

Full Length Research Paper

Assessment of stakeholders' views on accessing quality and equity of basic education in rural communities of Abia State, Nigeria

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This study aims to analyze the views of stakeholders on access to quality and equity in Basic Education in selected rural communities of Abia State, Nigeria. The study used mixed method design (quantitative and qualitative) in drawing views of a stratified sample of 432 stakeholders in the quantitative study and 72 participants of six focus group discussions. The study found out that access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities was significantly inadequate ($p < 0.025$) resulting from lack of qualified teachers, inadequate safety of the environment, poor facilities, very little involvement by government in maintaining the schools, learners reluctance to do their works and indiscipline, little or no stakeholders' involvement in the schools affairs. Stakeholders' involvement (most of who are parents) and their level of education were shown to be significant indicators of access to quality and equity in Basic Education although the schools were not exploiting these assets. The study concludes that if access to quality Basic Education is to become real in the rural communities, the Ministry of Education, Local Government Education Boards, stakeholders and communities need to establish strong collaboration and coordination of the activities to improve the conditions of the schools. Programmes that can assist parents and assist learners in their homework and instil morals in the learners need to be worked out by the education authorities.

Key words: Challenges, rural communities, quality education, equity, access.

INTRODUCTION

A good quality education is one that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being. Slander (2016) defined Quality Education as one that is pedagogically and developmentally sound and educates the learner in

becoming an active and productive member of society. A Quality Education is not one that is measured purely by a test score or by how many words per minute a 5-year-old can read (Slade, n.d). Two leading educational organisations, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and Educational International (EI) defined quality education as: "Education

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that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each learner regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location (equity). It prepares the child for life, not just for testing. It provides resources and directs policy to ensure that each child enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults. The child has to have access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults, and is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment (Slander, 2016; Slade, n.d.). A quality education provides the outcomes needed for individuals, communities, and societies to prosper. It allows schools to align and integrate fully with their communities and access a range of services across sectors designed to support the educational development of their learners” (Slander, 2016; EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005; UNICEF, 2000). The Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and more particularly, Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 recognized that Education for All policy cannot be achieved without the improvement of its quality.

There are three key pillars that support quality education: access to quality teachers; use of quality learning tools and professional development; and the establishment of safe and supportive quality learning environments. A study by Ng (2015), which examined how middle leaders in Singapore schools understand „quality education“ and how they think quality education can be achieved, referred to quality education as one that emphasises holistic development, equips students with the knowledge and skills for the future, inculcates students with the right values and imbues students with a positive learning attitude. Such quality education must be delivered by good teachers, enabled by good teaching and learning processes and facilitated by a conducive learning environment and stakeholders’ participation.

Access to quality and equity in Basic Education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to learners attending schools and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (OECD, 2012). Motala (2015) argues that despite improvements in both quality and practice, and significant resource allocation, educational access can be hampered by level of attendance, limited in terms of grade progression, unsatisfactory in terms of the age grade norms, poor in terms of quality and inefficient in terms of learning outcomes. Dryden-Peterson (2009) identified barriers preventing access to primary education to include under-investment in education, exclusion related to individual and group level characteristics, and systemic discrimination in policies and practice. Thus physical access to primary school is not meaningful unless it results in sustained enrolment and regular attendance,

progression through the appropriate ages and meaningful learning that has utility (Dryden-Peterson, 2009).

Quality education is a complex issue that cannot be easily quantified by test scores or examination grades but embraces a conglomeration of issues such as good environment, health care situation of the learners and an assessment of outcomes on how well the learners are performing after they have left the educational institution; government spending on education, student/teacher ratios, teacher qualifications, test scores, and the length of time students spent in school (Slade, n.d.; ASCD and EI, n.d.).

The rural community schools represent those schools that are usually neglected by most governments in terms of infrastructure, environmental care, access roads, water and sometimes electricity and quality teachers (du Plessis and Mestry, 2019). Yet they have many learners who are expected to write the same examinations and move into the same job market as those from schools in urban areas, where the conditions are far better. Hardly has there been any effort to assess the level of access to quality and equity in the rural schools of Abia State, Nigeria. An assessment of the access to quality and equity in Basic Education requires that we focus on a number of issues: Quality Learners, Good Health and Nutrition of learners, Family Support for Learning, Regular Attendance for Learning, Quality Learning Environments, Class size, Quality of school facilities, Peaceful, Safe Environments, especially for girls, Inclusive environments, Teachers’ behaviours that affect safety, Life Skills, Teacher Competence and School Efficiency, Continuing Support for Student-centred Learning, School management and Professional Learning for Teachers (Madani, 2019).

