

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating effect on education. Prior to the outbreak, the Nigerian education system relied solely on face-to-face instruction and learning in primary and intermediate schools. Primary and secondary school students were not permitted to own or be seen with any digital device, such as a phone or computer, in the classroom. Following the COVID-19 pandemic's development of the lockdown condition and school closure, both teachers and students were at a loss as to how to continue studying in the face of the pandemic. This study investigated the challenges posed by, and the impacts of COVID-19 on early childhood Education in Nigeria. The paper was a positional paper designed to explore the impact of covid 19 pandemic on early childhood education. Analysis of reviewed literatures showed that the challenges of education during the COVID-19 pandemic in general which include the early childhood in particular include school closure, poor learning, unequal access to education opportunities and poor skills. Further, the pandemic negatively impacts education, causing poor school enrollment, inequality in education, poor achievement, poor school health and challenges in school assessment and transition in early childhood education. It was concluded that COVID19 has negatively affected early childhood education in Nigeria particularly in Delta State. Implications for practice policy and practice of electronic learning (e-learning) on early childhood education were discussed.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Education, early childhood education, covid-19*

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of any nation's development. It creates the framework for all other institutions in a nation's growth and development. Any threat to the educational system is a threat to the progress of the country. Therefore, the relevance of education to human development has been clearly documented, stressing education's pivotal significance in national and individual inclusive growth and development (Fägerlind & Saha, 2016; Griffin, Care, & McGaw, 2012). Education is a means of self enhancement in through knowledge, attitude, practices and skills is transmitted from generations to generation. It is also a means positive habits are learning, negative ones are discarded through learning and information. The value of education for a country's economic, social, and moral development cannot be

overstated. Since the development of the novel coronavirus disease in 2019, education at all levels has been jeopardized, which is cause for serious concern (COVID-19). Since the corona virus was found in early 2020 and has been spreading across the globe, including Nigeria, the educational system has been one of the sections of the country's economy that has been severely impacted. Pupils/students' academy effectiveness has been harmed as the system has changed its means and techniques of operation to a considerable extent. This alteration and interference with educational systems and practices has a substantial impact on the early childhood educational system, as their learning is based on intimate contact, which goes against the novel corona virus's protective measures.

Concept of Covid-19

COVID-19 is a new coronavirus strain that causes disease. The letters 'CO' stand for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease, with the number 19 indicating the year of the occurrence. This disease was previously known as the 2019 novel coronavirus, or 2019-nCoV. The COVID-19 virus is a novel virus that belongs to the same virus family as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and several common colds (WHO, 2020). Coronavirus gets its name from the Latin word corona, which means crown or halo. It appears to be enveloped by a solar corona under an electron microscope (WHO, 2020). Coronavirus gets its name from the Latin word corona, which means crown or halo. The appears to be encircled by a solar corona under an electron microscope (WHO, 2020).

Coronavirus gets its name from the Latin word corona, which means crown or halo. The appears to be encircled by a solar corona under an electron microscope (WHO, 2020). Coronavirus illness 2019, often known as Covid-19, is an infectious disease (Moore, 2020; Ohia et al., 2020). SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) is the virus that causes the disease (Harapan, Itoh, Yufika, Winardi, Keam, & Mudatsir, 2020; Ohia et al., 2020). Fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, and sneezing are some of the symptoms (Harapan, Itoh, Yufika, Winardi, Keam, & Mudatsir, 2020; Ohia et al., 2020; Unhale et al., 2020).

The coronavirus sickness is a highly infectious disease that has afflicted the global population since December 2019 and continues to do so. Fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, and sneezing are some of the symptoms (Unhale et al., 2020). The virus was first thought to have moved from animal to human (zoonosis) at the start of the pandemic, but it is currently moving from person to person without regard for geography (Enitan, et-al & Kamau, 2020). It is a highly contagious disease (Adnan et al., 2020), with transmission occurring from person to person (Unhale et al., 2020). Close contacts are infected through respiratory droplets emitted by the infected person when he or she sneezes or coughs (Harapan, Itoh, Yufika, Winardi, Keam, Te, et al., 2020).

