

Child-Care Service Delivery Effect on Business Performance Female Nursery School Operators Meeting the Challenge in Nigeria

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Abstract : *The pressure associated with period of maternity leave for female key employees can be challenging for companies in the areas of maintaining quality output level, proper documentation, personnel turnover and overall smooth operations of firms in every competitive business environment. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of child-care service providers (nursery schools operators) in the context of providing care-support for working class nursing mothers who have to work to support families while boosting firm's productivity level. Without adequate care-support systems for the kids, the nursing mothers may less concentrate in their official duties, thereby resulting to low employee outputs due to absenteeism and in turn result to poor business performance. This study therefore surveyed the effect of one of child care support drivers such as service innovativeness on business performance variables in form of competitive positioning and customer loyalty. Selected number of head teachers, child-minders, parents and guardians, proprietresses and proprietors were reached with a total of 555 copies of questionnaire in the order of 5 each to the 111 schools studied. Data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation and Regression of the SPSS package. The study established that a significant proportion of patronage experienced by child-care service providers come from working class nursing mothers. The study concluded that the application of service innovativeness as part of child-care strategy, has direct stimulus effect on nursery schools' overall business performance. We therefore recommend that provided child-care support centers double as suitable alternative homes and learning centers in terms of kids' character molding, governmental influence should be injected more in the project with a view to realizing organized decent society.*

Key words: *Child-care service delivery, business performance, service innovativeness, customer loyalty.*

Paper Type: Research Paper.

I. Introduction

In the contemporary world economy, the business of child caring has continued to proliferate on a highly accelerated rate (Ogbimi, 1992 and Shellenback, 2004), and has become a vital aspect of socio-economic means of providing service, character molding, employment generation, profitability, and value addition, especially among female operators. In Nigeria alone, a greater number of child-care outfits - such as the nursery schools - have been managed by women and this kind of service has become a major source of income generation (Ogbimi, 1992). It was observed that poor management of Child-care gives room to employee absences with cost on businesses estimated by previous studies at the tune of \$3 billion annually in the United States alone (Shellenback, 2004). Child-care service was also reported to have shown a positive effect on employee absenteeism, reducing missed workdays by as much as 20% to 30% (Shellenback, 2004 and Friedman, 1986). Also studies done by Ransom and Burud, (1988) revealed that child-care program can reduce turnover by 37% to 60%. Employee retention was thus confirmed as one of the principal drivers of customer retention, which in turn is a key driver of company growth and profitability. The study by Huselid and Becker (1995) showed that a 7% decrease in employee turnover led to increases of more than \$27,000 in sales per employee and almost \$4,000 in terms of profit ratio per employee. In view of such impact on firms' performance, companies with child-care programs or who are considering them need to be able to measure the value of these programs as one of facilitators of return on firm's investment (Shellenback, 2004). In today's business environment, many children like those in the United States are cared for by someone other than an immediate family member during some portion of each day. In two-thirds of two-parent homes, both parents work, providing a large and ever growing consumer base for the day-care industry (Caldwell, 1987). Even in Nigeria, child-care service has been in vogue in the past decades due to greater number of women joining the workforce. According to Ogbimi, (1992), recent changes in terms of growth rate of dual career parents and working-class single parents have shown the importance of recognizing the role of early education which

provides social and intellectual stimulus in form of good play group among young children (Herbst and Barnow, 2007; and Mertan, 2003). Studies also noted that the reason parents register their infants and pre-schoolers might be of two-fold. It is either to invest in kids human capital in terms of skills, abilities, talents and knowledge or to supplement care while one has gone to work. Meanwhile, a greater number of the child-care outfits, especially in Nigeria, are individual or family-owned and are operated as profitable enterprises (Pinson and Jinnett, 1991).