Many studies conducted on quality education by Seginer (2006); Barge and Loges (2003); and Madani (2019) have concentrated on role of parents and learners’ academic performance without consideration of the holistic views of the stakeholders from the rural communities and outside the community including education officers and inspector of schools. Yet stakeholders’ participation especially those at the community level ensure, among others, that community members are sensitized and educated on the importance of education and education policies. They take measures to assist in providing and monitoring educational facilities and activities, embark on school projects through communal labour, provision of teaching and learning materials for pupils, ensure adequate supply and motivation of teachers, They sometimes meet to draw action programmes for school improvement; can check punctuality and regularity of both teachers and pupils to school; ensure good sanitation and security in schools, and monitor school activities to address their problems if given the opportunity (GES, 2000; GAIT II, 2005). The opinions of the stakeholders are key to the formulation of appropriate policies to enhance access to quality and

equity in Basic Education. Stakeholders, when they partner with schools and school management, can contribute to learning achievement in schools as setters of policy and providers of support (Deep Dive Report, 2016). It is important that their views on current position of access to quality and equity especially in the rural communities are analysed. This view, which is based on the Human Relations School of organization theory (Scott, 1998), believes that if stakeholders, in a particular decision outcome, are involved in crafting the decision, they will understand the decision better and be more committed to making it work.

This paper, which is an off-shoot of a larger study, analyzes the views of stakeholders (parents, teachers, learners, community leaders, inspector of schools and politicians) on access to quality and equity in Basic Education in selected rural communities of Abia State, Nigeria. The paper specifically answers the following questions: „Do the rural community schools have access to quality and equity in Basic Education? What are the challenges that the rural communities have in accessing quality and equity in Basic Education? Do the socio-demographic characteristics of the stakeholders have any effect on the access to quality and equity in Basic Education? The outcome of this analysis of stakeholders' views can pave way for new interventions and policies by the Ministry of Education to improve access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities. The stakeholders can also become more conscious of what constitutes their roles in the education of their children and what constitutes quality in education.

Conceptual framework

This paper is conceptualized based on Epstein (2011)'s theory of "overlapping spheres," which highlight the overlapping roles of parents, schools and communities. The framework is also based on the management theories. Ansell and Gash (2007) define the conditions necessary for collaborative governance and brings public and private stakeholders together in collective forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision making, while Kania and Kramer (2011)'s theory of collective impact outlines the conditions for effective collaboration for positive, community change. The theory illustrates an example of collective impact, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model places the child/student in the middle while the spheres of influence are: school, family, and community. Thus the stakeholders' roles in ensuring quality and equity in Basic Education require the partnering of different groups and demands that each be assigned specific tasks to be accomplished in the interests and well-being of the learners. In the bid to create access to

quality and equity in Basic Education, the family, parents, community, schools, Education Managers, each has defined roles in making the child become a useful product, but the different activities and assignments are not mutually exclusive but act jointly to achieve the overall goal of child development.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed method research design (quantitative and qualitative), and targeted all stakeholders from six rural communities in Arochukwu and Ohafia Local governments areas of Abia State, Nigeria. The Creative Research Systems (2012), a sample size calculator, gave a statistically acceptable sample size of 516 for the population of Abia State, Nigeria, at 95% confidence interval and a margin of error of 5%. The qualitative and quantitative methods are used simultaneously to complement each other (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Denzin, 2009) in order to get reliable results.

A multi-stage stratified sampling was used in the study. At the first stage, Abia State was purposively selected from the 36 States in Nigeria because of its peculiarity in having backward rural communities. At the second stage, two Local Government Areas, Arochukwu and Ohafia were randomly selected from the 17 Local Government areas of the state. In the third stage, six rural communities, two from Ohafia and four from Arochukwu Local Government areas were randomly selected for the study. The sample size of 516 stakeholders was equally allocated to the six rural communities ((Table 1).

