

CIVIL SERVANTS' PERCEPTION ON SERVICE DELIVERY OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract. This study examines civil servants' perception on service delivery of private and public elementary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. It employed descriptive design of survey type. Purposeful stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 600 respondents among teachers, medical practitioners and local government employees from four out of the state's twenty local government councils. Four (two in one) hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 significant level. Self-developed questionnaire was used to generate data and student t-test (independent) statistical tool employed for the analysis. The findings revealed, among other things, that gender, age and social-economic status had no significant influence on the perception of civil servants on the service delivery of public and private elementary schools. Level of education, however, significantly influenced civil servants' perception on the service delivery of private elementary schools, whereas it did not affect their perception on service delivery of public elemen-

tary schools. Private schools were perceived to be better in the measured indices of service delivery. Government was advised to ensure adequate provision of resources in public schools and thorough supervision of public and private schools so that whichever a parent sends his children will be a matter of choice.

Keywords: civil servants, service delivery, elementary schools

Introduction and overview

Private and public elementary schools have existed side by side in Nigeria since the nineteenth century. The missionaries blazed the trail in 1840's by founding the first set of primary schools. Five decades later, 1899 to be precise, the colonial government established its first primary school in Lagos (Fafunwa, 1991).

In the 1950's, private individuals and religious organizations established nursery education—an adjunct of elementary education—in cities and urban centres. It was patronized by the elite and/or the working class. Working mothers liked nursery school as it served dual role: taking care of their babies and at the same time providing some form of formal education. Naturally, the parents would want their children to complete the nursery and primary cycles in the same institution (Oni, 2006).

Ever since, the public had showed interest in private elementary schools. Government too is not averse to the private initiative at providing formal education. In its policy document on education, it is clearly stated that it shall encourage private individuals, voluntary agencies and communities in the founding and administration of pre-primary and primary schools alongside those provided by the state and local governments.¹⁾

Public and private schools are not exactly same. They are different in terms of their funding and administration. Whereas the former receive most of their funds from (and are administered by) the government, the latter rely on private sources, tuition fees and other levies charged and their control is largely private.

Some problems are common with public schools. Bumstead (1982) found that majority attributed public schools' disappointing performance to bureaucratic control, safety and discipline problems, insufficient money for teachers and programmes, inadequately prepared teachers, and special interest groups with conflicting goals. Jones-Wilson et al. (1992) and Crawford & Freeman (1996), identified the following as reasons responsible for parents' disinterest in public schools: lack of discipline, extremely large classes, the learners receiving less individual attention, and higher dropout rate, among others. Johnson (1999) found that majority of the parents believed that public schools did not provide a safe, orderly environment and teaching of the basics. Conversely, polling data have revealed that the general public is of the opinion that private schools have higher academic standards, have secure and conducive environment and more likely to encourage honesty and responsibility. (Anderson & Resnick, 1997)

Some of the reasons above and other factors account for the parents' choice of elementary school. In Nigeria, the likely reasons for the existence of more private schools than public schools, according to Ojemagbon (2009)²⁾ included: quality of instruction, availability of facilities, and commitment of teachers. In addition, consideration was usually given to cost of education. Parents in other parts of the world too give serious thought to these reasons and even more.

In a study by Guymn³⁾ on the evaluation of the Indianapolis Public Schools' Montessori Option (K-6) pupil progress report, he found that curriculum design and development, learning environment, programme expan-

sion, public school use of Montessori philosophy, and staff certification and training were factors influencing the choice of public schools. The results of a study conducted by Lankford & Wyckoff (1992), suggested that parents were sensitive to the relative quality of school offerings, the tuition of religious schools, and the student and family economic characteristics accompanying each alternative.

Sconyers⁴⁾ in a survey on the opinion of parents about public schools, discovered that parents wanted children to learn academic content, but they were equally concerned with work habits, preparation for the workplace, maintaining discipline, and citizenship skills. They also strongly supported extracurricular activities, with a majority favouring community service requirements for graduation. Although they believed that public schools were superior in supporting diversity and providing special education, they rated private schools higher for promoting religious and social values; maintaining discipline, safety, and higher academic standards; and having smaller class sizes.

