrated nature of the child-friendly learning environment. It is also proving to be a barrier for how best to determine where, when, and how limited resources should be applied dimension by dimension and cumulatively in order to ensure the rights of children are not threatened (Godfrey, 2012). Since, the child-friendly school initiative is holistic; it means that there may be some pedagogic, environmental, social, legal, health and safety and security challenges that can prevent children from experiencing equitable and inclusivity in primary schools. However, this study focused on teacher related challenges and infrastructural related challenges.

Ideally, educational stakeholders in schools and out of schools are parties to the child-friendly schools initiative but teachers are the major implementers of this initiative because they are intensively in contact with pupils. The importance of teachers in child-friendly learning environment cannot be overemphasised because they should have the knowledge and skills to practice child-friendly school dimensions in primary schools (Oliver & Charles, 2016). This means that the implementation of child-friendly learning environment starts with focusing on child-based activities and pedagogies instead of teacher-oriented activities that fail to capture pupils learning needs in primary schools.

In addition to the roles of teachers, social, health and physical school environment are essential to the implementation of child-friendly schools initiative in primary schools. The combination of social, health and physical school environment sums up the essence of infrastructural facilities in child-friendly learning environment. Infrastructure is a substructure and underlying facilities especially the basic installation and facilities on which the continuance and growth of a community and state (Amadi & Ohaka, 2018). In educational parlance, infrastructural facilities can be described as the physical amenities,

facilities, services and installations that promote teaching and learning in the classroom. In the same vein, child-friendly learning environment becomes effective when there is provision of safe and secure physical structures such as classrooms, which are well maintained and have adequate sanitary facilities like separate toilets for boys and girls which are in good condition, provision of functional assistive technology, and also provision of emotional needs such as creating pleasant surrounding, a friendly atmosphere and inspiring environment (Kanamba, 2014). However, Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) averred that infrastructural facilities such as classrooms, libraries, staff, laboratories and furniture are grossly inadequate in some early childhood care development and education centres in Nigeria. The inadequate infrastructural facilities can be as a result of political instability or political god fatherism and high economic status of the country whereby the people involved in purchasing the facilities embezzle the money meant for the purpose of the facilities. .

How a country operates can have a dramatic impact on the development of a country. Socio-political and economic uncertainty goes concurrently because economy of any country or society is based the political activities or affairs. Socio-political uncertainty is the state of doubt about the future or about what is the right thing to do which involves a combination of social and political factors while economic uncertainty refers to a situation in which the future economic environment is difficult to predict, and there is high degree of risk or unknowns involved (Abubakar & Ogunode, 2021). Causes of economic uncertainty include political instability, change in government policies, natural disaster and market fluctuations. The government-enforced policies and administrative norms known as political factors can influence economic development, which is the process that increased standard of living. The political factors that tend to have an impact on economic development can be government regime type, political stability or instability, policy management, corruption among others (Kanamba, 2014). These political factors influence economic development by supporting or disrupting the process of development of a society whereby the learning resources and materials needed for a child friendly environment will not be provided. This affects pupils, teachers and schools from achieving the stated goals and objectives of education.

Primarily, in a child-friendly learning environment, all the pupils are treated equally irrespective of their religion, parental, economic or educational background. In primary schools where child-friendly learning environment are implemented in Nigeria, it is consistent and complementary to the UBE programme objectives, in four thematic areas - equity in access to education, improved quality of education, improved governance of schools, and, allocation and equitable distribution of resources - with cross-cutting emphasis placed on monitoring and evaluation (UNICEF, 2009). The UNICEF also tasked various governments to place high premium on actualising these objectives through constant monitoring and evaluation. In a bid to examine the monitoring and evaluation of child-friendly schools initiative, the study is interested in exploring the barriers on effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty in Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

The United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF, 2009) introduces the concept of child-friendly schools for the very first time to make the learning environment of primary

schools look playful, healthy and safe for the children. Twenty-three (23) years since the adoption of child-friendly schools initiative in the Nigerian primary education system, it seems that quite a large number of pupils in public primary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority learn in an environment that is not friendly to the child due to the political and economic uncertainty in that area. People of Ezeagu have experienced series of clashes with people ranging from terrorist attacks from insurgents and by Fulani herdsmen in recent times. The hardship and agony caused by these attacks may have negatively affected the socio-political and economic situations in this area. As a result of this, it brings about instability thereby making these children and teachers to be out of school and making the school unfriendly. It may also affect even the learning resources or instructional facilities because the resources might not be provided for children to learn with which also makes the school unfriendly for the teachers and pupils.

