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DESCRIPTION OF PARENTS' PREFERENCE FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN TWO-SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF KWARA STATE

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Abstract

The study finds out parents' preferences for public and private basic education schools in Irepodun and Ifelodun Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kwara State. It further established the reasons for the preference. In addition to these, it finds out whether the parents' preference significantly varied on the basis of their education and residence. Thus, the population for the study consists of literate and illiterate parents residing in rural and urban areas of the LGAs. From the population, cluster sampling technique was used to sample a total of 437 parents, across their randomly selected places of work or trading. A researcher-made instrument titled Preference for Private and Public Basic School Questionnaire (PPPBSQ) was used to elicit needed data. The instrument was validated using test-re-test approach. The collected data were analyzed using percentage and Chi-square statistics. Findings revealed that a higher percentage of

parents in the LGAs preferred private to public Basic Education Schools. The reasons given for the preference include: the quality of education obtainable in the schools (94.05%), methods of child discipline and moral development used by the schools (70.93%) and the parents' trust in the commitment of the owners of the schools to deliver qualitative education (75.05%). In addition to these, significant difference was found in the parents' preferences for the categories of schools on the basis of their residence (X^2 =11.24 >p 3.84) and educational status (X^2 =24.05 >p 3.84). Based on these findings, it was concluded that parents in the LGAs appreciated private partnership in the provision of Universal Basic Education and for the reason of quality; private UBE schools may record more enrolment than public UBE schools in the LGAs. Thus, it was recommended that government and stakeholders in education should intensify their promotion of Private Partnership Program (PPP) in the provision of Basic Education.

Key words: description, preference, quality education, partnership, ownership

Introduction

For quite some time, government and non-governmental bodies have beee identifying and developing education as a veritable instrument for social and economic developments. They have identified basic and universal education as what must be available and accessible in all nations of the world. This awareness has initiated series of efforts at various levels of governance to enact and enforce policies and practices that will make education an all-time available social commodity. One of such efforts was initiated in 1948 when a world governing body such as the United Nation Organization (UNO) in its Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) identified education as a human right. The Article clearly states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free... and compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally

available... and higher education shall be equally accessible....(Thomas & George, 2012).

In pursuance of this ambition, international efforts have been geared towards committing public and private efforts to provide quantitative and qualitative education to every human being, irrespective of gender, religion, race and biological attributes. Subsequently, several internationally initiated forums have been initiated to promote Private and Public Partnership (PPP) interests in providing education. For example in 1990, government and non-governmental bodies met at the World Conference on Education for All (WEFA) held at Jomtien, Thailand, to scheme ways of achieving Education for All come 2015. At the forum, it was concluded that annexing private and public efforts in the provision of education will ensure unhindered availability and accessibility of educational opportunities, particularly in developing nations (Charles & Iheme, 2002).

No doubt, Nigerian government has been part of these series of international efforts. It has conscientiously ratified many of the EFA goals, nationalizing many, through home-based policies and programs such as Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and Public Private Partnership Initiative (PPPI) program. Since it returns from the EFA Conference, Nigerian government has vigorously embarked on privatization of almost all of its level of education (Charles & Iheme, 2002).

To promote privatization at tertiary of education, Decree No. 19 of 1984 that abolished private ownership of higher institutions was repealed by Decree 9 of 1993. The new decree allows private individuals and non-governmental organizations to own private tertiary institutions. This decree ushered in an era of licensing series of private universities. The efforts saw to the establishment of 38 private universities between 1999 and 2011 (Raheem, 2012). With privatization policies, Nigerian government has also achieved greatly at the elementary level of education. One of such efforts at this level is structured and delivered as Universal Basic Education program. Empowered by the UBE Act of 2004, the program provides for educational programs that comprise ECCE, Primary and Junior Secondary Education. Many of these programs receive international sponsorship. But in most cases, the finance policies are regulated internally.

In Nigeria, in addition to foreign financial aids, states and Local Governments finance the UBE program. The Federal Government only intervenes with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund. For administrative purposes, the activities of UBE are placed under the authorities of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) that was established on 7th October 2004. Also, the UBEC works through the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in each state and with the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs).

