BRIDGING THE SOLOS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) FUNDING IN BASIC SCHOOLS IN IKORODU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Early Childhood Development (ECD) plays a vital role in shaping later educational achievement and human capital development. Despite its recognized importance, disparities in funding and inequitable allocation of resources continue to constrain access to quality ECD programmes. This study examined existing gaps in ECD funding in basic schools in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos, State, assessed the roles of relevant stakeholders in supporting early childhood programmes, and explored strategies for bridging these funding gaps through policy reforms, public–private partnerships, and innovative financing approaches. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Out of 863 teachers, a sample of 120 teachers was randomly selected from twelve basic schools, comprising six public and six private institutions. Ten respondents were drawn from each school, including nine classroom teachers and one school administrator. Two research questions and one theoretical framework guided the study, while one hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Data were collected using researchers' developed instrument titled *Bridging the Silos in Early Childhood Development Funding Questionnaire (BSECDFQ)*. Regression analysis was employed to determine the relationship between funding challenges and the quality of early childhood education provision. Findings revealed that inadequate funding policies and inequitable distribution of financial resources constitute major barriers to effective ECD implementation. Results further indicated that schools with higher levels of financial support demonstrated better learning environments, improved instructional facilities, and enhanced programme quality. The study recommended increased federal and state government investment, strengthened public–private partnerships, and community-driven funding initiatives to ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development, Equity in Education, Funding Gaps, Policy Reforms, Quality Learning Outcomes

Introduction

Early childhood represents a crucial phase in human development, establishing the foundational architecture for lifelong learning, socio-emotional well-being, and long-term economic productivity. Empirical evidence underscores that targeted pedagogical interventions during these formative years yield profound, enduring advancements in cognitive, social, and emotional domains (Heckman, 2011). Despite these documented benefits, persistent funding deficits and systemic disparities continue to obstruct universal access to quality Early Childhood Education (ECE).

In the Nigerian context, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), through its National Policy on Education, formalised the statutory objectives of pre-primary education. These objectives mandate that ECE centres provide secure, supervised care for children of working parents, while the government regulates minimum quality benchmarks. Furthermore, the policy outlines a collaborative framework wherein host primary schools serve as feeder institutions, and local communities alongside Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) actively participate in the daily administration and infrastructural maintenance of these facilities. This structural paradigm was designed to incentivise public-private partnerships and community-driven initiatives.

However, despite these policy provisions, inadequate funding remains a major challenge confronting ECD centres in Nigeria. Poor financial support often results in insufficient infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of qualified teachers. Consequently, the quality of learning experiences provided in these centres is compromised, thereby negatively affecting pupils' learning outcomes and overall developmental attainment.

Literature Review

To mitigate persistent financial deficits, a multi-sectoral financing paradigm incorporating state intervention, private capital investment, and community-led initiatives is imperative. Coordinated cross-sectoral investments yield exponentially higher developmental returns because cognitive, socio-emotional, and physiological growth trajectories are intrinsically interdependent (Heckman, 2011). Consequently, resilient early childhood systems depend on integrated fiscal frameworks that consolidate resources from the ministries of education, health, and social welfare (Myers, 2013). Establishing these collaborative funding architectures is essential to guarantee sustained, adequate capital deployment for foundational programs.

However, institutional fragmentation severely undermines these funding models by creating operational silos. Ministries frequently operate in isolation, which perpetuates jurisdictional overlap and regressive resource misallocation. Evans (2000) is of the opinion that resolving these inefficiencies requires the establishment of centralized national coordinating bodies to harmonize cross-ministerial policies, streamline funding channels, and standardize program execution. Such unified governance structures are critical to institutionalizing transparency, enforcing fiscal accountability, and optimizing resource distribution across the early childhood sub-sector.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) constitute a viable structural strategy for mitigating persistent financing deficits within the early childhood sub-sector. By consolidating resources from state institutions, private enterprises, philanthropic foundations, and grassroots community networks, these collaborative frameworks expand capital availability and elevate the quality of instructional delivery. In alignment with this strategy, the National Policy on Education explicitly mandates strategic alliances with Non-Governmental Organizations

(NGOs) and International Development Partners (IDPs) to mobilize external fiscal and material resources for Early Childhood Development (ECD) (FRN, 2013). This policy also dictates the creation of the Network of Educational Services Centres in Nigeria (NESCAN) to drive the production, development, and utilization of innovative instructional materials. However, a critical systemic barrier remains: the acute lack of geographic availability and equitable access to these specialized materials and facilities within marginalized or underserved ECD centres.