The snow ball sampling technique (Vogt, 1999) was used in identifying stakeholders from the selected rural communities because of non-availability of sampling frames for this population of stakeholders. However, only 432 stakeholders responded to the survey (Table 1) giving a response rate of 84%. This is very much higher than Arber (2001), who recommended an achievable and acceptable rate of approximately 75% for interviews and 65% for self-completion postal questionnaires (Kelley et al., 2003). There was however an oversampling from Okpo rural community to make up for the shortfalls from the other communities as a result of reluctance to participate by stakeholders

Data were collected using questionnaire administered to the selected stakeholders by trained research assistants who were recruited from the rural communities. The questionnaire was translated into the local language (Igbo) to facilitate use by those who might not understand English Language. The content of the questionnaire and objectives of the study were explained to the stakeholders and they were informed that participation was not compulsory and assured of confidentiality of the information supplied and anonymity, as the questionnaire did not contain any names of participants. Those who accepted to participate in the study completed a consent form before the interview. One Focal Group Discussion (FGD) was held in each of the six rural communities with 12 members in each group. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the instrument was calculated as 0.89. The collected quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive (percentages, means and correlations) and inferential statistics (multinomial logistic regression analysis, Chi-square and t-tests). The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis.

Ethical review

The study was approved by the Abia State Institutional Research Review Board of the Ministry of Education before being

Table 1. Distribution of sample size to studied population.

State	Population	Local government area {LGA}	Rural communities	Proposed sample size	Achieved sample size
Abia	3,256,600	Arochukwu	Okpo	86	102
			Umuzomgbo	86	79
			Achara	86	73
			Umuchiakuma	86	59
		Ohafia	Elu Ohafia	86	68
			Ebem Ohafia	86	51
Total			516	432	

administered on the stakeholders.

RESULTS

Knowledge of access to quality education

To determine perception of the stakeholders on access to quality and equity in Basic Education, they were asked the question: „Do you think that you have access to quality Basic Education in your community schools?“ Participants were given three choices to respond to the question, namely: 1=Yes, 2 = No and 3 = Don't know. Two in every three males (67.7%) and a little more than three in every four females (78.8%) answered yes.

Adequacy of access of access to quality and equity in basic education

To determine whether or not access to quality and equity in Basic Education is adequate, the stakeholders in the field study were asked to ascertain how adequate certain characteristics (indicators of quality and equity in basic education) were in the rural community schools using thirty seven items question response on a five-point Likert scale, 1=Very inadequate; 2= Inadequate; 3= Undetermined; 4= Adequate; and 5= Very adequate.

The mean responses to each item and the standard error (standard deviation of the mean) were computed using the SPSS programme. Means that are less than three indicate that access is either inadequate or very inadequate while means that are greater than three indicate that access is adequate or very adequate. The following null (H_0) and alternate (H_1) hypotheses were tested.

H_0 : Access to quality and equity in Basic education in the schools of the selected rural communities is significantly adequate;

H_1 : Access to quality and equity in Basic education in the schools of the selected study rural communities is significantly inadequate.

In order to test the hypothesis, a t-test was run to determine whether there is adequate access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities. The t-value for each item was obtained from the formula (1),

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s/\sqrt{n}} \quad (1)$$

Where \bar{x} is the mean response for each item and μ is the hypothetical mean which in this case is equal to 3 (the average of the scale 1, 2, 3, 4, 5); s is the standard deviation of the scores on each item and n is the number of cases per each item. A test of hypothesis of the adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education is carried out using the t-values calculated from equation (1) at the 5% level of significance. A negative t-value is an indication that item mean is less than the theoretical mean of three and therefore access is inadequate. A positive value of t indicates that access is adequate. The p-values (significance probabilities) generated by the SPSS are compared with the 5% level of significance. A p-value less than 2.5% (two tailed test) means that the test is significant whereas a p-value greater than 2.5% implies that the test is not significant. The results are shown in Table 2.