Consequently, Nigerian government has particularly liberalized provision of the UBE program. This has yielded almost unspecified number of registered and unregistered basic education schools in Nigerian communities. These schools can be categorized as either public or private basic schools. Public and private basic schools are aspects of Nigerian pre-tertiary formal education system. They are schools established to operate within the framework of either Early Childhood Education Policy or Basic Education Policy. In Nigeria, public basic schools are established, controlled and financed, wholly or in part, by local, state or federal government. On the other hand, private basic schools are established, controlled and financed by individual persons or by non-governmental organizations. Gone are the days when religious bodies dominated ownership of private school in Nigeria. In present Nigerian communities, there are a good number of private school owned by individuals and multi-national business organizations. Further still, private education can be categorized into three. There are profit-oriented schools which are operated like business enterprise, with huge motive on profit making. There are also religious schools and non-profit schools run by religious institutions and NGOs. School in the latter category may be philantropical to all or to some segment of people in the society. Torento & Hills (2010) also gave a category of private schools that are publicly funded but operated by private boards. All these schools are however coordinated centrally for reasons of standard.

Notwithstanding the privatization efforts, the Federal Government holds privy right of ensuring standard quality control in public and private schools in the country. Specifically, the Second Schedule, Part 1, Item (59)e of the Exclusive Legislative List of the Nigerian 1979 Constitution amended in

1989 and 1999 empowers the Federal Government of the federation to hold the sole right of prescribing Minimum Standards of Education at all levels of education in the country (Olugbile & Fadipe, 1998). Since the Section 5(1)a of the 1979 Constitution vests the Executive Powers of the Federation in the President and with the Section 136 (1) of the same Constitution, the President has the power and authority on every affairs of the country. However, the President, in most cases delegates government business to other authorities and institutions. Education business is part of what is delegated. Ministers and Heads of Education Parastatals are charged with the responsibilities of acting In behalf of the President on issues concerning educational practices (Olagboye, 1998). Through these efforts, Nigerian government has been able to unify content of learning and procedures of evaluating academic achievement in both public and private basic education institutions in the country.

Notwithstanding, the unification does not mean that there are no differences in the internal administration, and in the quality and quantity of academic and behavioural products at these two categories of schools. The government may directly control the principles and practices of recruitment/enrolment, motivation and assessments of staff and students at public basic schools but the private owners largely control those of their respective schools. These may have contributed to the differences recorded in the pattern of academic successes in public and private schools (Fajugba & Badejo, 2009; Udoji & Harrison, 2010).

Fortunately, the power to choose which school to enroll a child is legally that of parent. A parent has the right to decide whether his/her child should be enrolled in a public or a private school. Part of the Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Right cited above indicates that: *Parents shall have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.* Though the phrase: *kind of education* embedded in the legal statement is semantically broad, its basic meaning includes parents' right to choose whether their children/wards should attend a public or a private school. A mere observation of patterns of children/wards' enrolment in schools in our community indicates that parents do make the choices.

However, it would be appropriate to identify the dynamics of parents' choice of school for their children through a research like this- particularly now that the EFA target year of 2015 is fast approaching away. Knowing issues surrounding parents' preference for public or private schools could help in the nation's assessment of its success towards achieving the EFA goals and could help the nation appraise the strength and weaknesses of its private and public provisions of education. Specifically, this study is designed to find out whether the preference for basic education schools among parents in Kwara State communities is in favour of privately or publicly owned schools. In addition to this, the study also finds out the factors that informed parents' preferred schools in the communities. Subsequently, the study established whether the parents' preference significantly varied on the basis of their level of education and residence.

Theoretical Framework

Education has become a business. It has gone beyond being a mere welfare facility that is provided and coordinated by government policies and religious organization. Today, substantial part of public and private educational activities is profit driven (Harron, 2012). Invariably, education business has lent itself to some economic forces particularly in the aspect of supply, choice and demand for education. As in economics, human consumption of education can be theorized in relation to *choice* and *preference.* This provides the background for the application of *Utility Theory* used in this study.