In that direction, previous studies (i.e. Venturella, 2004; Steinmetz, 2007; Shellenback, 2004 and Nupponen, 2005) have focused on job satisfaction, innovation, Service Pro-activeness, staff turnover, cross-national variation in the distribution of men and women across occupations and hierarchical position of staff in measuring language development, customer satisfaction and overall staff productivity. The studies did draw samples heavily from government sponsored child-care outfits and households in developed countries of the world, but failed to concentrate more on developing nations like Nigeria, where government support in terms of subsidizing cost of child-care at nursery level is viewed by average individuals or families as non available. Therefore, making inference from earlier findings focused in developed environments to nations like Nigeria with apparently peculiar socio-political and economic structure could weaken validity of earlier results in the Nigeria context. Hence, this study focuses on the activities of profit oriented center-based private firms and empirically surveyed one among child-care service delivery constructs (predictor variables) on competitive positioning and customer loyalty (criterion variables), with a view to ascertain how the firms studied perform in the course of rendering services which facilitate performance of many firms in various sectors of the economy, considering other mediating factors such as government policies on education and organizational structure.

Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses

According to family child-care academy.com (2012) the theory of child-care dates back in the days of Freud Sigmund (1856-19), Erik Erikson (1902-1994), Jean Piaget (1896-1990) Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) etc. a period in which neurologists, psychoanalysts, psychologists and other influential thinkers contributed immensely in providing baseline understandings regarding child-care developments in the area of child learning capabilities, environment influence on the child, childhood social and emotional development, child personality development, etc. In a competitive business world where businesses compete with closely related service offerings, customer satisfaction is seen as a key differentiator in service delivery and increasingly has become a key element of business strategy. There is a substantial body of empirical literature that establishes the benefits of customer satisfaction for firms as driver for firm's service delivery effort. It has been confirmed that satisfied customers are key to long-term business success (Blau, 2006; Berna and Keane, 2005; and Bindl and Parter, 2010). The concept is the same regardless of organization's size, whether profit or non-profit, local or multi-national companies that have a more satisfied customer base (Breunig and Mercante, 2010; Currie, 2004; and Ciabattari, 2005).

According to Pinson and Jinnett (1991) many child-care outfits exist for profit interest as someone other than an immediate family member needs to care for the kids of working class parents within some hours of each day. The study shows that in two-thirds of two-parent homes, both parents work, providing a large and ever growing consumer base for the day-care industry. In addition, it was observed that 12 million children, said to be more than 20% of the children in the United States alone, live with single parents who need child-care support in order to work, and same is applicable in other countries of the world (Caldwell, 1987). Over the years, the demand for child-care services in many parts of the world has equally risen. These include; out of school hours care, (parent group, play group and play centers) preschool and kindergarten, long day care, occasional care, family day care, in-home care, integrated services and centers. Integrated early childhood services offer a combination of two or more services. The services vary from centre to centre and may include child care, playgroup, preschool, early education and learning, early development, health services and family support services. Meanwhile, Children's centers for Early Childhood Development and Parenting offer a mix of education, health and family services and are supported by various state governments. Each centre may offer a slightly different mix of services depending on the needs of the communities. Nevertheless, as a form of global practice, child-care services have been grouped into two main categories, namely; Home Based and Center Based care services. The name is derived based on where the services are rendered. Home-based operations are small businesses run out of a person's home. Center-based operations may be profit-motivated small or large businesses or nonprofits - that is - when such is funded by the government as well as NGO's.

Another issue to consider is the cost implications associated with equipping child-care centers. While latest or expensive equipment may not be necessary; however, safety and liability are usually kept in mind. For instance, using the right kind of toys considered friendly for kids at care centers. Belsky (1988) holds the view that high quality, dependable, accessible child-care can impact positively on children, and when strongly supported by the constituted authorities', can produce positive outcome on the society at large" (Vandell, 2004). This approach acknowledges the importance of the quality of care experienced by the child in non-maternal care (Moss and Melhuish, 1991). The business side of care delivery has been centered on how child-

care service providers can guarantee effective and efficient service delivery to target customers by creating attractions that make their services desirable.

