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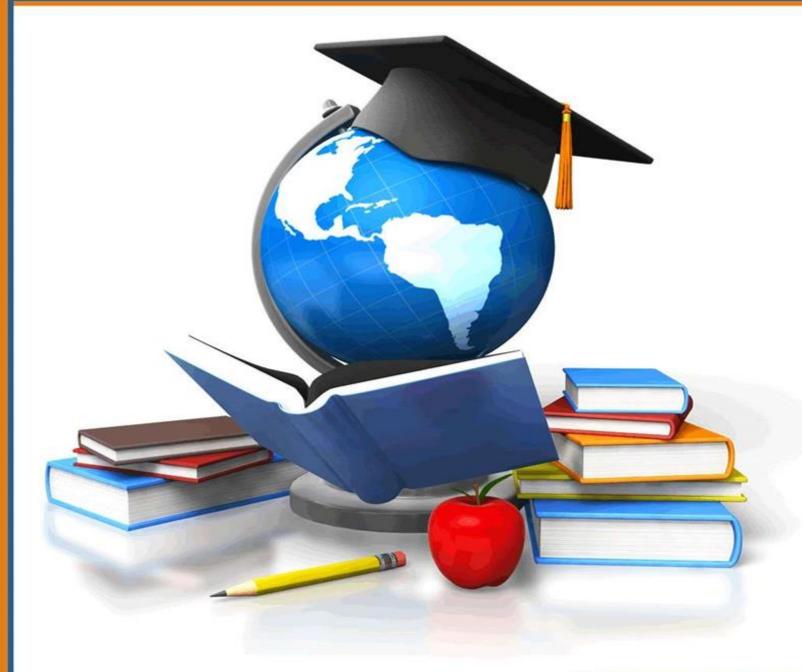
Assessment of Early Childhood Education Programme Implementation by Pre-schools during COVID-19 Lockdown in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Purpose: The study assessed the implementation process of early childhood education in distance learning during the Covid-19 lockdown in Osun State. It also determined the delivery system for distance pre-school education during the Covid-19 lockdown in the study area and examined the challenges of distance learning in early childhood education during the Covid-19 lockdown in the study area. These were done with a view to providing empirical information on the implementation process of early childhood education in distance learning during the Covid-19 lockdown in Osun State.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population consisted of all the early childhood administrators of pre-primary schools in Osun state. The sample comprised 30 early childhood education centres selected across the three senatorial districts in the state. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. For the three senatorial districts, one local government area (LGA) was selected using simple random sampling technique. From each LGA, ten early childhood education centres were selected using simple random sampling techniques. All schools that had preschool sections and accepted to participate in the study were involved. From each preschool centre an administrative head/representative was selected using simple random sampling technique. One research instrument was used titled; 'Pre-schoolers Centers Covid-19 Lockdown Assessment Questionnaire (PCCAQ). Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics was used to calculate the reliability of the PCCAQ and was found to be 0.71. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Findings: The result in the study showed that the implementation process for distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown was poor with 80.0% of the preschoolers' centres did not implement distance learning during covid-19 lockdown. In addition, results revealed that the delivery system for distance pre-school education during covid-19 lockdown in the study area was very poor with 70.0% of preschool centres not organising distance learning during the period of the lockdown.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Finally, the result showed that 66.7% of the pre-school centres were having challenges in engaging children during the period of the lockdown. The study concluded that early childhood education programmes by pre-schools during covid-19 lockdown in Osun state were not implemented.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Early Childhood Education, Remote Learning*

Introduction

UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda and in particular the Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to 'by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education' (UNESCO, 2016). Motor skills are required for children to interrelate with the world around them (Grissmer, 2010) and most of these skills are enhanced through preschool activities often taught by a trained early childhood educator. Early Childhood Education is perceived as having a significant change to the child's personal circumstances that usually has a decisive influence on identity development, performance, and academic success (Hattie 2013; Mays et al., 2018).