From a developmental perspective, empirical literature confirms that early childhood experiences permanently shape lifelong trajectories, directly modulating adult educational attainment, labour market outcomes, and longitudinal health status (Shonkoff& Phillips, 2000). Consequently, global governance bodies increasingly categorize ECD not merely as a fundamental human right, but as a high-yield strategic investment for macroeconomic development (UNESCO, 2021). Despite this global consensus, highly volatile and fragmented domestic resource allocations continually compromise the efficacy of ECD interventions, particularly within low-income communities. Conversely, longitudinal data demonstrate that institutionalized public-private financing frameworks were foundational to the structural success of landmark interventions, such as the High Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart, 2005). These historical models illustrate how coordinated sectoral partnerships effectively mobilize supplementary capital to fund continuous professional teacher training, standardized learning materials, and rigorous, evidence-based program monitoring.

Increasing state commitment through dedicated, statutory budgetary allocations constitutes a critical imperative for dismantling operational silos and securing fiscal sustainability within Early Childhood Development (ECD) systems. Robust, institutionalized early childhood infrastructure cannot rely on transient international donor funding or regressive parental out-of-pocket contributions; it must be permanently integrated into national education financing systems. Strong public investment in foundational programming significantly optimizes longitudinal academic performance and lowers long-term macroeconomic expenditures associated with remedial education, structural unemployment, and social deviance (Barnett, 2011). Furthermore, when state authorities prioritize early childhood education within macroeconomic fiscal frameworks, structural disparities in institutional access and instructional quality decline markedly.

In the Nigerian context, chronic deficit spending and inadequate federal and state budgetary provisions remain the primary constraints hindering the operationalization of early childhood frameworks, particularly within public basic schools (Abdullahi, 2018). Consequently, expanding and harmonizing state-led fiscal disbursements is essential to rectify geographic and socioeconomic inequalities in program delivery, stabilize institutional funding, and guarantee the equitable distribution of educational resources.Fiscal architecture within Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres relies on a pluralistic financing framework spanning statutory public allocations, private investments, and localized community capital. Statutory state funding constitutes the primary engine of foundational education financing globally; however, severe macroeconomic disparities dictate its efficacy. High-income economies routinely institutionalize universal pre-kindergarten frameworks through robust budgetary allocations, whereas developing nations face chronic fiscal inadequacies that constrain systemic implementation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). To mitigate these public funding deficits, the early childhood sub-sector increasingly leverages private capital markets and philanthropic networks. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) portfolios and non-profit organizations provide essential capital infusions to supplement state resources (Evans &Kosec, 2020). Nevertheless, a critical operational vulnerability persists: these private interventions are predominantly project-based, transient, and lack the longitudinal sustainability required for systemic stability.

These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by systemic policy deficits that perpetuate fragmented implementation frameworks. The absence of comprehensive, unified national ECD financing policies across many developing states directly results in decentralized, non-cohesive resource administration and widespread operational inefficiencies (Naudeau,Kataoka, Valerio, Neuman& Elder, 2011). A prominent manifestation of this policy failure is the regressive, inequitable spatial distribution of educational capital. Public funding allocations remain disproportionately concentrated within urban administrative centres, structurally marginalizing and underfunding early childhood facilities in rural communities (Britto,Yoshikawe&Boller, 2017). This urban-centric fiscal bias systematically stalls infrastructural development and compromises instructional quality within rural communities, deeply entrenching spatial disparities in foundational educational outcomes.

A critical structural impediment within Early Childhood Development (ECD) fiscal frameworks is the prevalence of abbreviated funding cycles. Because long-term capital forecasting and institutional development demand substantial, sustained financial outlays, most funding injections are restricted to transient, short-term operational plans. Yoshikawa,Wuermli, Raikes, Kim and Kebay(2013) assert that the systemic reliance on short-term funding architectures severely disrupts programmatic continuity, stalls ongoing developmental projects, and prevents the execution of strategic, multi-year pedagogical planning.

To mitigate these systemic vulnerabilities and secure long-term programmatic sustainability, immediate policy reforms and expanded state-led capital investments are mandatory. National governments must intentionally prioritize the early childhood sub-sector by embedding foundational education financing directly into core national development strategies and macroeconomic policy frameworks (Heckman, 2011). Elevating budgetary thresholds and enforcing statutory policy consistency are vital prerequisites to stabilizing cash flows and ensuring enduring institutional viability. Furthermore, the systematic deployment of public-private partnerships (PPPs) offers a scalable mechanism to expand fiscal capacity. By consolidating the administrative reach of public institutions with the operational efficiency and capital resources of private enterprises and non-governmental organizations, PPPs can establish highly resilient, sustainable financing frameworks that maximize localized social impact (Evans &Kosec, 2020). Beyond traditional partnerships, non-traditional financial instruments such as impact investing portfolios, social impact bonds (SIBs), and structured community-led micro-financing initiatives provide vital alternative channels to mobilize non-state capital for foundational infrastructure (Gustafsson-Wright &Boggild-Jones, 2019).