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization proclaimed the COVID-19 outbreak a Global Health Emergency. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization labeled it a pandemic (WHO, 2020). While steps such as lockdown, social distancing, self-isolation or self-quarantine, as well as simple hygiene practices such as regular handwashing, wearing facemasks, and covering the mouth with a handkerchief when coughing or sneezing have been recommended to curtail the spread of the disease among people, simple hygiene habits like regular handwashing, wearing facemasks, and covering the mouth with a handkerchief when coughing and sneezing (Ohia et al., 2020). It's worth noting that there's

currently no known cure or vaccination for the Covid-19 epidemic (Adnan, et al., 2020). Nonetheless, some governments and international agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) are working to find vaccines or treatments for the Covid-19 malady. As at the time of writing this report, the disease had spread by droplets, affecting more than 15.1 million people and resulting in about 737,000 deaths globally (Aljazeera News, 2020). As a result, countries have used a variety of containment measures, such as physical and social separation, to flatten the epidemiological curve and prevent morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 (Barasa et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020). Different governments have taken a variety of steps to create physical separation, such as shutting down the economy completely, including educational institutions (Nicola et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The pandemic is wreaking havoc on the educational system at all levels, from early childhood education to higher education, with irreversible educational and economic consequences (Lindzon, 2020).

Covid-19 Crisis in Nigeria

On February 27, 2020, in Lagos State, the first case of coronavirus in Nigeria was confirmed. An Italian citizen who works in Nigeria returned on February 25 from Milan, Italy through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, fell ill on February 26 and was transferred to Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities for isolation and testing. Following this, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) published various guidelines to help stop the spread, all of which were in conformity with international standards (NCDC, 2020). Regardless of these precautions, the number of cases continued to grow, reaching 44,433 by August 5, 2020. (NCDC, 2020). By March 2020, the virus had progressed to the point where the federal and state administrations, as well as their numerous parastatals, had shut down operations in the country. Both the land border and the airspace had been closed by March 23, and the weekly meeting of the Federal Executive Council had been suspended, among other things (Premium times, 2020). The Nigerian University Commission (NUC) ordered the closure of all universities and related schools on Monday, March 23, 2020 (NUC, 2020). Academic activities have come to a halt, with students returning home or abandoning their work immersion - an unforeseen interruption.

In addition, starting March 30, 2020, practically almost states in the country were put under lockdown, with just few states having a partial lockdown that included the cancellation of all social and religious meetings (Premium times, 2020). As a result, residents of the several states and the Federal Capital Territory, in particular, where entire lockdown was imposed, as well as residents of other states where partial lockdown was imposed, were forced to spend the most of their time at home. Since then, many firms including the educational system have allowed their employees to work from home, and several private and secondary schools have taken steps to involve their students or learners in digital learning system.

In order to curtail the spread of the virus in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education in 2020 directed all educational institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home as cases of reported COVID-19 increased. Nigeria joins the growing list of countries in Africa which have closed schools and universities. Leveraging on previous disaster management and containment skills such as the handling of the Ebola virus that broke out between 2014 and 2016, the country instituted a proportional response by constituting a Presidential Task Force (PTF) which was saddled with the responsibility of managing the government response to the pandemic.

The aggressive containment measures yielded positive results as the total confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Nigeria within the first nine weeks were about 1154 cases with just about 3% fatality rate. Nevertheless, it became apparent that Nigeria could no longer afford a total lockdown because the damage caused by the pandemic was already noticeable in most sectors of the Nigerian economy particularly in the education sector. The most vulnerable sectors are the manufacturing sector and the service sector such as education, distribution, among others. The post-lockdown era has, however, changed the narrative for Nigeria. It has commenced the second wave of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country which is driven by community transmission. There has been a sporadic increase in the number of confirmed cases which averaged about 500 cases per day. Due to the nature of the livelihood of the citizens, the fallacy of disbelief about the existence of the virus and its exclusive status; many asymptomatic patients have become the agents of community transmission in the country. As at August 5th 2020, the total number of confirmed cases in Nigeria was about 44,433 with about 2.5 percent fatality rate, 910 death been recorded, Active cases was 11,672, and 31, 851 have been discharged in 36 states and the federal Capital Territory. A total of 289,133 tests have been carried out as of August 3rd 2020 (NCDC, 2020).

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is defined as a sort of education that is focused on the child's overall development without any bias (Osho, Aliyu, Okolie & Onifade, 2014). Early childhood education encompasses crèche, nursery, and kindergarten programs, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Akinbote, 2006). According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, this program was created so that children from zero to five years might benefit from it. Early childhood education is seen as the foundation for a kid's growth, and it is clear that the exposures that a child has at this time have an impact on the child's later life, which can be either a negative or a positive impact. According to FRN (2013), the goals of early childhood education include: ensuring a smooth transition from home to school; preparing the child for primary school; providing adequate care and supervision for children; instilling social norms and values; instilling a spirit of inquiry and creativity; developing a sense of cooperation and team spirit; teaching good habits and values; and instilling a sense of cooperation and team spirit.