Thus, the problem of the study is that a large number of children in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State will not be able to enjoy the complete education of their mind, body and soul that can prepare them for their future endeavours if the barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly schools initiative in primary schools are not identified and reduced to its barest minimum. From literature gathered, there seems to be paucity of empirical studies on the teachers'-related barriers and infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. This problem prompted the researchers to ascertain the barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty in Ezeagu Local Government Education authority of Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study;

1. What are the teachers'-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State?
2. What are the infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State?

Methods

Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The entire population of the study comprised 529 public primary school teachers in the 80 public primary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority without sampling. The researchers developed an instrument titled "Barriers to Effective Implementation of Child-Friendly Learning Environment in Primary Schools (BEIC-FLEPS)." Questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 20 items on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA-4 points), Agree (A-3 points), Disagree (D-2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD-1 point) for the two clusters. Face validity of the instrument was determined by three experts; two in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department

of Educational Foundations all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach alpha technique was used to establish the reliability of the instrument which yielded coefficients of 0.87 and 0.71 for the two different clusters respectively with an overall coefficient of 0.79. The data collected were analysed using mean (\bar{x}) to answer the research questions and standard deviation to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' views. In analysing the mean (\bar{x}), value of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed and value below 2.50 was regarded as disagreed.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the teachers- related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State?

Table 1: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Teachers-Related Barriers to Effective Implementation of Child-Friendly Learning Environment in Primary Schools (N = 529)

S/N	Teachers- related barriers	X	SD	Remarks
1	Shortage of professional teachers to implement the child-friendly school initiative due to political instability	3.72	0.49	Agree
2	Teachers' poor attention to the individual needs of Pupils due to economic uncertainty	3.18	0.80	Agree
3	Stereotyping pupils on the basis of their ability by teachers	3.26	0.59	Agree
4	Teachers inability to adapt their lessons to support the different learning needs of pupils	3.90	0.47	Agree
5	High number of teacher-child ratio	3.61	0.62	Agree
6	Teachers use of negative methods to manage pupils' behaviour	2.98	0.51	Agree
7	Teachers' inability to organise excursions/field trips for Pupils due to political and economic instability	3.57	0.78	Agree
8	Lack of in-service training for teachers to implement the child-friendly school initiative caused by political instability	3.84	0.48	Agree
9	Teachers do not adopt child-centred teaching methodologies due to poor working conditions caused by economic instability	3.69	0.82	Agree
10	Teachers do not have special education experience to teach pupils with disabilities	3.91	0.64	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.75	0.62	Agree

Data in Table 1 shows that the respondents agree that all the items were teachers-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment with mean scores ranging from 2.98 to 3.91. The cluster mean score of 3.57 showed that the items listed were teachers-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. The standard deviations for all the items ranged from 0.47 to 0.82. The cluster SD score is 0.62 shows that the respondents are homogeneous in their ratings.

Research Question 2: What are the infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State?

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Infrastructural-Related Barriers to Effective Implementation of Child-Friendly Learning Environment in Primary Schools (N = 529)

S/N	Infrastructural-related Barriers	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
11	Overcrowded classrooms	3.89	0.90	Agree
12	Unavailability of clean latrine near water source	3.84	0.51	Agree
13	Unavailability of separate toilets for boys and girls	2.95	0.83	Agree
14	Lack of first-aid equipment in schools due to the economic instability	3.91	0.66	Agree
15	Non-provision of hand wash point with tap and soap	3.83	0.59	Agree
16	Inadequate provision of child-sized furniture in schools incurred by political and economic uncertainty	3.68	0.74	Agree
17	Non-provision of sick bays for children due to political and economic factors	3.07	0.58	Agree
18	Lack of library facilities in schools	3.90	0.80	Agree
19	Non-provision of sporting facilities in schools due to political and economic instability	3.73	0.65	Agree
20	Lack of garbage bins in schools	3.95	0.82	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.68	0.71	Agree