In Economics, *utility* connotes the satisfaction or enjoyment a consumer derived from the consumption of a good or services. In this study, *satisfaction* is defined as the assurance of standard education provided by a particular provider of education. Basically, *Utility Theory* opines that a rational human being will choose between different goods or services based on his/her intent to maximize total satisfaction or total utility. Thus, it can be assumed that a rational parent will choose either to enroll his/her child in a public basic school or in a private basic school based on his/her predetermined interest to derive optimum satisfaction (standard education) for himself/herself and for his/her child/ward. Simply put, a parent will want to

enroll a child/ward only in a school that can provide the best form of education. Thus in making choice of school, a parent may consider:

- How much satisfaction (standard education) would they get from chosen a particular provider of education (private or public provider).
- The financial and non-financial prices or costs that they may have to bear in chosen a particular provider of education (Is it going to be a free or fees-based education) in relation to the eventual derivable satisfaction from the chosen school.

Basically, *Utility Theory* recognizes possible influence of other factors other than the *satisfaction* a consumer derived from goods or services (Bettman, 1983). For example, it is believed that the choice a consumer of education made can be shaped by other factors such as the knowledge (information) a consumer of education has about the quality and quantity of education provided in a school. This factor itself can be a product of the consumer's pattern of interaction with other consumers of education, his/her level of education, or his choice may be as a result of marketability strategies employed by the provider of education. Also, the residence of a consumer of education may shape his/her choice of education provider. Other factors that are theoretically assumed as capable of shaping a consumer of education's choice of private or public school are the wealth of the consumer and the available educational policies in the consumers' community. In all, for the purpose of this study, *Utility Theory* provides a base for the argument that irrespective of the possible influence of other factors, a consumer of education is very likely to prioritize *satisfaction (the standard of education)* derivable from chosen either a public or a private provider of education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study.

1. Which is the preferred provider of Universal Basic Education in the two selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kwara State?
2. What factor(s) informed parents' preference for private and public Universal Basic Education schools in the two selected LGAs of Kwara State?

3. Is there significant difference in educated and illiterate parents' preference for private and public Universal Basic Education schools in the two selected LGAs of Kwara State?
4. Is there significant difference in urban and rural parents' preference for private and public Universal Basic Education schools in the two selected LGAs of Kwara State?

Research Hypotheses:

The following research hypotheses were tested in the study.

HO_1 There is no significant differences in educated and illiterate parents' preference for public and private Universal Basic Education schools in the two selected LGAs of Kwara State.

HO_2 There is no significant differences in urban and rural parents' preference for public and private Universal Basic Education schools in the two selected LGAs of Kwara State.

Research Design

The research was a survey. The population for the study comprised parents residing in Ifelodun and Irepodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Nigeria. From the population, cluster sampling technique was used to sample a total number of 437 parents. The parents were accessed at religious centers and places of work such as school environments and LGA secretariats. In the selection of the parents, those residing at the LGA Headquarters were classified as resident of urban area and those residing in other communities other than the Headquarters were classified as residents of rural areas. The samples were further stratified on the basis of their level of education (educated parents and illiterate parents).

A researcher-made questionnaire titled Preference for Private and Public School Questionnaire (PPSQ) was used in eliciting data. The instrument has two sections. Section A contains items structured to obtain respondents' biographical data and Section B consists of items eliciting respondents' preferred provider of Basic Education in their community. Some items in the section also asked factors that informed the parents' preference. Each of the items in Section B has two response options indicated as either

Applicable or *Not Applicable.* Because the sample for the study included illiterate parents, the researchers took time to translate the items on the questionnaire to Yoruba Language being the predominant language of the natives of the covered LGAs. The items in the instrument were validated using Face Validity Approach (FVA). To do this, a draft copy of the questionnaire was given to two lecturers in the Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education University of Ilorin. They were requested to assess the relevance of the items in sourcing the needed data from respondents. They adjudged the items as valid. On the other hand, 0.72 reliability co-efficient was derived for the instrument through test-re- test approach. The items were administered twice on a sub-set of the respondents at an interval of three weeks. Responses obtained from these two-time administrations were analyzed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Two research questions (R1 and R2) were answered in the study. Answers to the research questions were descriptively presented in Percentages. On the other hand, the two raised hypotheses were tested using Chi-Square statistics.

Analysis and Findings

R1: Which is the preferred provider of Universal Basic Education in the two selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kwara State?