Covid 19 and the Educational System in Nigeria

Basic education (nine years), post basic or senior secondary education (three years), and university education (four years) make up Nigeria's educational system (four to six years, depending on the program of study). Basic education in Nigeria is defined as nine years of formal (compulsory) schooling consisting of six years of elementary and three years of junior secondary education, according to the country's most recent National Policy on Education (2004). Three years of senior secondary education are included in post-basic education (WENR, 2019).

Though school closures are designed to control the spread of the virus within schools, limit transmission to other vulnerable individuals, and maintain public health, they have had significant socioeconomic consequences (Lindzon, 2020; Wren-Lewis, 2020; Cauchemez et al., 2009). Furthermore, the far-reaching impacts of social/physical separation, as well as the attendant lockdown measures and school closures, have hampered the education sector and are

projected to leave an indelible impression on the education system, notably at the basic level (Impey, 2020; Yinka & Adebayo, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020).

Several countries, including Nigeria, had devised timely online learning solutions to the epidemic (Crawford et al., 2020). Experts have proven, however, that the epidemic has created significant educational barriers in many countries (Crawford et al., 2020). As a result, the pandemic is expected to have a higher negative impact on institutions that did not have online learning tools in place prior to the outbreak (Zhong, 2020; Kachra & Brown, 2019). According to Zar et al. (2020), indirect impacts of the pandemic include disrupted schooling and lack of access to education, particularly in low and middle-income countries. In low and middle-income countries, whose education systems have been running on inferior platforms, COVID-19 has a particularly severe impact on education, particularly for children (Dan-Nwafor et al., 2020; Yinka & Adebayo, 2020). In these regions' overcrowded, resource-constrained institutions, it's also challenging to provide a safe learning environment for children (Zar et al., 2020). In Nigeria, the epidemic has a particular distributing effect on education, causing a reduction in educational attainment, a widening of the existing gap in learning access and quality, and an increase in school dropouts (Blundell et al., 2020).

Unique vulnerabilities, such as deficient health systems, poverty and inequality, hunger, internally displaced persons, enormous population densities, the urban-rural divide, and an out-of-school population, increase the problem of education in Nigeria (Obiako & Adeniran, 2020). Nigeria had one out of every five out-of-school children in the world prior to COVID-19. Around 10.5 million children aged 5 to 14 were out of school in Nigeria, with just about 61% of children aged 6 to 11 receiving a regular primary school education (UNICEF Nigeria, n.d.). As a result, COVID-19's repercussions exacerbate Nigeria's fundamental educational problems, which have hampered the country's ability to prepare young people for today's dynamic workplace (Dan-Nwafor et al., 2020; Obiako & Adeniran, 2020; Yinka & Adebayo, 2020). As part of the Federal Government's effort to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, all Nigerian schools were closed as of March 27, 2020. In each of the country's 36 states, this resulted in a contextualized state-wide school closure. As a result, some state education departments have made radio and television schooling, as well as internet-based learning, available to students in public elementary and secondary schools. Despite the fact that these initiatives may be successful in wealthier countries, they might have far-reaching detrimental consequences for education in developing low-income countries like Nigeria (Obiako & Adeniran, 2020). While the COVID-19 epidemic alters digital and online education around the world, rural and marginalized students fall behind due to a lack of skills and resources to adapt or transfer to new learning channels. Furthermore, university students who might be able to participate in internet-based learning face a lack of reliable electrical sources as well as a shaky internet infrastructure (Crawford et al., 2020; Zhong, 2020). Remote learning (including radio, TV schooling, and online learning apps for primary and secondary kids, virtual libraries, and online classes in institutions) is nearly impossible in most Nigerian areas.

The government's response is jeopardized by underfunded institutions and socially disadvantaged students who have restricted access to technology and the internet, as well as students' inability to participate in an online environment (Zhong, 2020).

