

Impact of COVID-19 on Early Child Education Program Me in Nigeria

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Abstract: This presentation discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the early child education in Nigeria. The presentation depends on the secondary data. The secondary data were sourced from print materials and online publications. The presentation identified the impact of COVID-19 on the early child education in Nigeria include: suspension of teaching and learning, suspension of internal examination, disruption of academic calendar and led to the reduction of funding of early child education. The presentation recommended the following; that the government should provide special fund for early child education to enable the centers manage all the damages caused by the COVID-19 centers close down and the government should immediately embark on the integration of all early child centers into e-learning. Administration of early child education should be switched online to admit new students.

Keywords: COVID-19, Early Child Education, Learning, Programme, Teaching,

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1. Introduction

In order to contain the spread of the virus in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education has directed all educational institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home as cases of reported COVID-19 increased to 13. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sonny Echono, told reporters on 19 March that the directive was part of the country's overall strategy to contain the spread of the virus (Wikipedia, 2020). The directive affected all the educational institutions in Nigeria including the early child development education programme in Nigeria.

The early child education is the first school education children receive. The Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) according to the National Policy on education (2013) is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0 - 4 years in a crèche or nursery. The purpose of Early Child Care Development and Education shall be to: to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; to prepare the child for the primary level of education; to provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work; to inculcate social, moral norms and values; to inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, etc.; to develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit; to stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits; and to teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colors, shapes, forms, etc., through play. This article is aimed to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on the Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) programme in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of COVID-19

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). These viruses were originally transmitted from animals to people. SARS, for instance, was transmitted from civet cats to humans while MERS moved to humans from a type of camel. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. The name coronavirus comes from the Latin word corona, meaning crown or halo. Under an electron microscope, they look like they are surrounded by a solar corona. The novel coronavirus, identified by Chinese authorities on January 7 and since named SARS-CoV-2, is a new strain that had not been previously identified in humans. Little is known about it, although human-to-human transmission has been confirmed (Ogunode, 2020, Muhammad 2021, Ajazeera, 2020).

According to the WHO, signs of infection include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, it can lead to pneumonia, multiple organ failure, and even death. Current estimates of the incubation period - the time between infection and the onset of symptoms - ranging from one to 14 days. Most infected people show symptoms within five to six days. However, infected patients can also be asymptomatic, meaning they do not display any symptoms despite having the virus in their systems (Ogunode, 2020, Muhammad 2021, Ajazeera, 2020). Several governmental measures have been taken to counteract the risk of disease spreading. These measures include travel restrictions, mandatory quarantines for travelers, social distancing, bans on public gatherings, schools and universities closure, business closures, self-isolation, asking people to work at home, curfews, and lockdown (Bedford et al., 2020; Gostin and Wiley, 2020). Authorities in several countries worldwide have declared either

lockdown or curfew as a measure to break the fast spread of virus infection (Paital et al., 2020). These measures have a negative worldwide effect on business, education, health, and tourism (Pragholapati, 2020).

3. Impact of COVID-19 on Early Child Education Program me in Nigeria

The impact of COVID-19 on the early child education program me in Nigeria include suspension of teaching and learning, suspension of internal examination and disruption of academic calendar.

3.1 Suspension of Teaching and Learning

Teaching is the act of transferring skills and knowledge to the learners. Teaching is the act of imparting knowledge. Teaching in conversational method involves the teachers and the learners. Conversational means of teaching occurs when the teachers and the learners are under one classroom. Teaching in conversational method brings the teachers and learners in contact. The order given by the government to curtail the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the close contact of people affected the teaching and learning in all Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) centers across the country. Henrieta H. Fore, (2020) submits that instead of learning new things, socializing with peers, and preparing for their future, children have instead been challenged by COVID-19's impact on education — which has seen a lack of school attendance, increased dropout rates, and declining global funding. Muhammad (2021) also acknowledged that the national lockdown of educational institutions in Yobe State and across Nigeria have caused a major interruption in students learning; disruptions in an academic program, suspension of terminal examination, cancellation of internal and external examination (NECO and WAEC) and creating a gap in teaching and learning. The Covid-19 pandemic, in no small measure, has adversely affected primary education, especially in the area of literacy ability (Ogunode & Jegede 2021, Osiesi, 2021, Bao, Qu, Zhang, Hogan & Tiffany, 2020) as well as effective learning among learners. The pandemic has negatively impacted the regular teaching and learning schedules of the educational systems of the most parts of the globe, causing a major setback in providing quality teaching and learning and necessitating digital learning (Muhammad 2021, Lindzon, 2020; Karp & McGowan, 2020). Aiyedun, & Ogunode, (2020) did a study and find out that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected academic programs thereby leading to major disruptions in academic activities.