The mean scores of the participants were obtained and two-sided t-tests were carried out for each of the items that were used as indicators of quality and equity in Basic Education. A 95% confidence level was set for the difference in mean score of each indicator. The results show that all the t-values are negative which meant that the mean score for each indicator is significantly less than three; that is, access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural schools is significantly inadequate ($p < 0.025$). This is supported by the 95% confidence intervals which do not contain the value zero in the difference between the mean scores and the test value of three, but are all negative (less than zero). The mean difference between the item means and the test means of

Table 2. Test of adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities (Test value: mean = 3).

Indicators of quality and equity in Basic education	Description of indicators	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard error of the mean $\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}$	Mean difference $(\bar{x} - \mu)$	T= $\left(\frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}\right)$	d.f.	p-value (2-tailed)	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Security	Safety of teachers and learners	2.55	0.062	-0.45	-7.26	426	0	-0.57	-0.33
	Crime free area	2.33	0.054	-0.67	-12.58	430	0	-0.78	-0.57
Environment	Pipe borne water	1.88	0.044	-1.12	-25.29	429	0	-1.21	-1.04
	Electricity supply to the school	1.72	0.045	-1.28	-28.81	430	0	-1.37	-1.19
	Access to healthcare	1.76	0.042	-1.24	-29.38	430	0	-1.32	-1.16
	Access to good toilet system	1.75	0.041	-1.25	-30.75	425	0	-1.33	-1.17
	Access to good road to the school	1.84	0.048	-1.16	-24.25	429	0	-1.26	-1.07
	Availability of transport to school	1.83	0.041	-1.17	-28.65	430	0	-1.25	-1.09
	Playground/fields for games	1.96	0.048	-1.04	-21.67	411	0	-0.68	-0.44
	Ventilations in each classroom	2.03	0.049	-0.97	-19.80	430	0	-0.89	-0.67
	Number of schools in the community	2.03	0.043	-0.97	-22.56	428	0	-1.13	-0.95
Teacher	Quality teachers	2.05	0.048	-0.95	-19.79	425	0	-1.06	-0.87
	Number of teachers in the schools	2.18	0.050	-0.82	-16.40	430	0	-1.05	-0.88
	Number of qualified teachers	2.48	0.055	-0.52	-9.45	424	0	-1.04	-0.85
	Use of local language for instruction at the lower classes.	2.47	0.055	-0.53	-9.64	425	0	-0.77	-0.57
	Good adaptation to the national curriculum	2.22	0.055	-0.78	-14.18	424	0	-0.79	-0.6
	Record keeping by teachers and head teachers	2.44	0.060	-0.56	-9.33	423	0	-0.44	-0.23
	Teaching as well as practice of equity in dealing with students	2.02	0.048	-0.98	-20.42	425	0	-0.36	-0.12
	Number of subject teachers e.g. Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and others	1.93	0.048	-1.07	-22.29	429	0	-0.92	-0.72
Facilities	Capacity of each school	1.63	0.039	-1.37	-35.13	429	0	-0.63	-0.41
	Number of classrooms	1.58	0.040	-1.42	-35.50	427	0	-0.64	-0.42
	Good Principal /Headmaster's office	1.61	0.040	-1.39	-34.75	427	0	-1.08	-0.89
	Good Teachers' offices	1.64	0.039	-1.36	-34.87	427	0	-1.16	-0.97
	Computers for students and teachers	1.72	0.044	-1.37	-31.05	428	0	-1.44	-1.29
	Laboratories for science lessons	1.80	0.048	-1.20	-25.00	427	0	-1.50	-1.35
	Library facilities	2.02	0.053	-0.98	-18.49	429	0	-1.47	-1.31
	Supply of quality books to students/learners	1.77	0.044	-1.33	-30.30	429	0	-1.44	-1.29

Table 2. Contd.

	Supply of writing materials (exercise books)	1.78	0.048	-1.22	-25.42	427	0	-1.37	-1.2
	School buildings	2.08	0.050	-0.92	-18.40	426	0	-1.30	-1.11
Discipline	Discipline in the schools	2.28	0.043	-0.72	-16.74	426	0	-1.08	-0.87
Government involvement	Assistance to learners from Government	2.01	0.046	-0.99	-21.52	428	0	-1.32	-1.15
	Assistance to the schools from Government	2.09	0.046	-0.92	-20.00	355	0	-1.32	-1.13
	Parental assistance to learners at home	2.28	0.047	-0.72	-15.32	424	0	-1.02	-0.83
Parental involvement	Social economic status of the parents.	2.33	0.050	-0.68	-13.60	425	0	-0.81	-0.64
	Parental involvement in learners' education	2.31	0.048	-0.69	-14.38	425	0	-1.08	-0.9
	Parental level of education	2.66	0.053	-0.34	-6.42	423	0	-1.00	-0.82
Learner	Learners' commitment to their studies.	2.76	0.059	-0.24	-4.07	424	0	-0.81	-0.62

three are also negative further supporting that the access to quality and equity Basic Education is inadequate.