A study of the attitude of parents in Cleveland, Ohio, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin,⁵⁾ indicated that test results are not what interest parents most when they are facing school choice. Parents are interested in what is being taught and who is teaching it, and they seldom mention results of achievement tests. Interviews with 270 parents, teachers, and school administrators in these two cities showed that information about the school's programme, primarily the curriculum and method of instruction, is the most common piece of information parents want in making a decision about where to send their children.

In a study entitled: 'An Evaluation of Parents' Patronage of Private Primary Schools in Abeokuta, Nigeria,' Onuka & Arowojolu (2008) found that five factors are responsible for the parents' support of private schools. These are: early opportunity to train a child properly, discipline, physical fa-

cilities/environment, dedication to work and the prediction of the child's future education.

To the question: "Are private schools superior to public schools?" Anderson & Resnick (1997) analyzed the arguments of their respondents, and concluded that the answer is "no". All things being equal, a good school is a good school, whether it is public or private. Private and public schools have highly similar graduation requirements, although private schools as a whole have smaller class sizes than do public schools and the teachers at private schools believe that they have more influence over curriculum offerings than do public school teachers.

Problem statement

The explicit support by the government could perhaps have led to the present proliferation of private nursery and primary schools. On the other hand, the explosion of and rising school enrolment in fee-paying private elementary institutions in the face of economic recession and widespread unemployment could have been as a result of parents' great disappointment at the public primary schools which are tuition-free. As at year 2000, there were 1308 public primary schools. The number has grown up to 1390 in 2009. As regards private primary schools, the number in the state as at year 2000 was 409. In just nine years, i.e. 2000 - 2009, the number had grown to 1362.¹⁾

The different studies cited above have contributed to our understanding of the motivating factors when it comes to the choice of elementary school by the parents. The main objective of the present study, however, is to determine the perception of civil servants on the service delivery of both private and public schools. This set of people is set aside for investigation on this matter because they are among the active players and also a major stakeholder in the educational system. Thus, they should be able to make an informed decision on issues of interest, especially one relating to education.

A study of this nature may likely be an eye-opener to other government policies especially at this time when government at different states of the federation is contemplating handing over schools to their previous owners. Findings of a study of this nature may further assist government and other stakeholders in education to take decision on an important educational matter.

The posers of this study, therefore, are: what is the perception of the civil servants on service delivery of private and public elementary schools; to what extent do sex, age, educational background and socio-economic status influence the civil servants' perception of private and public elementary schools.

In order to provide solution to the problem under investigation, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance: (1) there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female civil servants on service delivery of public and private elementary schools; (2) there is no significant difference in the perception of young and old civil servants on service delivery of public and private elementary schools; (3) there is no significant difference in the perception of the educated and uneducated civil servants on service delivery of public and private elementary schools; (4) there is no significant difference in the perception of civil servants of low socio-economic status and those of high socio-economic status on service delivery of public and private elementary schools.

Methodology

The study was a descriptive one. It was carried out in Ogun State. Ogun State, made up of the following four distinguishing zones—Egba, Ijebu, Remo and Yewa—has 20 local government areas (LGAs). After having stratified the 20 LGAs into zones, one LGA from each of the zones was sampled using simple random sampling procedure. Altogether, 4 LGAs—

Abeokuta South, Ijebu-Ode, Sagamu and Yewa South—representing 20%, were sampled.

The target population comprised three categories of civil servants. These were: teachers (primary and secondary school teachers), medical practitioners (doctors, nurses and pharmacists), and local government employees. There were 26 686 teachers in the primary and secondary schools, 249 medical practitioners (doctors, nurses and pharmacists), and 8015 local government employees in the state.²⁾

Civil servants who were parents were purposely sampled. They could be: young, i.e. those whose eldest children's age ranges between 4 and 8 years; old, i.e. those whose eldest children's age ranges between 9 years and above; educated, i.e. those who possess at least Nigeria Certificate in Education; uneducated, i.e. those whose highest academic qualification is below Nigeria Certificate in Education; of low socio-economic status, i.e. those having large nuclear family members and low income of less than fifty thousand Naira (#50,000.00) monthly; and of high socio-economic status, i.e. those having fairly small nuclear family members, high income of more than fifty thousand Naira (#50,000.00) monthly, personal car(s) and house(s). In each sampled LGA, 50 teachers, 50 medical practitioners and 50 local government employees were sampled. Altogether, 200 teachers, 200 medical practitioners and 200 local government employees participated in the study.