Global empirical models offer valuable operational templates for restructuring domestic ECD financing frameworks. In East Africa, Rwanda has successfully operationalized a decentralized, home-grown ECD financing model by legally integrating early childhood infrastructure into its overarching national development strategy; this model secures long-term sustainability by blending public revenues with harmonized international aid and active community equity contributions (UNICEF, 2021). Similarly, the United States established the federally funded Head Start program, an institutionalized, state-backed framework explicitly designed to deliver comprehensive early childhood education, nutrition, and social services to low-income populations. This long-term intervention demonstrates that uncompromised, sustained government investment is the most effective mechanism for achieving universal access and closing socioeconomic achievement gaps during formative human development (Shonkoff& Phillips, 2000).

In Nigeria, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) serves as an effective mechanism for driving institutional advancement, primarily through the strategic sponsorship of academic research, international and domestic conference attendance, scholarly publications, and physical infrastructure development. To resolve deep-seated systemic and financial deficits within foundational education, this proven fiscal framework should be systematically extended to the basic education sub-sector by establishing an integrated partnership with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). Replicating the core structure of Adeniji (2012) proposal, codifying this institutional synergy into a distinct statutory entity the Universal Basic Education Trust Fund (UBETFUND) would represent a significant policy paradigm shift. This collaborative funding model would directly generate sustainable, long-term capital for Early Childhood Development (ECD), specifically targeting continuous professional teacher training, early childhood infrastructure development, and independent fiscal auditing frameworks.

Consequently, it is against this analytical backdrop the study investigates mechanisms for bridging the operational and fiscal silos in Early Childhood Development (ECD) funding in public basic schools inIkorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The study identified the funding challenges affecting early childhood development centres in basic schools inIkorodu Local Government Area. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Identify the key effects of funding challenges thataffect early childhood development in basic schools.
2. Explore innovative and sustainable funding strategies that can bridge the existing financial gaps in early childhood education.

Research questions

The study answers the following research questions:

1. What are the major effects of funding challenges affecting early childhood developmentin basic schools?
2. What innovative and sustainable funding strategies can be implemented to bridge the funding gaps in early childhood education?

Methodology

The study adopts descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises all teachers in Ikorodu LGA which is 863(Lagos State School Census Report (2018-19). However, the sample size is 120 teachers in Ikorodu LGA. 12 schools were randomly selected, six public schools and six private schools. 108 teachers and 12 school administrators formed the sample size. Researchers' self-made 10 item questionnaire titled' Bridging the Solos in Early Childhood Development Funding' (BSECDF) was utilized to gather data for the study. Two research questions and one theoretical framework on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory of 1979 guided the study. One hypothesis was also raised at 0.05 significant level. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean were used to analyse data collected. Multiple regression analyses was used to test the hypothesis. Three experts in early childhood Education validated the instrument while the reliability coefficient was tested using Cronbach Alpha at .84.

Findings

Research question 1: What are the major effects of funding challenges affecting early childhood developmentcentres in basic schools?

Table 1

Major effects of Funding Challenges affecting ECD Development

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	ECD Funding challenges results in inadequate infrastructure.	49(40.8%)	59(49.2%)	9(7.5%)	3(2.5%)	3.2
2.	ECD Funding challenge also results in lack of instructional materials.	53(44.2%)	57(47.5%)	7(5.8%)	3(2.5%)	3.3
3.	Lack of ECD funding challenge also results in insufficiently trained educators.	47(39.2%)	59(49.2%)	9(7.5%)	5(4.1%)	3.2
4.	Lack of ECD funding hinders long-term planning and programme continuity	51(42.5%)	55(45.8%)	11(9.2%)	3(2.5%)	3.2
5.	Lack of equitable funding of ECD result in fragmented development.	50(41.7%)	57(47.5%)	10(8.3%)	3(2.5%)	3.2
Grand mean						**3.2**

Results: Findings from items 1–5 indicate that funding challenges significantly affect Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. Inadequate infrastructure (M = 3.2), lack of instructional materials (M = 3.3), insufficiently trained educators (M = 3.2), limited long-term planning and programme continuity (M = 3.2), and inequitable funding leading to fragmented development (M = 3.2) were identified as key effects. The grand mean of 3.2 indicates general agreement among respondents that funding constraints negatively influence the effectiveness of ECD centres.