The results show that although the stakeholders think that they have access to quality and equity in Basic Education but what constitutes quality education, namely safety of learners and teachers, facilities, quality of teachers and teaching, discipline, governance of schools, parental involvement in the schools and learners' commitment to their studies are all grossly inadequate.

Furthermore, in this section the study answered the question, „Do the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents have any effect on the access to quality and equity in Basic Education?“ The Multinomial Logistic Regression Model was fitted to the responses with access to quality and equity in Basic Education as the dependent variable and gender, marital status, highest educational qualification of the respondents, parental involvement in education

and distance to school as independent variables. The log odds of the outcomes are modelled as a linear combination of the independent variables. Table 3 shows the coding of the dependent and independent variables.

The means of the gender, marital status, highest educational qualification of the respondents and distance to school as independent variables attributes have been combined to provide a common mean for the independent variables thus forming the covariate in the fitting of the model. The overall fitted model was tested using the Likelihood Ratio tests and shown to be adequate in explaining access to quality and equity in Basic Education. Thus jointly, gender, marital status, the highest educational level of stakeholders, parental involvement and distance to school contribute significantly ($p < 0.05$) in explaining access to quality and equity in Basic Education (Table 4). However, the variables explained only 24% of the variation in access to quality and equity in Basic Education ($R^2 = 0.24$)

showing that there are other variables (not considered in this study) which also help to explain access to quality and equity in Basic Education. The test of significance of individual variables (independent variables) in predicting access to quality and equity in Basic Education is shown in Table 5.

The test of significance of the individual demographic variables shows that highest educational qualification, parental involvement and distance of learners' homes from school significantly ($p < 0.05$) predict access to quality and equity in Basic Education when the other variables are held constant; whereas gender and marital status are not significant ($p > 0.05$). This means that highest educational qualification of the stakeholders, who are mostly parents and their involvement/participation in the children's education (paying their fees, morally supporting them, communicating expectations to them, providing food and taking them to school) have great impact in the children performing well in

Table 3. Coding of variables.

Variable type	Variable	Coding
Dependent	Have you access to quality and equity in Basic Education?	1=Yes, 2=No, 3= Don't know
	Gender	1= Male; 2 = Female
	Marital status	1=Never married; 2 = Married; 3 = Divorced/Widowed
Independent	Highest educational level	1=Primary Certificate; 2= Secondary School Certificate; 3 = GCE O'Level; 4 = Diploma;5 = Degree;6 = Higher Degrees
	Parental Involvement	1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Undetermined; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly Agree
	Distance to school	kilometres

Table 4. Overall model fitting of access to quality and equity on demographic variables.

Model	Model fitting information			
	Model fitting criteria		Likelihood ratio tests	
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Intercept only	528.733			
Final	448.821	79.912	26	0.000

Table 5. Test of significance of individual variables.

Effect	Likelihood ratio tests			
	Model fitting criteria		Likelihood ratio tests	
	-2 Log likelihood of reduced model	Cchi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	448.821			
Gender of respondent	454.616	5.796	2	0.055
Marital Status	456.183	7.363	6	0.289
Highest Educational Qualification	488.848	40.027	14	0.000
Parental Involvement	455.218	6.397	2	0.041
Distance of school from home	465.474	16.653	2	0.000

class and boosting the image of the school and education in the state. When the distance to school is far from home, by the time the learners get to school they are tired and rate of absorption is low and so cannot perform well. Concerning the parental level of education, when parents are not well informed/educated and lack the knowledge, the learners' future can be jeopardized. However, gender of the participant, as well as their marital status might not be contributing so much in determining access to quality and equity in Basic Education.