Nevertheless, Bergin-Seers (2002) as in Nupponen (2005) conceptualized four core factors, namely: environmental factors, entrepreneurial orientation, center performance and organizational factors. Those factors highlighted key influences that can either oppose or complement firms' business efforts in the area of child-care service delivery. While some previous studies produce inconsistent results regarding best ways in terms of child-care matters (Hoffman and Young-blade, 1999), Morgan (1996) stressed that child-care had for close to two decades "been hammered home as the catch-all miracle solution to a host of complex problems, targeted to achieve national transformation and open the gates of Utopia". Although Ochilree (1994) maintained that no evidence has been found that good quality child-care harms children", on the contrary, Cook (1997), reached the opposite conclusion. These raises the following questions: What outcomes constitute harm in child-care? And if non parental care is to be considered as a discrete and consistent entity which may be harmful, is parental care to be considered as consistently benevolent, irrespective of the feelings, capabilities or circumstances of parents? How can best practice in terms of child-care be realized?

Some studies maintain that while poor quality care has contributed to lower cognition in terms of language development, high quality care can enhance children performance even when they are already at risk of poor outcomes (Scarr and Eisenberg, 1993). Alluding to that line of thought, Bloom, et al., (1991) outlined three cultural factors contributory to overall performance of a firm in the area of service delivery. Namely: people, process and structure. According to Nupponen, (2005), the growth in child-care service in the past few decades reflects a changing social, political and economic context. It noted that a government with strong social policy agenda can enhance educational equality, also, that child-care can receive a great boost where there is a strong political will driven from the federal level, as opposed to state and or private enterprises. The focus in this regard, is affordability, accessibility and availability made possible by government subsidies set aside for child-care service (Nupponen, 2005). These constitute considerations that child-care operators such as Nursery school management must focus on in the operation of child-care centers. Also there are ongoing debates about how well child-care policies and funding programs meet children and families' needs. While emphasis in these areas are focused on government support, in developing countries like Nigeria, there is little or no history of previous government's involvement in child-care service cost subsidization at nursery level, except the new wave of 'transformation agenda' that highlights the impact of (U.B.E) Universal Basic Education at Federal level which in recent time offers free learning assistance to primary and secondary school children but not to nursery children, except in the case of kids located in motherless babies homes.

A number of studies have made critical observations regarding process through which firms provide specific services to target customers (Nupponen, 2005, Venturella, 2004; Steinmetz, 2007; Shellenback, 2004). In our view, process is designed to control specific marketing objectives, such as measuring achievement objectives. Thus, in services business, process is an element that appreciates customer experience encapsulated in organization's offerings. It is viewed as an outcome that indicates level of customer participation at different point(s). This therefore highlights the importance of customer interaction in corporate setting, given that it requires a proper encounter, a proper communication, a proper action and a proper resolution, in which process the system undergoes a progression of inputs, throughputs and outputs, where service marketing value is added. Simply put, process is a course of action between customer and service provider(s), whom through effective and efficient service delivery create attractions toward customers. These active players in the child development process are therefore shown in the figure presented below:

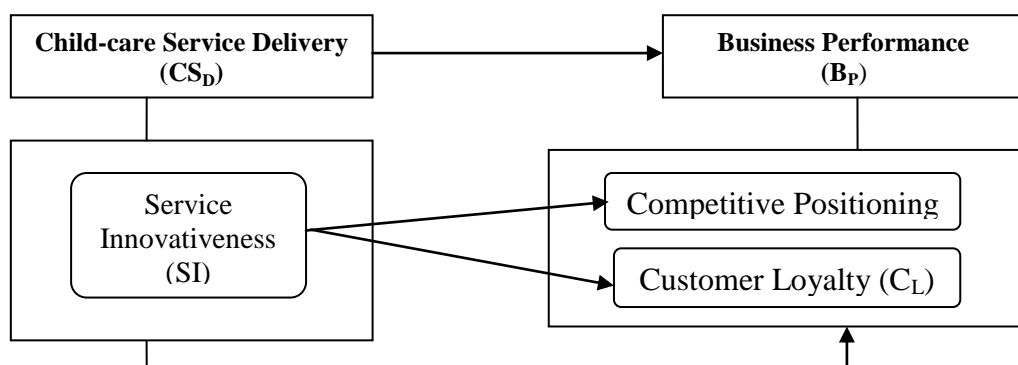


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Child-care Support Intervention Project.