A questionnaire entitled: 'Civil Servants' Perception on Service Delivery of Private and Public Elementary Schools Questionnaire' was designed and used in the collection of data. The questionnaire was in two parts: Section A, of 23 items, solicited general information on respondent's sex, age, educational background and socio-economic status. Section B had 15 items—indices of service delivery expected of private and public primary schools. Each respondent was expected to indicate which of the two schools was better than the other on the basis of service delivery and at what rate.

The instrument was administered on a pilot study group which comprised 20 teachers, 20 medical personnel and 20 local government employees at Owode in Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.8197. The high reliability coefficient indicated that the instrument was reliable.

Results

Hypothesis 1:

Table 1. Comparisons in the perception of male and female civil servants on service delivery of public and private schools

School	Sex	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	T	Sig.
Private	Male	226	17.46	7.38	555	-0.553	0.581
	Female	331	17.84	8.31			
Public	Male	226	12.31	7.72	555	0.347	0.729
	Female	331	12.07	8.47			

The Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female civil servants on service delivery of private elementary schools ($t = -0.553$; $p > 0.05$). Also there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female civil servants on service delivery of public elementary schools ($t = 0.347$; $p > 0.05$). This implies that gender does not influence the perception of the civil servants on the service delivery of public and private elementary schools.

Hypothesis 2:

Table 2. Comparisons in the perception of young and old civil servants on service delivery of public and private schools

School	Age	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	T	Sig
Private	Young	169	18.16	6.77	555	0.910	0.363
	Old	388	17.48	8.63			
Public	Young	169	11.47	7.22	555	-1.339	0.181
	Old	388	12.47	8.54			

The Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the perception of young and old civil servants on service delivery of private elementary schools ($t = 0.910$; $p > 0.05$). Likewise there is no significant difference in the perception of young and old civil servants on service delivery of public elementary schools ($t = -1.339$; $p > 0.181$). This implies that age does not influence the perception of the civil servants on the service delivery of public and private elementary schools.

Hypothesis 3:

Table 3. Comparisons in the perception of educated and uneducated civil servants on service delivery of public and private schools

School	Education	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	T	Sig
Private	Uneducated	94	20.46	8.65	555	3.674	0.00
	Educated	463	17.12	7.89			
Public	Uneducated	94	11.51	10.19	555	-0.857	0.392
	Educated	463	12.30	7.69			

The Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of uneducated and educated civil servants on service delivery of private elementary schools ($t = 3.674$; $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, there is no significant difference in the perception of uneducated and educated civil servants on service delivery of public elementary schools ($t = -0.857$; $p > 0.05$). This

implies that while education influences the perception of the civil servants on the service delivery of private elementary schools, it does not affect their perception on the service delivery of public elementary schools.

Hypothesis 4:

Table 4. Comparison in the perception of low socio-economic status and high socio-economic status civil servants on service delivery of public and private schools

School	Socio-Economic Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	T	Sig
Private	Low Socio-Economic Status	419	17.40	8.00	555	-1.433	0.152
	High Socio-Economic Status	138	18.54	8.41			
Public	Low Socio-Economic Status	419	12.55	8.29	555	1.907	0.057
	High Socio-Economic Status	138	11.02	7.68			

The Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the perception of low socio-economic status and high socio-economic status civil servants on service delivery of private elementary schools ($t = -1.433$; $p > 0.05$). Also there is no significant difference in the perception of low socio-economic status and high socio-economic status civil servants on service delivery of public elementary schools ($t = 1.907$; $p > 0.05$). This implies that socio-economic status does not influence the perception of civil servants on service delivery of private and public elementary schools.