Focus group discussion

When the issue of adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education was raised during FGD, the

participants mentioned challenges such as shortage of teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials as well as inadequate school infrastructures, learners' inability to perform well, low level of government involvement in funding education in rural areas, insecurity of the school environment and poor parental/community involvement in the education of their children as impediments to quality and equity in the rural community schools. Participants' responses were counted on each indicator and displayed in Table 6.

The interviews that were conducted on the teachers show that teachers are neglected and cannot take care of their families with their salary alone which is not paid on time. Many of the teachers resort to other means of financial support for their families. The extra engagement takes away their attention from their primary duty of teaching and so the learners are the ones who suffer the

Table 6. Distribution of opinions of participants on lack of access to quality basic education.

Challenges mentioned	Frequency	% out of 72
Lack of quality teachers	55	76.4
Teachers' low morale	57	79.2
Teachers' salaries not paid in time	54	75.0
Poor infrastructure	56	77.8
Insecurity of school environment	53	73.6
Low level of government involvement	50	69.4
Learners' inability to perform well	52	72.2

consequences in the end. With this type of attitude, no effective learning can take place. For instance, when the teachers were asked about adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education in their rural communities, two teachers from one of the rural community (Elu Ohafia) had the following to say, *'We are neglected as teachers in this rural community'. 'We cannot take care of our family needs because of our meagre salary'*. Echoing a similar sentiment, a teacher with a long service record from Okpo rural community said: *'we have not been paid any salary for the past six months yet we have our families to feed, how does one expect us to discharge our responsibilities creditably well?'*

A teacher from Umuzomgbo community who teaches Science complained that they do not have the proper equipment to teach science to the students. *'There are no chemicals/materials to conduct simple practical in chemistry or physics'*. A teacher from Umuchiakuma commented that the poor educational outcome in their school is because, *'Many of their teachers lack the expertise to teach the subject they are currently teaching'*. A background paper in Education International (EI) workshop 4 (Education International (EI), n.d) noted that there are many examples of teachers trying to do their best in spite of lack of support from local and national authorities. Such situations most often end with stress and the burn-out of the teachers. There are also bound to be problems in a system with an excellent curriculum, but where teachers are not provided with the necessary moral and financial support needed to implement it. In order to enhance teachers' participation to provide quality Basic Education, government and relevant education authorities must see that teachers have a salary comparable with other professions requiring the same level of qualifications and responsibility; and ensure that teachers receive the moral recognition appropriate to their level of qualifications and responsibilities. Teachers and schools must be provided with the resources necessary to offer quality education.

The supervisors in the FGD had the following to say on the issue of adequacy of quality and equity in Basic Education. Despite the supervisors not discharging their duties of visiting and monitoring the teachers' activities in

the rural community schools, the supervisor from Eberm Ohafia blamed the government for not cooperating with them (supervisors) in the running of the rural community schools. The few supervisors that were interviewed from Achara said that, *'there are no good roads to the rural communities, so we do not go for supervision as we are supposed to go'*; In Okpo, another supervisor added that, *'there is no transport to visit the rural communities because of the bad roads'*. It can be argued that when there is no corporation between the government and supervisors, the rural schools are the ones who bear the consequences. More so, it can be said that there is so much gap in communication on how to improve access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities between the supervisors and the government.

The community leaders responding to the same question of adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education indicated as follows: The community leaders in Umuzomgbo blamed the school administration for not allowing the parents to have access to the school in order to help the teachers build moral conduct of the learners and assist in the daily running of the school. One of the community leaders said, *'Parents are not fully involved in the running of the rural schools'*. In Achara, a community leader attributed the inadequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education to some parents being uninformed about the essence of education, and so do not take particular interest in their children's education and children from such homes lack encouragement and financial support.

In Okpo community, one of the super chiefs whose name is withheld said, *'We need a senior secondary school in our community so that our children will not be going to other villages to attend school. Our children get tired walking to and fro school. Sometimes they do not go to school because they are tired and so perform badly in the examinations'*. In Umuchiakuma, a community leader said, *'The teachers we have are young and still new in the field. So we need long serving teachers'*, while, in Elu Ohafia, a community leader said, *'We have been settling disputes between parents and teachers because the parents are complaining of teachers abusing their children physically and verbally. These are all as a result*

of young, untrained and unqualified teachers'.