Research question 2: What innovative and sustainable funding strategies can be implemented to bridge the funding gaps in early childhood education?

Table 2

Innovative and Sustainable funding Strategies in bridging Implementation Gaps

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
6.	Sustainable policy reforms can bridge the implementation gaps in funding ECD maximally.	47(39.2%)	63(52.5%)	7(5.8%)	3(2.5%)	3.2
7.	There should also be an increased government commitment in funding ECD.	53(44.2%)	57(47.5%)	6(5%)	4(3.3%)	3.3
8.	Encouraging an enhanced private sector involvement and philanthropic support can foster ECD.	59(49.2%)	56(46.6%)	3(2.5%)	2(1.7%)	3.4
9.	Allowing and innovative financing mechanisms such as external donor support can help improve ECD.	49(40.8%)	63(52.5%)	5(4.2%)	3(2.5%)	3.3
10.	Allowing federal character sponsorship through TETFUND partnership with UBE can foster ECD.	45(37.5%)	67(55.8%)	5(4.2%)	3(2.5%)	3.2
Grand mean						**3.2**

Results: Findings from items 6–10 indicate strong agreement on innovative and sustainable strategies for bridging funding gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD). Sustainable policy reforms (M = 3.2), increased government commitment (M = 3.3), enhanced private sector and philanthropic support (M = 3.4), innovative financing through donor support (M = 3.3), and collaboration between TETfund and UBE (M = 3.2) were identified as key strategies. The grand mean of 3.2 indicates overall agreement that these measures can strengthen ECD funding.

Discussion

The empirical evidence addressing the first research question, which evaluated the systemic repercussions of fiscal constraints on early childhood infrastructure, strongly aligns with the global assessments of UNESCO (2021). Their findings corroborate that volatile and asymmetrical resource distribution fundamentally undermines the efficacy of Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives, particularly within economically marginalized jurisdictions. This observation is further reinforced by Yoshikawa et al. (2013), who demonstrated that an institutional over-reliance on abbreviated funding cycles severely impedes strategic, multi-year developmental forecasting and compromises long-term programmatic continuity. Collectively, these insights substantiate the primary data gathered in this study, illustrating how financial insecurity directly degrades instructional quality in public basic schools.

Correspondingly, the data analysed for the second research question, which explored innovative and sustainable financing paradigms, directly echoes the macroeconomic propositions of Gustafsson-Wright and Boggild-Jones (2019). Their research supports the deployment of non-traditional financial instruments specifically impact investing portfolios, social impact bonds, and structured community-driven financing initiatives as viable, high-yield mechanisms to stabilize early childhood capital streams. Furthermore, these findings converge with the structural models advanced by Evans and Kosec (2020), who argued that formalized, multi-stakeholder public-private partnerships uniting state apparatuses, commercial enterprises, and non-governmental organizations fundamentally bolster the fiscal resilience and operational sustainability of foundational educational networks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the prevalence of fragmented funding architectures within early childhood education underscores the critical imperative for a highly coordinated, integrated macroeconomic financing model that consolidates disparate fiscal streams into a unified, resilient Early Childhood Development (ECD) framework. Dismantling these operational and financial silos requires the institutionalization of strategic cross-sectoral alliances among state ministries, public educational institutions, civil society, international development partners, and private capital markets, all underpinned by innovative financing instruments. Implementing such coordinated, equitable capital deployment systems is an essential prerequisite to guaranteeing universal access to standardized foundational learning environments. Furthermore, the successful mitigation of persistent financial deficits depends on rigorous policy alignment, enhanced governance frameworks, and highly transparent fiscal management systems. By leveraging stakeholder synergy and multi-sectoral networks, public basic schools can optimize the mobilization, strategic allocation, and deployment of financial, material, and human capital. Ultimately, this structural synchronization is vital to maximizing resource efficiency, enforcing institutional accountability, and elevating the overall efficacy of ECD program delivery.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered based on the findings of the study

1. Federal Government should institutionalize increased and sustained budgetary allocation to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in basic education financing frameworks.
2. Policy and governance structures should be reinforced to support integrated and transparent ECD financing systems, including effective coordination among relevant ministries, donor agencies, and development partners to ensure accountability, efficiency, and sustainability in resource utilization.

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