Discussion

The results of the study indicates that gender, age and social-economic status have no influence, whatsoever, on the perception of the civil servants on the service delivery of public and private elementary schools. However, the results reveal that level of education influences their perception on the service delivery of private elementary schools, but it does not affect their perception on service delivery of public elementary schools. Private elementary schools are adjudged to be better in the measured indices of service delivery. It is perceived that private schools have better facilities and qualified teachers when compared with their public school counterparts.

These findings are not surprising. In actual fact, they are in line with the researcher's expectation. As a civil servant working in a public school on the one hand and as a parent who has children in private schools up to the university level on the other hand, personal experience about today's elementary schools has revealed that age, gender and socio-economic status are not strong determinants of parents' choice of patronage of school either public or private. As a matter of fact, old and young and male and female civil servants patronize both public and private schools.

The truth is that the downtrodden in the society stand shoulder to shoulder as much as possible with their affluent counterparts when it comes to school-related issues in particular and educational matters in general. This is so because the poor and oppressed see education as the only leverage or bridge that needs to be crossed in order to be on a par with the rich. This is why they pay through the nose for their children's education. To put it in a nutshell, parents, irrespective of age, gender and socio-economic status attach nearly the same value to educational matters.

It is also not unexpected that level of education significantly influenced parents' perception on the service delivery of private elementary

schools. In other words, both the educated and the unlettered civil servants differ in the way they adjudged the service delivery of private elementary schools. The experience and exposure of educated parents, having being in the four walls of the school environment, and having enjoyed good education themselves, will definitely come to bear in rating very salient issues such as curriculum content, method of instruction and other less obvious but equally important matter which, altogether, is the culmination of service delivery and of which private elementary schools have an edge over public elementary schools.

At the same time, however, level of education does not affect parents' perception on the service delivery of public elementary schools. Both educated and uneducated have the same opinion on the service delivery of public elementary schools which was adjudged to be poor. Incessant workers' strike, inadequate facilities, and unconducive environment, among others, are common with public primary schools. According to Johnson (1999) and Ojemagbon,²⁾ this simple fact explains the continuous dwindling enrolment of pupils in the public schools and the proliferation of private schools especially at the primary and post-primary levels of education. In a study on evaluation of parent patronage of private schools, Onuka & Arowojolu (2008) affirmed that quality of instruction, availability of facilities, conducive learning environment, high quality supervision and commitment of teachers put private schools ahead of public schools in service delivery.

In all, the findings corroborated previous research works^{2,4,5)} (cf. also in Johnson, 1999) on parents' choice of primary elementary schools which clearly indicated that parents are interested in what is being taught, those teaching it and the methods used in teaching it.

Recommendation

Arising from the findings above, it is crystal clear that government will need to step up the re-engineering process of the educational sector, especially at the pre-primary and primary levels.

It is recommended that government should ensure adequate provision of educational resources—financial, human and materials—in all the public schools. In addition, the Ministry of Education’s Department of Primary, Teacher and Non-Formal Education, in charge of formulation, review and execution of policies which concern the administration of pre-primary education and primary education, among other things, and the Department of Inspectorate Services, saddled with the responsibility of ensuring quality control and enhancement of standards in all schools, as well as other agencies including National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, Universal Basic Education Commission, and State Universal Basic Education Board, should be up and doing and monitor what goes on in public and private elementary schools.

This becomes necessary so as to guarantee equal and high academic standards in all the primary schools throughout the state and, indeed, the whole nation and, by extension, instill in the public a lasting interest and patronage of the sector. If the public elementary schools are made attractive, sending children to private elementary schools will, therefore, just be a matter of choice.

NOTES

1. Federal Republic of Nigeria. *National Policy of Education*, 4th Edition, 2004; cf. also: Ogun State Universal Basic Education Board, Abeokuta. Ogun State Ministry of Education, Abeokuta.

2. <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/sylvester-ojenagbon/in-search-of-a-cheap-school-for-my-children/pdf.html>; also A Report of Human Resources Statistics of the Ogun State Public Service, 2009 Edition.

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