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization first announced that COVID-19 was an emergency in international public health (WHO, 2020b). Nigeria's president declared an initial 14-day total lockdown, on March 30, 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic (Gardaworld, 2023). The United States of America National Cancer Institute defines Covid 19 as a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. (NCI, 2023). The far-reaching effects of COVID19 like social/physical distancing and the associated lockdown measures, as well as school closures, have thwarted the education sector and are expected to leave an indelible mark on the education system (Impey, 2020; Yinka and Adebayo, 2020). The United Nation reports that the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating impacts on the educational sector (UNESCO, 2022). Before the pandemic, the Nigerian education system used majorly, onsite approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood education and primary schools (Edufirst, 2020). It is of significant concern that education at all levels has been threatened since the emergence of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). As a result, countries including Nigeria have relied on several containment measures, including a range of physical and social distancing measures to flatten the epidemiological curve and avert morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 (Barasa et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria. The lockdown implemented by the government in response to the pandemic led to the suspension of onsite schooling and the need for alternative methods of education. While some preschools were able to transition to remote learning, many faced challenges in doing so.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide empirical data on the number of preschools that engaged with preschoolers during the COVID-19 lockdown in Osun State. It will also provide insight into the implementation process of ECE in distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, the delivery system for distance pre-school education during the COVID-19 lockdown in the study area, and the challenges of distance learning in ECE during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The sample comprised 30 early childhood education centres selected across the three senatorial districts in the state. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. One local government area (LGA) each was selected per senatorial district using simple random sampling technique. There were three senatorial districts. From each LGA, ten early childhood education centres were selected also using simple random sampling techniques. All schools that had preschool sections and accepted to participate in the study were involved. From each preschool centre an administrative head/representative filled the questionnaires.

A structured questionnaire adapted from a survey questionnaire on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020) was used for this study. It contained four sections; section A of the questionnaire was on questions to sought information on socio demographic characteristics of the schools, section B was made up of eight (8) yes or no questions to assess if there is any individual or organisational support to the schools during covid-19 lockdown. Section C, thirteen (13) questions with yes or no answers assessed the implementation process for distance learning by some preschools during covid-19 lockdown. Section D with fifteen (15) questions assessed the strength and the challenges of engaging with children during covid-19 lockdown and section E was based on the delivery system for preschool distance education during covid-19 lockdown.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviation to describe the data. All the research questions were analysed using frequency count and simple percentage.

Results

Table 1 shows the number of pre-school staff, from the table 60% of the schools have 1-5 staffs while 26.7% have 6-10 staffs, 3.3% have 11-15 staffs and 10% of the pre-schools have more than 20 staff. Based on the number of pre-school children, 10% of the schools have less than 10 pre-school children while 46.7% have 11-20 pre-school children, 26.7% have 21-30 pre-school children and 16.7% have more than 30 pre-school children. In considering of number of years pre-school has been opened, 6.7% of the pre-schools has been opened for less than a year and 10-14 years respectively while 40% of the schools has been open for 1-4 years and 5-9 years respectively and 3.3% of the pre-schools has been opened for 15-19 years and more than 20 years respectively.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of schools

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency (30)	Percentage (%)
Number of pre-school staff		
1-5	18	60.0
6-10	8	26.7
11-15	1	3.3
>20	3	10.0
Number of Pre-school children		
<10	3	10.0
11-20	14	46.7
21-30	8	26.7
>30	5	16.7
Number of years pre-school has been opened		
<1	2	6.7
1-4	12	40.0
5-9	12	40.0
10-14	2	6.7
15-19	1	3.3
>20	1	3.3