Source: Authors' Concept Based on Literature (2013)

The above diagram shows that child-care service delivery which is an aspect of services marketing can be affected by the influence of those critical elements that contribute to the success or failure of service oriented organizations they represent. For instance, for any service oriented firm to count on customer loyalty, attain the position of industry leader or be a strong competitor in the services industry, there must be proper utilization of its personnel towards achievement of organization goal, the process (method / service delivery procedure) must be adequate and consistent with firm objective, also the physical evidence/environment must leave positive innovative impressions in the minds of target customers at all times.

Business Performance.

Generally, business is described as an economic activity that ensures that goods and services are moved from the producer to the consumer at reasonable profit. As regards performance, many authors have given it similar explanation as productivity based on research focus (Mentzer, 1991 and Konrad, 1991). For instance, Kearney suggests that the evaluation of performance functions may be divided into three areas: utilization, productivity, and performance, where productivity is the ratio of real output to real input, utilization is seen as the proportion of capacity used for available capacity, and performance is the proportion of actual output to standard output. In essence, performance measurement appear to be analysis of both effectiveness and efficiency in area of accomplishing a given task that promotes the business performance of firms in terms of competitive advantage, customer loyalty, profitability etc (Johnson and Marshall, 2003). It was also noted by previous scholars that when firms expand their business efforts to include identification of needs and meeting the needs of consumers, following up with consistent executive business plans might give the firm superior edge in form of customer loyalty and competitive advantage that basically moves in the upward direction (Ogbuji., et al. 2014)

Business Performance Theoretical Framework

According to Spegel, (2004), adequate measurement variables should have the capacity and relevance to measure what it supposes to measure. On this basis, business performance measuring tools need to be determined based on the formulated framework established for the study, as well as the path of the research. Given that we are at freedom to select from existing business performance measuring instruments, we therefore selected two among business performance variables to examine the relationship between key variable for the study which is Child-care Service Delivery against the dependent variable which is Business Performance. The selected measuring instruments for business performance are; competitive positioning and customer loyalty. While the dimension of the independent variable for the study is Service Innovativeness. This section therefore examines how child-care service delivery affects business performance in the context of the selected indices.

Service Innovativeness and Business Performance

Regarding the effect of innovation on firm performance, previous studies done by Mel, et al., (2009) defined innovation as “the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations”. It noted that the minimum requirement for an innovation is that the product, process, marketing method, or organizational method must be new or should significantly improve firms’ productivity. This includes innovations where the firm in question is the first to develop or initiate new idea, or a situation where those adopted from other firms give a particular firm an edge over competitors. In developing countries, incremental changes especially in child-care sector, acquisition of embodied technology, and applications or adaptations of existing products or processes are thought to be the most frequent forms of innovation. Scholars have noted that there has not been any era more crucial for firms in terms of innovativeness (introduction of new ideas) for improved service delivery other than now, considering the level of challenges firms manage in order to survive amidst the present competitive changing climate. It is also expected that for organizations to continue navigating successfully through in the face of such stiff business conditions, they must explore more creative ways of increasing competitive advantage to remain relevant in respective industries. Also, according to Roelandt et al., (1997), the various indicators of innovative behavior used in the literature can be characterized in terms of measuring either innovative inputs or outputs. The study also highlighted that firms’ success factors in areas such as innovativeness and competitiveness may depend on concentrated market structure and large firm size. Andy et al., (2005) thus acknowledged in their study that innovative performance carried on by firms is dependent not solely on their resources and level of innovative inputs, but mainly on their productivity capabilities. This has therefore been captured in the framework used for testing the relevance of the measured variables as presented below.