3.2 Suspension of Teaching and Learning

Another impact of COVID-19 on the early child education program me in Nigeria is that it led to suspension of internal examination. The COVID-19 came during the time many early child education centers in Nigeria are preparing to write their second term examination. The government order on all school closure led to the suspension of the internal examination in all the early child education centers in the country. This submission is confirmed by Ogunode Niyi Jacob (2020) that did a study and found out that COVID-19 Schools close down affected the academic program me, led to suspension of internal and external examinations, led to reduction in investment on education; led to suspension of teaching and learning in Schools, affected the academic calendar and led to the suspension of all extra-curriculum activities in Senior Secondary Schools. Ogunode Niyi Jacob, Ahaotu Godwin Ndubuisi & Ayisa Cyprian Terfa (2021) identified the following: suspension of internal and external examinations, disruption of academic programs, suspension of admission of new students at all levels of the educational system, suspension of teaching and learning activities, research program, cancellation of

conferences and proceeds, suspension of internal examination, loss of manpower in the educational institutions.

3.3 Disruption of academic calendar

The COVID-19 impact on early child education in Nigeria can also be seen in the area of disruption in the academic calendar of the early child education program me across the country.

It starts by making sure that schools no longer experience extended closures as they did in 2020.

This submission agrees with Deborah Jegede (2020) who carried out a study to find out the perception of undergraduate students on the impact of covid-19 pandemic on higher education development in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The study concludes that Covid-19 pandemic affected the academic calendar of higher institutions; affected implementation of higher institutions financial budget for 2020; that Covid-19 pandemic have relationship with reduction of manpower in higher institutions and that Covid-19 pandemic have relationship with the cancelation of academic conferences of higher institutions. Ogunode Niyi Jacob (2020) also supported tis claimed when he investigated the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher institutions in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria and discovered that that COVID-19 pandemic had led to the suspension of academic calendar of higher institutions, COVID-19 pandemic had led to the suspension of research programmed of higher institutions, COVID-19 pandemic had led to the suspension of community service of higher institutions. It is therefore clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a major disruption in the educational system, much of which is still being understudied due to the severity of its effects (Zethembe 2020; Bryson & Andres, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020).

3.4 Increase the Out of school Children

The COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria has led to the increase in the out of school children. Nigeria is battling with the problem of how to reduce the out of school children. Research by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) shows that 89 per cent or about 1.54 billion children and youths in primary, secondary and university, were out of school during COVID-19. This figure included over 740 million girls and already, the United Nations has warned that 11 million girls across the globe may never return to school after the pandemic. This bleak scenario will no doubt expose them to the risk of early pregnancy, early marriage and abuse (Thisday, 2020). Investigation revealed that Nigeria is no exception. While some girls have not returned to school, other half-hearted returnees have become indifferent to education, as a result of other conflicting engagements. Sadly, most of the girls this reporter spoke with seemed to have lost hope in the current derivable benefits of education (Thisday,2020). Ogunode & Jegede (2021) observed that the impact of the COVID-19 on the administration of primary school education include: suspension of teaching program me, suspension of internal examination, suspension of extra-curriculum program me, disruption of academic program me and inability to enroll new students into primary schools. According to Unicef, 1.5 billion children worldwide were affected by school closures because of COVID-19. Vulnerable children, like those living through conflict and crisis, are now at twice the risk of missing out on an education, and its multiplying benefits for their futures, and the world. Girls have also been among the most affected by the pandemic's impacts on education, and are more at risk of dropping out of school permanently than boys following these closures.

3.5 Reduction in Funding of Early Child Education

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the reduction of the early child education in Nigeria. The early child education drives its allocation from the ministry of education through the three tiers of the government that is the federal, states and local government. The COVID-19 affected the Nigerian economy negatively which resulted to fall in national revenue. Chukwu (2021) said, "Last year we had COVID-19 which affected all revenues, including revenue and it affected economic activities. So last year's drop in IGR can be explained by the COVID-19 induced economic crisis. However, beyond that, states have to improve their tax collection and management system. Maryjacob & Mukhtar (2021) submitted that state investment in education is heavily reliant on the federal account allocation, making its educational goals susceptible to challenges of national resource mobilization (COVID-19, international oil price fluctuation) and expenditure management. The federal government of Nigeria allocated the sum of 568 billion naira (approx. USD 1.5 billion) to education in 2020. However, as a result of COVID, this allocation was reduced to 509 billion naira (approx. USD 1.34 billion). This has pressured public schools into dismissing hundreds of temporary staff members and skyrocketed student school fees in various institutions, thereby increasing the inequality in education.

4. Way Forward

Based on these problems, to bridge this gap, this paper recommends that:

1. The government should provide special fund for early child education to enable the centers manage all the damages caused by the COVID-19 centers close down.
2. The government should immediately embark on the integration of all early child centers into e-learning. Administration of early child education should be switched online to admit new students.
3. The Nigeria government should provide portable solar radios for poor family especially those living in rural areas. This will provide the opportunities for early child education center children to continue learning and those who cannot access digital learning in this period of pandemic.
4. School administrators and caregiver of various early child education centers should be trained on how to deliver e-learning and lesson through radio. Caregivers should be trained through virtual platforms.

4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this presentation looked at the impact of COVID-19 on the early child education in Nigeria. The presentation identified the impact of COVID-19 on the early child education in Nigeria to include: suspension of teaching and learning, suspension of internal examination, disruption of academic calendar and led to the reduction of funding of early child education. The presentation recommended the following; that the government should provide special fund for early child education to enable the centers manage all the damages caused by the COVID-19 centers close down and the government should immediately embark on the integration of all early child centers into e-learning. Administration of early child education should be switched online to admit new students.

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