Source: Field survey, 2022

Research Question One: What is the implementation process of early childhood education in distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on the implementation process of early childhood education in distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area were subjected to descriptive analysis of frequency count and simple percentage and the results are presented in Table 2. shows that 30% of the pre-schools organised distance learning or virtual classes while 70% of the schools did not organised distance learning or virtual classes for pre-primary children; 23.3% of the pre-schools have adjusted their school calendar while 6.7% has not adjusted their school calendar; 23.3% of the preschools reduce learning time during distance

learning when compared to onsite learning while 6.7% of the pre-schools did not reduce learning time during distance learning when compared to onsite learning; 16.7% of the preschools created new play/instruction methods to work with children while 13.3% of the pre-schools did not create new play/instruction methods to work with children; 20% of the respondents think that quality of learning was reduced through mode of teaching during the lockdown while 10% of the respondents think that quality of learning was not reduced through mode of teaching during the lockdown; 23.3% of the pre-schools modify their curriculum while 6.7% of the pre-schools did not modify their curriculum; 16.7% of the pre-school staff work from their homes or within school facility while 13.3% of the pre-school staff did not work from their home or within school facility; 13.3% of the pre-schools requested fees for the new distance learning mode while 16.7% of the pre-schools did not request fees for the new distance learning mode and 16.7% of the pre-schools provided the educators with instructions on remote learning while 13.3% of the pre-schools have not provided the educators with instructions on remote learning.

Table 2: Implementation process for distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown

S/N	Implementation process	Yes F(%)	No F(%)
1.	Organise distance learning or virtual classes for pre-primary children	9(30.0)	21(70.0)
2.	The current school calendar has been adjusted	7(23.3)	23(76.7)
3.	Reduce learning time during distance learning when compared to onsite learning	7(23.3)	23(76.7)
4.	Create new play/instruction methods to work with children	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
5.	Think quality of learning was reduced through mode of teaching during the lockdown	7(23.3)	23(76.7)
6.	School create/modify its curriculum	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
7.	Staff work from their homes or school facility	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
8.	School request fees for new distance learning mode	4(13.3)	26(86.7)
9.	Educators been provided with instructions on remote learning platforms	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
10.	Educators been trained to use remote learning Platforms	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
11.	Educators been provided with any additional support in the specific context of Covid-19 to help them with the transition to remote/distance learning	4(13.3)	26(86.7)
12.	Educators been provided ICT tools and free connectivity	4(13.3)	26(86.7)
13.	Educators been provided Professional, psychosocial and emotional support	7(23.3)	23(76.7)
14.	Educators been provided teaching content	8(26.7)	22(73.3)
	Average	**6(20.0)**	**24(80.0)**

Source: Field survey, 2022

Research Question Two: What is the delivery system for distance pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on delivery systems for distance pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area were subjected to descriptive analysis of frequency count and simple percentage and the results are presented in Table 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 3:

Medium of learning during Covid-19 lockdown

S/N	Medium of learning	Yes F(%)	No F(%)
1.	Whatsapp	8(26.7)	22(73.3)
2.	Zoom	0(0.0)	30(100.0)
3.	Telegram	1(3.3)	29(86.7)
4.	Facebook	0(0.0)	30(100.0)
5.	Radio	2(6.7)	28(93.3)

Table 3 shows the medium of learning during Covid-19 lockdown. Majority of the preschools that organise distance learning during Covid-19 lockdown made use of whatsapp (26.7%) as medium of learning while 3.3% made use of Telegram, 6.7% made use of radio while none of the preschools made use of zoom and facebook as medium of learning.

Table 4:

Rate of engaging children per week during Covid-19 lockdown

Rate of engaging children per week	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	1	3.3
2	4	13.3
3	2	6.7
5	2	6.7
Distance learning not organised	21	70.0

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 4 shows that during the lockdown 3.3% of the pre-schools engage children once in a week, 13.3% engage children 2 times in a week, 6.7% engage children 3 times and 5 times in a week respectively.

Table 5:

Rate at which children were engaged in a day during Covid-19 lockdown

Rate of engaging children per week	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	4	13.3
2	1	3.3
3	3	10.0
5	1	3.3
Distance learning not organised	21	70.0

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Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 5 shows that 13.3% of the pre-schools engage children once per day while 10% of the pre-schools engage children 3 times per day and 3.3% of the children engage children 2 times and 5 times in a day.