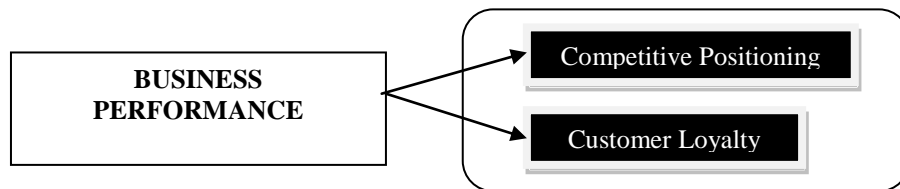


Figure 2: Business Performance Measures

Source: Authors' Concept Based on Literature (2013)

Therefore, based on our specific study area of interest, the following two research questions were raised:

- i. To what extent does Service Innovativeness (Si) relate to Competitive positioning?
- ii. To what extent does Service Innovativeness (Si) relate to Customer loyalty?

Considering the trend of customer patronage influenced by service innovativeness as expressed in previous studies relating to child-care, we are inclined to believe that service innovativeness can equally affect customers' decision on whether or not to patronize specific child care service outfits based on the trust and competency they exhibited in the course of their services to target customers which are usually considered in terms of customer evaluations and decisions regarding the nursery outfit that will be patronized. To ascertain customers level of willingness towards utilizing the child care service providers appeal options in the contemporary business world, we therefore argue that child care service delivery practice does influence business performance through organizations' service innovativeness efforts.

From the above theoretical framework, we developed the following two working hypotheses as guide to the study.

H₀₁: Service Innovativeness (SI) is significantly related to competitive positioning.

H₀₂: Service Innovativeness (SI) is significantly related to Customer Loyalty.

II. Research Methodology

Generally, this type of study adopts a cross sectional research design because it is less expensive as well as allows the researcher the freedom to gather primary data on a short interval (Bryman, 2008) for the study, a number of 555 participants made up of proprietors/proprietress, head teachers, minders and parents/guardians in the order of 5 respondents each were surveyed through questionnaire administration. This sample size was drawn from the randomly selected 111 out of 154 outfits registered and operating in the Niger Delta region as at March, 2012 when the survey commenced. The sampling unit was deliberately chosen for optimization of resources and extraction of reliable information on the subject matter. The questionnaire embodied controlled and uncontrolled questions which were hand-delivered with a cover letter to elicit ample response. Further, the questionnaire was organized into three parts; first contained seven questions relating to respondents' profile; second focused on six questions relating to service innovativeness, and third consisted of six questions relating to business performance, These were pre-tested for simplicity, applicability, completeness and extension of validity on the selected head teachers, minders, parents and proprietresses within the profit oriented nursery outfits. These pilot survey enabled informed participants on the study area to make their inputs through feedbacks, this formed bases for improving upon the final copies. Analysis was based on impressive response rate of 67.9% representing 221 usable copies of questionnaire that returned. The instrument for data collection was a (twenty five) 25 – item questionnaire used to elicit information for the study. It contains (two) 2 sections. Section A, contains seven item questions focused on the demographic variables while section B, contains information on the dependent and independent variables of the study. Items 8 – 13 of section B, elicited data on service innovativeness, items 14 – 19 elicited data on competitive positioning, and items 20 – 25 elicited data on customer loyalty.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the variables for this study have been certified by the previous works of Miller and Cioffi, (2004); O'Sullivan, and Abela, (2007), also service innovativeness was addressed by (Bergin-Seers and Breen (2002); Bloom, et al., (1991) as in Nuppenon (2005); Hsu (2008). Vision Edge, (2007); Rogers, (2003); Srivastava and Reibstein, (2005); Nevertheless, effort was made to reevaluate the applicability of the instrument selected for current study, hence the pilot evaluation option. Cronbatch alpha was applied to test the reliability of the concepts of the study variables. Coefficient Alpha is maintained to be one of the extensively recommended evaluation instruments for internal consistency and reliability in social sciences research. (Asiegbu, et al., 2011, Hatcher, 1994). The table below shows the reliability assessment of our study variables using Cronbatch Alpha.

The Cronbatch coefficients of the items in the instrument showed that they exceed recommended 0.70 (Hatcher, 1994) therefore, the items are internally related to the factors they intend to measure.