Data in Table 2 shows that the respondents agree that all the items were infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment with mean scores ranging from 2.95 to 3.95. The cluster mean score of 3.68 showed that the items listed were infrastructural-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. The standard deviations for all the items ranged from 0.51 to 0.90. The cluster SD score is 0.71 shows that the respondents are homogeneous in their ratings.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study in table 1 revealed that respondents agree that the teachers-related barriers listed to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in

primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. Some of the teacher-related barriers are shortage of professional teachers to implement the child-friendly school initiative, teachers' poor attention to the individual needs of pupils with disabilities and stereotyping pupils on the basis of their ability by teachers in primary schools. This finding tallies with Olaleye (2012) who reported that teachers do not adopt child-centred teaching methodologies and attend to the individual needs of pupils in child-friendly schools due to poor working conditions. It also agrees with the findings of Abubakar and Ogunode (2021) which disclosed that high number of teacher-child ratio and lack of in-service training for teachers to implement the child-friendly school initiative were barriers faced by teachers in primary schools. The finding that teachers do not have special education experience to teach pupils with disabilities and they use negative methods to manage pupils' behaviour is in agreement with the study of Cheruto, et al (2021) which discovered inadequate teachers and lack of enough manpower with proper knowledge and skills to carry certain principles of child-friendly school initiative as major barriers in schools. The presence of teacher-related barriers to effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment implies that primary school teachers do not have the professional capacity to handle the various challenges facing them in order to adopt child-friendly school initiative in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State.

Findings of the study in Table 2 revealed that teachers agree that the infrastructural-related barriers listed affect teachers effective implementation of child-friendly learning environment in primary schools in a period of socio-political and economic uncertainty Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State This is in line with the discovery of Okoye (2012) who discovered that the availability of input facilities are not sufficient to justify child friendliness in UNICEF designated child friendly schools in Enugu State. It is not surprising that most primary schools in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State are in terrible condition with leaking roofs, cracked walls, no writing desks, no writing materials, no libraries, no laboratories and no furniture for teachers and pupils. This finding is in agreement with Njue (2013) who disclosed that overcrowded classrooms, lack of sporting facilities and sanitation facilities affect the implementation of child-friendly school programme in public primary schools. In support to the findings, Osho, et al (2014) found out that infrastructural facilities for the convenience of the children like toilets, bathrooms, beds/beddings and clean and safe water were not available in primary schools. The poor provision of infrastructural facilities implies that children are not experiencing safe, healthy and fun learning environment in primary schools Ezeagu local government area of Enugu State

Conclusion

The UNICEF child-friendly school initiative encourages all education stakeholders, especially parents, guardians, teachers and communities to value their positions and contributions they can make to children's current and future educational needs. Therefore, the learning environments of child friendly schools are characterised by equity, balance, freedom, solidarity, non-violence and a concern for physical, mental and emotional health. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the physical, social, emotional, and psychological developments of normal pupils and pupils with disabilities will not be catered for if the teachers-related and infrastructural-related barriers faced by teachers in primary schools are not comprehensively minimised by educational stakeholders (head teachers,

parents, guardians, teachers, state ministry of education and communities) responsible for the facilitation of child-friendly school initiative in Ezeagu Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State..

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be constant in-service training of teachers on child friendly pedagogies and on special education practices to enable them acquire relevant pedagogic, disciplinary, classroom management and conflict resolution skills for effective management of behavioural problems emanating from normal pupils and pupils with special needs in primary schools
2. The Enugu State government should endeavour to allocate adequate financial resources for provision of relevant infrastructural facilities and instructional materials for all-round development of children to advance effective implementation of the child-friendly learning environment in primary schools.

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