According to Obiako and Adeniran, 2020 (2020), the pandemic has harmed education in three main ways, including missed learning for the majority of pre-pandemic learners, loss of access to important school-provided services, and causing more children to fall behind. As a result of

these effects, the country's school closures which was undertaken in 2020 are expected to exacerbate disparities in educational quality and social equality. This is due to the fact that a smaller percentage of learners in metropolitan areas, who are more likely to come from higher-income households, have a better chance of getting education via technology during school closures (Obiako & Adeniran, 2020). The majority of low-income schoolchildren, as well as those from disadvantaged rural and suburban areas, are falling behind (Zhong, 2020). Furthermore, children in schools that lack the resources or expertise to adapt to online delivery are suddenly missing out on learning possibilities (Leung & Sharma, 2020).

Learning from home can be challenging or even impossible for pupils, especially those in the early stages of their education. A bigger percentage of the population of learners is left behind as a result of parents' educational accomplishment and other commitments. All stakeholders in the educational system are concerned about these issues (Crawford et al., 2020). As a result, despite the fact that most states in the country replied via radio and television, a significant number of students continued to face difficulties in their education. Furthermore, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has looked into the influence of COVID-19 on early childhood education among children in Nigeria irrespective of the fact that this group of children are the worse affected by the new normal in educational practice brought by the threat of the corona virus pandemic. it was this gap that the study tend to levelled.

Impacts COVID 19 on Education of Children

Schooling is one of the most effective public policy tools for developing skills and potential of children. School can be enjoyable, and the fundamental economic benefit of attending school is that it improves a child's potential to become a valuable and acceptable member of society. Even a very short period of time spent in school has a lasting impact on a child's life; a brief absence from school, therefore, may have long-term ramifications for future skill development. This is why we cannot say how much the COVID-19 disruption will influence learning; we can only witness the observable effects; the gradual deterioration of inborn abilities may be difficult to detect exactly. We have entered a new world that is vastly different from the one we previously knew. The school timetables and schedules have changed, and many grounds were expected to be covered with the resumption of classes after the lockdown in order for Nigeria's educational system to contend with the world's educational system. During lockdown, educational facilities are neglected, and some may be destroyed as a result of not being used for an extended length of time.

According to UNESCO, over 35.9 million primary and secondary school students are now out of school due to school shutdown. In primary schools, there are roughly 25.6 million pupils, with approximately 87 percent (23.5 million) attending public schools. For secondary school students, the numbers are just as dramatic. Approximately 81 percent (8.4 million) of the nearly 10.3 million secondary school students that are out of school as a result of the closures are government school students. There is no guarantee that all students particular the under aged children who left school during the pandemic lockdown will return; some may have changed their minds about going to school, seeing it as a waste of time, some may have died, some may have changed schools, and some may have joined bad groups, diverting their attention away from school. This is where parents' and guidance's work should come in to ensure the right welfare of students even when they are at home. Unfortunately, given certain parents' literacy levels in Nigeria, learning within the house is also limited; not every parent is

equipped to handle the pedagogic component of parenthood, and other responsibilities of parents must also be considered. The impact of this may not be immediately apparent; however, a child in this category faces a substantial academic setback if adequate interventions are not implemented, because the majority of pupils will not be able to learn until the movement prohibition is lifted and schools are reopened.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic is indeed a threat to our nation educational development especially as it concern early childhood education. Children like adults are also vulnerable to the corona virus disease but the impact of the disease on children education is more due to the fact that children education at the early stage of life is carried out on a close physical contact between them and the teachers. Similarly, because children like physical attachment with adults, the tendency to maintain the rule of social distancing is difficult. This thus posed a serious challenge to teaching and learning between teachers/caregivers and children at the early childhood education.

Technological wise, most children at the early childhood stage are not matured and competent enough to handle or learn through digital (online) means. The implication of the above is learning gap to children and eventual school interruption or dropout to majority of unprivileged children in Nigeria particularly those from the rural, riverine, remote and low income family background.

To ensure effective teaching and learning among children at the early childhood education, the need for all stakeholders to go to their drawing board is undeniable as the child are leaders of tomorrow.

Recommendations

From the review and literature and conclusion draw, the following recommendations are made:

1. Primary education management board should make provision for digital learning facilities and equipment in all the elementary schools to enable teachers and learner scope and adjust to the new normal in teaching and learning in this era of covid-19.
2. Teachers and parents should be trained on ICT and e-learning facilities on how to use it to support learning of children in covid-19 era and beyond.
3. All in service teachers and students teachers in early childhood education should be given special training in blended teaching and learning methods to enable them cope with current trend in early childhood teaching and learning

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