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients of Variables Measured

S/N	Dimensions/Measures of the Study Variables	Number of Items	Number of Cases	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Service Innovativeness	6	221	0.709
3	Competitive Positioning	6	221	0.821
4	Customer Loyalty	6	221	0.818

Source: SPSS Output

III. Analysis And Discussion

This paper applied descriptive statistics as well as specific statistical models to ascertain the correlation between Si on business performance variables. The individual effect of CSd on the control variables-competitive positioning (Cp), and customer loyalty (CL) were also measured. The hypotheses were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Regression of the SPSS. Below are the outcomes of the analysis:

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Service Innovativeness, Competitive Positioning and Customer Loyalty

Model	r	r ²	Adjusted r ²	St. Error of the Estimate	Change of statistics					Durbin - Watson
					r ² Change	F Value	df 1	df 2	Sig F Change	
Competitive positioning and SI	.821*	.714*	.677	3.854	.678	296.657	1	219	.000	1.172
Customer Loyalty and SI	.822*	.709*	.711	3.722	.710	274.443	1	219	.000	1.534

Dependent Variables: Competitive Positioning and Customer Loyalty. **P<0.01

Table 3: Dependent Variables, B_p Regression Model Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient t	t. value	Sig	95% Confidence interval for β		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	β	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VI F
Competitive positioning and SI	4.906 1.134	1.076 .075	.702	4.24 17.1	.000 .000	2.964 1.002	6.811 1.423	.853	.811	.841	1.000	1.0
Customer Loyalty and SI	4.246 1.167	1.154 .082	.711	3.87 18.3	.000 .000	2.743 1.022	7.904 1.447	.802	.805	.824	1.000	1.0

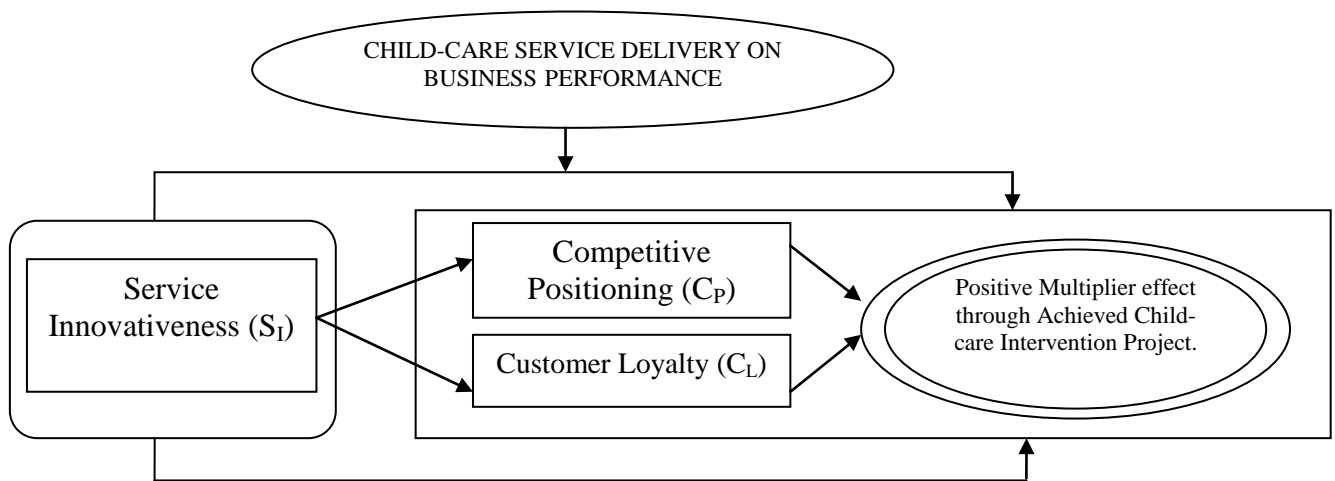
Dependent Variables: Competitive Positioning and Customer Loyalty.