Table 6:

Assessment of learning during Covid-19 lockdown

S/N	Form of Assessment	Yes F(%)	No F(%)
1.	Online assessment by teachers	7(23.3)	23(76.7)
2.	Homework assessed by parents	1(3.3)	29(96.7)
3.	No assessment	1(3.3)	29(96.7)

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 6 shows that the majority of the pre-schools that organise distance learning during Covid-19 lockdown assess their students via online assessment by teachers (23.3%) while 3.3% of the pre-school children's homework were assessed by parents.

Table 7:

Rate at which preschool children participated in the distance/online learning

Percentage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
100%	0	0.0
About 75%	4	13.3
About 50%	2	6.7
About 25%	2	6.7
Less than 25%	1	3.3
Distance learning not organised	21	70.0

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 7 shows that 13.3% of the respondents opined that 13.3% of the pre-school children participated in the distance/online learning while 3.3% opined that less than 25% of the pre-school children participated and 6.7% of the respondents opined that about 50% and about 25% of the pre-school children participated in the distance/online learning respectively.

Table 8:

Developmental domains covered in the online learning platform

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Domains	Yes F(%)	No F(%)
Psychosocial	4(13.3)	26(86.7)
Fine motor skills	2(6.7)	28(93.3)
Hard motor skills	1(3.3)	29(96.7)
Literacy	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
Mathematics or Numeracy	5(16.7)	25(83.3)
Other	1(3.3)	29(3.3)

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 8 shows that the developmental domains covered by the pre-schools during the covid-19 1ockdown are psychosocial (13.3%), fine motor skills (6.7%), hard motor skills (3.3%), literacy (16.7%), Mathematics/Numeracy (16.7%), others (3.3%). The result shows that the delivery system for distance pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area was very poor with 70.0% of preschool centres not organising distance learning during covid-19.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges of distance learning in pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area?

In order to answer this research question, data collected on challenges of distance learning in pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area were subjected to descriptive analysis of frequency count and simple percentage and the results are presented.

Table 9:

Challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown

S/N	Challenges	Yes f(%)	No f(%)
1.	Poor financial state (little or no cash reserves) to meet up with funding requirements for salaries, fixed costs, infrastructure (smart phones, data etc), communications and other expenses for remote teaching	5(55.6)	4(44.4)
2.	Poor/lack of cooperation from parents	6(66.7)	3(33.3)
3.	Poor/lack of cooperation from children parents	6(66.7)	3(33.3)
4.	Lack of motivation of teachers to take up remote teaching due to non-payment of salaries and job insecurity	5(55.6)	4(44.4)
5.	Limited or zero access to devices or hardware to sustain online learning	7(77.8)	2(22.2)
6.	High literacy (basic & digital) rates and poverty levels of most parents leading to them not willing to embrace new solutions e.g Whatsapp classes	5(55.6)	4(44.4)
7.	Poor infrastructure to support remote learning in most low-income communities	8(88.9)	1(11.1)
8.	School fear that some children/learners will never return to the classroom after the lockdown	5(55.6)	4(44.4)
9.	Financial survival of the school due to loss of revenue from school fees due to the impact of the crisis on parents' income	7(77.8)	2(22.2)
10.	No educational subsidies, stimulus packages or concessional loans available by government	8(88.9)	1(11.1)
	Average	**6(66.7)**	**3(33.3)**

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 9 shows that 55.6% of the respondents opined that poor financial state (little or on cash reserves) to meet up with funding requirements for salaries, fixed costs, infrastructure (smart phones, data etc), communications and other expenses for remote teaching is one of the challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown while 44.4% opined that it is not; 66.7% of the respondents opined that poor/lack of cooperation from parents is one of the challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown while 33.3% of the respondents opined that it is not; 66.7% of the respondents opined that poor/lack of cooperation from children's parents is one of the challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown while 33.3% of the respondents opined that it is not; 55.6% of the respondents opined that lack of cooperation of teachers to take up remote teaching due to non-payment of salaries and job insecurity is one of the challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown while 44.4% of the respondents opined that it is not and 77.8% of the respondents opined that limited or zero access to devices or hardware to sustain online learning is one of the challenges of engaging with children during the Covid-19 lockdown while 22.2% of the respondents opined that it is not.