The parents' opinions are summarized as follows: A parent from Okpo said, *„our hard earned money is not put in proper use and we are not satisfied with the teachers' performances in their communities'.* Two parents from Umuzomgbo had this to say concerning adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education:

Parent 1: *'The school demands a lot from our children; we are poor and cannot meet up with the educational demands for our children'.*

Parent 2: *'We try to make sure that we provide for the teachers through contributing food so that they can stay longer in our community but still they leave for the cities'.*

In Achara community, a parent said, *'We, the parents are not satisfied with the state of the laboratories and library in the school'.* A parent in Okpo said *'My daughter never comes back from school with any homework because their teacher is never in class'.* Another parent added that, *'My son complained to me that most of the days, another teacher comes into their class to take them on one or two lessons, because their teacher is absent'.*

In Umuchiakuma, two parents had this to say:

Parent 1: *'The teachers do not involve us as parents in any decision making about our children or in running the affairs of the school'.*

Parent 2: *„The roofs of the classrooms in our community school are leaking and our children come back from school wet when it rains while they are at school'.*

In Elu Ohafia and Ebem Ohafia, parents simultaneously said the same things thus: *'Our school does not have qualified teachers. We (the parents in this community) are not involved in the running of the school even though we are the ones who maintain the school structures' and 'We (the rural community parents) are responsible in renovating our school because the government is not concerned about the rural community school'.* The learners' participants were not left out as they had also their own experience on adequacy of access to quality and equity in Basic Education as shown below.

Learners in Umuzomgbo had this to say concerning adequacy of access to quality and equity in education, *'When I was still in school, there was no proper discipline; sometimes the learners fight with our teachers. Teachers do not care about the learners in this community'.* In Achara, a learner reported that, many parents send their children to the cities for proper education. Okpo had two learners who also reported that, *'Many of our learners do not come to school because they are exhausted from house chores and some are not able to pay some assigned fees by the teachers'.* Learner 2 said, *„Many children drop out of school because they could not meet up with school financial issues'.*

A learner from Umuchiakuma had this to say,

'Education in my community is not of quality because our children do not perform well in their final academic assessment'. In Elu Ohafia a learner added, *'We do not have qualified teachers in my school because some of the subjects were not properly thought and all the learners were complaining about the subject'.* In Ebem Ohafia a learner complained that, *'Our library is not functioning and there are no laboratories for science subjects. We also have no books and no proper school settings'.*

DISCUSSION

This paper set out as its objectives to obtain the views of stakeholders from six rural communities of Arochukwu and Ohafia Local Government Areas of Abia State, Nigeria on the challenges facing rural communities in accessing quality and equity Basic Education. The stakeholders answered the following questions: *„Do you think that you have access to quality Basic Education in your rural community schools?''* What are the challenges that the rural communities have in accessing quality and equity in Basic Education? Do the sociodemographic characteristics of the stakeholders have any effect on the access to quality and equity in Basic Education?

It is evident from the quantitative and qualitative analyses that the teachers' roles are key to access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural community schools and have been identified by the stakeholders as major challenge to access to quality and equity Basic Education. Teachers have to be of quality and be there for the learners all the time for them to acquire the necessary knowledge and basic skill they need. Unfortunately, the study found that teachers were most of the time absent from class, not qualified to teach, lacked discipline and were never interacting with parents and the community. These attributes of teachers in the rural schools run contrary to Education International (EI) (n.d) that identified some competences that a good teacher should have to, which include, organizing students' learning opportunities; managing students' learning progression; developing students' commitment to working and learning and working in teams. Other characteristics were teachers participating in school curriculum and organization development; promoting parent and community commitment to school; using new technologies in their daily practice; and tackling professional duties and ethical dilemmas and managing their own professional development. It is important that government and educational authorities should endeavor to employ teachers based on some of these competences.

The welfare of teachers should be treated with utmost concern to get out the best from them in terms of motivation to do the jobs. The teachers in the studied rural schools were owed salaries and when they are paid, it often comes late. This accounted for the teachers'

consistent absence from school. This result agrees with the findings of a study organized by Education International on Ghana that found that few teachers manage on their salary to the end of the month. When all basic costs are paid, there is nothing left and in many cases the salary has already disappeared before these costs are paid. To manage their families, most employees in the education sector have to look for additional income and have little time left to concentrate on their jobs (Fredriksson et al., 1999). It is important that teachers' welfare and well-being be given top priority in the affairs of child development and learning outcome.