Table 4: The Correlation of Child-Care Service Delivery Items Against Business Performance Measures

S/No	Child-Care Service Delivery items		Competitive Positioning	Customer Loyalty
P1	Competitive Positioning	Pearson r Sig. 2-tailed	0.701** 0.000	0.702** 0.000
P2	Customer Loyalty	Pearson r Sig. 2-tailed	0.715** 0.000	0.683** 0.000

Dependent Variables: Competitive Positioning and Customer Loyalty. **P<0.01

The above outcome derived from the empirical evidence indicates that beyond the profit target of the center based childcare organizations which largely is the driving objective of profit-oriented child care services outfits, there is far rewarding target in terms of positive multiplier effect achievable where synergy results from symbiotic relationship between the active players in the child-care intervention project, namely, the government through established policies and programmes, parents / guardians and the management of the nursery outfits. The implication of such outcome is thus presented below:



2.4 Model of Child-care Service Delivery and Business Performance

Source: Authors' Concept Based on Literature (2013)

IV. Conclusions And Practical Implications

The child care service delivery outfits have continue to project themselves not only as suitable and competent options in terms of catering for early child development, character molding and emotional support, but have also become the dependable alternatives which afford nursing mothers reasonable freedom to play productive roles in the corporate industry, support family income and contribute towards boosting organizations profitably. Thus, this paper focused on investigating the relationship between strategies child care outfits adopt for improved business performance in the care-support aspect of services delivery sector in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The results of the qualitative analysis therefore reveal that there is concrete evidence which shows that CS_D as adopted by firms in the services industry provides leverage in terms of business performance of profit oriented child care service centers, as shown in the positive results on the tested Ho₁, and Ho₂. This strengthened our inclination to believe that where government policy on education provides the enabling environment in terms of infrastructures, and where organization setup are conducive for child care service support practice, model child care (nursery) outfits will likely remain a viable and profitable business within the child-care sector, while providing support for nursing mothers not only for family income level, but for respective firms higher productivity and higher GDP. Based on the findings of this study, we hold the view that given the mutual interest of the active players in the child care intervention project, such as the government agencies, parents/guardians and the nursery outfits towards useful development of the child for the society, qualified child care service centers such as nursery schools should be improved upon, both for profit maximization and for achievement of positive multiplier effects on the part of the child, firms and the society.

The implications of our findings are as follows. That child care service delivery practice can positively impact on firm's business performance in terms of translating to higher productivity both for registered nursery outfits and firms in other industries. If nursing mothers who play active roles in various industries either as captains of industries, members of top management, key employees or entrepreneurs perceive the child care outfits as suitable complements in terms of quality option regarding child character molding, proper leaning centers and as alternate homes for the kids who are away from home. That if firms in the child care business adopt the policy of attracting patronage through service innovativeness; it is likely that child-care services may stand as strong boost for higher profit volume of firms. For instance, if service firms lay emphasis on attracting trust from actual and prospective customers such as nursing mothers, their relevance might lead to achievement of positive multiplier effects both for the nursery outfits, the business world and for society at large. The study therefore conclude that the mechanisms of child care service delivery such as service innovativeness, does significantly influence business performance of child care business outfits.

Research Limitations and Suggestion for further Studies

The degree of acceptability of the present study's findings depends mostly on the fitness of conditions in which the cases are similar among firms and industries. The fact that the test was conducted in one section of the services industry, namely, profit oriented child care service center and did not focus on the non-profit child care support centers makes it logical to affirm that generalization of findings may prove inapplicable, for the

reason that every industry has specific elements that differentiate it from others. Therefore, Shiau et al, (2009), were of the view that one of the sure means of building external validity is to conduct similar survey, perhaps in a repeated manner, in other industries. It is also obvious that there are various measures of ascertaining business performance, such as growth rate of sales, market share, etc, as found in literature, however, the effect of CS_D on any of the above were not measured. Therefore, scholars are challenged to carry out study toward that direction to ensure that additional knowledge in that regard enhances the combined performance of firms in the child care intervention service industry. As well as examining the extent to which different organizational business investments respond to the practice of child care service delivery chosen by firms as a way of offering insight through literature as to which business effort is likely to deplete or succeed when deciding to diversify into child care service delivery whether as profit or non-profit oriented business.

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