Table 1: Description of parents' preferred provider of Basic Education

	Categories of parents								
	Educated		Illiterate		Rural		Urban		BE Providers
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Public Schools	6	2.53	41	20.5	32	16.24	15		6.25
Private Schools	231	97.4	159	79.5	165	83.7	225		93.7

Data on Table 1 indicate that 2.53% of the sampled 237 educated parents preferred public schools to private schools while 97.4% of them preferred private schools to public schools. On the other hand, 20.5% of sampled illiterate parents preferred public schools and 79.5% of them preferred private schools. Based on residence, 16.24% of sampled rural dwellers

preferred public schools and 83.7% preferred private schools. Then among urban dwellers, 6.25% preferred public schools and 93.7% preferred private schools.

R2 What factor(s) informed parents' preference for private and public Universal Basic Education schools in two selected LGAs of Kwara State?

Table 2: Reasons for parents' preference for a particular provider of Basic Education

Reasons	Applicable		Not Applicable	
	n	%	n	%
1. Nearness and availability	29	6.63	408	93.3
2. Quality of academics	411	94.05	26	5.94
3. Financial cost	172	39.35	265	60.64
4. Mobilization policies	-----	--------	376	86.04
5. Self level of Education	216	49.42	221	50.57
6. Ownership Trust & sentiments	328	75.05	109	24.94
7. Children's'/wards' choice	-------	--------	437	100
8. School administrative styles	297	67.96	140	32.03
9. Discipline and issue of moral	310	70.93	127	29.06
10. Consistency of school calendar	68	15.56	369	84.43

Data on Table 2 indicate the various reasons why sampled parents in the two LGAs chose to enrol their children in either private or public Basic Education schools. Thus, among the sample, 6.63% indicate nearness and availability of the chosen type of school in their neighbourhood as what informed their choice and 94.05% gave reason of the standard of education obtainable in the schools. On the other hand, 39.35% of the sample said they would consider financial cost of enrolment before deciding which school to chose, but none of the parents believed that neither government and private institutions' enrolment mobilization strategies nor their children's choice could have influenced their choice. In addition to this, while 49.42% of sampled parents saw their level of education (self level of education) as a factor, 75.05% agreed that their trust and sentiment for ownership of school could have informed their choice of enrolling their children in either private or public Basic Education School. Similarly, 67.96% of the parents chose either of the

school because of the administrative style employed in the schools and 70.93% said they must have considered the issue of morality and child discipline before choosing private or public Basic Education Schools for their children.

Hypotheses Testing

Through the testing of the following hypotheses, the significance of the differences in samples' preference for public and private basic education schools was statistically illustrated.

$H0_1$ There is no significant difference in educated and illiterate parents' preference for

public and private Universal Basic Education schools.

Table 3: Chi-square test of the significance of parents' preference for public and private basic schools

Edu. Status	Preference					
	PUBES	PRUBES	Total	df.	X^2 Cal. V	X^2 tab. V
Educated	6(25.48)	231(86.23)	237			
				1	24.05	3.84
Illiterates	41(21.51)	159(72.76)	200			

Keys

PUBES= Public Universal Basic Schools

PRUBES= Private Universal Basic Education Schools

Data on Table 1 show that the X^2 Calculated Value (24.05) is higher than the X^2 Table Value, (3.84). Thus hypothesis 1 was rejected and it was concluded that there was significant difference in educated and illiterate parents' preference for private and public Universal Basic Education schools in Ilolodun and Irepodun Local Government Area of Kwara State.

$H0_1$ There is no significant differences in urban and rural parents' preference for public and private Universal Basic Education schools.

Table 4: Chi-square test of the significance of parents' preference for public and private basic schools

Residence	Preference					
	PUBES	PRUBES	Total	df.	X^2 Cal. V	X^2 tab. V
Urban	15(25.81)	225(214.18)	240			
			1 11.24		3.84	
Rural	32(21.18)	165(175.81)	197			

The statistics on Table 4 indicate that the X^2 Calculated Value, (11.24) is higher than the X^2 Table Value (3.84). Thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected and it was concluded that there was significant difference in urban and rural parents' preference for public and private Universal Basic Education schools in Irepodun and Ifelodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

Discussion

Around the world, Universal Basic Education has become aspect of human rights that must be conceitedly provided by private and public institutions and that must mandatorily be obtained by every child. In Nigeria the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Program covers a period of nine (9) year compulsory and free basic teaching and learning activities. Since 1999, the program has been delivered with main objective of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty among Nigerian populace. It is also said that UBE program in the country is specially provided to arouse and step up efforts at achieving national development, political consciousness and national integration (Obayan, 2010). However, despite that UBE is compulsory, the government cannot impose on parents the UBE schools they will enroll their children. The parents have the right of choice. In this study, some of the factors informing parents' choice are identified and discussed.