Discussion

Findings of the study showed that the implementation process for distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown was low as most of the preschool centres did not implement distance learning during the covid-19 lockdown in study area. The result is not in line with the findings of Jena (2022) who noted that the majority of learners prefer online mode of admission but only a small percent of learners prefer a soft copy of the study materials. Furthermore, the finding is not with Jena (2022) that half of the total counsellors and coordinators felt satisfactory/ pleasant about online support services, very few of them did not have such an experience and are dissatisfied during Covid-19 lockdown. A research which showed some challenges of both Early childhood teachers and children showed low levels of participation in remote learning and a lack of knowledge and skills to carry out remote learning (T. Ford, Kwon, & Tsotsoros, 2021). In addition, the findings reveal that the delivery system for distance pre-school education during the covid-19 lockdown in the study area was very poor with most preschool centres not organising distance learning during covid-19. The findings is in line with International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020) that indicated that 53 per cent of the instructors do not use any form of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivery of instruction at a distance, while 47 per cent of the respondents indicated moderate use of ICT for delivery of instruction via distance learning. It can be deduce that the major issues inhibiting the use of ICT for design and delivery of instruction, assessment of student learning at a distance during the pandemic was the lack of, or limited knowledge and use of the Learning Management System (LMS); a critical factor in facilitating the adoption of ICT for distance learning. However, the findings support ILO (2020) who reported that in the use of ICT in delivery instruction at a distance learning based on types of technology or platform they use. Nineteen respondents (43 per cent) collectively listed Moodle Cloud, Blackboard, and Google Classroom, while 57 per cent of the respondents did not indicate any platform or technology. A study by (Malik, Tabasum & Mirza, 2020)   showed that most teachers were not familiar with the virtual learning themselves as they indicated that their teacher education did not prepare them with the real tasks or the necessary skills to get the job done. Also, research shows the need for professional development of teachers' on the use of ICT platforms /tools for teaching (Malik, Tabasum & Mirza, 2020).

Finally, the findings revealed that most of the pre-school centres were having challenges in engaging children during the Covid-19 lockdown. The corroborate Mahyoob (2020) who found that the main problems that influence and impact online EFL learning during COVID-19 are related to technical, academic, and communication challenges. He further stated that most EFL learners are not satisfied with continuing online learning, as they could not fulfil the expected progress in language learning performance. A study by Munastiwi (2021) corroborated the results of this study. Lack of technology, poor network coverage,poor cooperation from parents which might be due to a lack of competence by parents to participate in the learning process of their children (Rahman, 2020) were some challenges of education observed during distance learning during the pandemic. Another study by Sukiastini (2020) also showed a lack of infractures to implement online education during the pandemic.

This study showed that most schools had adapted their curriculum to incorporate new learning styles during the Covid 19 pandemic (Mansyur, 2020, Chick et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The study concluded that the implementation of preschool programmes during the covid19 lockdown was low. Also, the study revealed that the delivery of distance pre-school education in the area was inadequate, with many preschool centres failing to organise distance learning during the pandemic and struggling to engage children during lockdown.

Recommendations

According to this study, it is recommended that the Nigerian government should expand distance learning beyond just tertiary institutions to include secondary and elementary schools as a way to ensure continuity in education during times of crisis, when in-person activities may be suspended. Additionally, it is suggested that tele-courses through radio, TV, and telephone networks be implemented to keep students engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic and any future disasters, as it may be difficult to operate full online learning in Nigeria at this time.

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