What appeared to be a conflict in the opinions of the stakeholders, where about 70% of them indicated that they have access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural community schools, yet the overwhelming indication that all the indicators of quality and equity in Basic Education were inadequate was clarified during the focus group discussions. The majority of the stakeholder participants in the FGD believed that there was lack of quality teachers, teachers had low morale, teachers' salaries were not paid in time, poor infrastructure, insecurity of school environment, low level of government involvement, and learners' inability to perform well. All these factors combined constitute barriers preventing access to Basic Education (du Plessis and Mestry, 2019). Parents are always more comfortable with the quality of education their children are receiving, and consequently, families will become more willing to support children's learning. The school gets a better reputation from the community when the schools involve them in the affairs of the schools.

Furthermore, it has been shown that demographic characteristics of the respondents, namely highest educational level, parental involvement and distance to schools jointly significantly predict access to quality and equity in Basic Education. Thus, when parents are highly educated, are committed to assisting the learners with homework, promptly pay their fees and monitor the learners' class work, and when the distances to schools are short, learners perform better in school. The performance of learners would boost the quality of education and image of the schools. Additionally, the qualitative and quantitative analyses show that access to quality and equity in Basic Education is grossly inadequate. The results are in line with Abu et al. (2017) who stated that „well educated parent would always have the right attitude toward education and provide learning materials such as television, videotapes, novels books, and journals that could facilitate the learning processes“. The motivation of any intelligent child towards learning is accelerated by the positive influence of his/her environment while others who lack motivation are negatively affected.

The study findings attribute the low access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities to the high level of pupils' absenteeism and drop outs, inaccessibility of most of the rural community schools,

unavailability of schools in some communities and the high poverty level in the rural communities. Others include the problem of insufficient professional teachers in Basic Sciences coupled with their high attrition rate of quality teachers, poor facilities, inadequate Teacher Learner Motivations, low level of supervision, low levels of parents and community participation in school activities and more significantly the skewedness in the distribution of educational resources and personnel, These results are supported by Ukeje (1970); Fafunwa (1969); Vermeersch and Kremer (2004); Chaudhury et al. (2004, 2006) and Abadzi (2007).

Conclusion

It is evident from the study that the three key pillars that hold access to quality and equity in Basic Education, namely, access to quality teachers; use of quality learning tools and professional development; and the establishment of safe and supportive quality learning environments are inadequate in the rural community schools. For instance, the views of the stakeholders on access to quality and equity in Basic Education in the rural communities indicate that generally access to qualified and motivated teachers, good environmental conditions of the schools, good roads, good infrastructures and partnerships between the teachers, schools and parents are inadequate. The stakeholders are hardly involved in school decision making and formulation of school policies. Although there are Parent Teachers' Associations set up for each school, these associations are inactive with lack of clarity on what they should be doing. It is shown in this study that parental involvement in matters concerning the learners and schools is a significant contributor to access to quality and equity in Basic Education, yet the schools and teachers are distanced from parents and communities on matters of academic performance of the learners and governance of the schools. Parental involvement in schools that directly or indirectly influence children's cognitive development and school achievement is absent in the rural schools. Parents ought to be involved in parent-teacher conferences, PTA, volunteer in school, help in the classroom, discuss school activities with the child, as well as monitor child's school progress, encourage and provide rewards to learners for good grades, and reading with the child. They should contact the school in case of problems, monitor the child's out-of-school activities, and talk regularly with the child. Most stakeholders are parents and the schools cannot afford to lose their expertise in the learners' academic development.

The study, therefore, concludes that if access to quality Basic Education is to become real in the rural communities, the Ministry of Education, Local Government Education Boards, stakeholders and communities need to establish strong collaboration and

coordination of the activities to improve the conditions of the schools, employment of teachers, community participation in supervision of performance of teachers, assistance of communities in maintenance and renovation of schools and maintenance of access roads to the schools. Programmes that can assist parents and learners in their homework and instil morals in the learners need to be worked out by the education authorities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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