It was discovered that substantial percentage (97.4%) of educated parents and 79.5% illiterate parents in Irepodun and Ifelodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State preferred to enroll their children/wards in private Universal Basic Education Schools rather than in public Universal Basic Education School. Only 2.53% of educated parents and 20.5% of illiterate parents in the LGAs preferred public to private UBE schools. Preference for privately owned UBE schools was also reflected in the expressed interest of 83.7% of parents in rural areas and 93.7% of parents in

the urban parts of the LGAs. These expressions of preference for private UBE schools make case for the identified benefits of private and public partnerships in provision of universal basic education around the world. Involvement of private providers of basic education has been expressed in many parts of the world. Torento & Hills, (2010) found through a study that such involvement encourages diversifications in the quality and quantity of basic education. In fact, Bettman, (1983) opines that liberalized provision of economic and social welfare services such as education can encourage choice that will sprout ideal competition needed for quality assurance in services and commodity productions.

Definitely, parents will have reasons for their preference for private basic schools. This study found out that parents in the covered LGAs chose private UBE schools because of academic standard which 94.05% of the sampled parents identified as main reason for their choice. Other reasons that have high percentages of parents' support are: effective administrative style (67.96%), discipline and morality (70.93%). In fact, many parents said they prefer private schools because they trust the owners' sense of control and possibly the owners' readiness to ensure achievements in what belongs to them. This ownership-trust sentiment that was expressed by 75.05% of the sampled parents confirms what Freeman, (2011) said about the possibility of private owners of business institution to insist on commitment and achievement from their employees. Thus, it can be assumed that UBE schools that are owned or maintained by private individuals are very likely to gain clients' trust mostly on the quality of education such schools will deliver.

Many have argued that private schools tend to operate consistently on predictable school calendar (Morayo & Solagberu, 2000) and that such time assurance could gain public trust in terms of enrolment in private schools. Unfortunately, consistency of school calendar is not identified as a potential reason for preference for private schools in this study. For instance, only 15.56% of sampled respondents saw such reason as good enough for their preference. Similarly nearness and availability (6.63%) and financial cost (39.35%) were not strong reasons for parents' preference for privately owned basic schools.

These expressions of preference for private UBE schools were found to be significantly higher than the preference expressed for public UBE schools on the basis of the parents' educational status (educated and illiterate = X^2 24.05 > 3.84) and the parents' residence (rural and urban dwellers = X^2 11.24 > 3.84). Thus, it can be inferred that issues such as residence and educational status of parents can be influential in choice of private or public providers of UBE schools in Irepodun and Ifelodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

Basically, the possibility of the influence is tenable. Morayo, & Solagberu (2000) had earlier opined that education and residence are important in how a parent decide where to enroll their children. This does not rule out the possibility of less educated parents aspiring for better education for their children and rural parents aspiring that their children be educated in even schools not within their locality.

Conclusion

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in provision of basic education is a welcome idea in Ifelodun and Irepodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State. This conclusion is reached based on the expressed preference for private basic schools among parents in the local government areas. Besides, parents in the area seem to be sensitive of the quality of basic education obtainable in their locality. This can be inferred in their expression of reasons for their preference. Thus, because of the belief that private basic schools will deliver qualitative education and because of the trust that private basic schools will be administered well enough to ensure discipline and moral development of children, private schools in the two LGAs may attract more enrolment than public basic schools in the areas.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and stakeholders in education should advance ideas and practices that support private provision of basic education in Nigeria.

2. Public basic education schools should be revamped to ensure delivery of qualitative and quantitative basic education, particularly in Ifelodun and Irepodun Local Government Areas of Kwara State.

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