



MANAGEMENT OF TEACHER-PUPILS INTERACTION AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (PRE PRIMARY AND PRIMARY) IN EMERGENCY PERIODS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the management of teacher-pupils interaction and distance learning in emergency periods in Nigeria. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria in February 2020, the school system was unexpectedly shut down, forcing children to stay at home for a long period. The stay at home principle lingered for more than expected. As a result, the issue of how to engage children in learning so there will be no educational breakdown ensured. The paper study the capability of early childhood educators of meeting the challenges in emergency periods, and considers this in the areas of the ECE expertise, their technological and mental preparedness and other areas for man-made and natural emergencies as the world is facing currently. It concludes that for distance learning in emergency periods to work, government must promote school-home collaboration and suggested among other things that teachers must be technologically and mentally prepared on rapid response to meet the educational needs of emergency affected children.

Key Words: Management, Distance learning, Early childhood education, Emergency periods, Teacher-pupil interaction

Introduction

Nigeria, like other nations facing insecurity is witnessing various forms of insecurity ranging from kidnapping and banditry in the South, insurgency and terrorists attack in the North East to ethno-religious and Fulani- herdsman and farmers' violent conflicts in the North Central. These lingering conflicts and violence has inflicted various degrees of traumatic experience to Nigerian citizens causing the disruption of economic, educational and social activities in the areas. Since the on-set of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic in Nigeria in February 2020 which later led to the abrupt shut down of the educational system among others, teacher-pupil interaction which has all along been a classroom experience forced children to remain at home to date.

COVID-19, banditry, kidnapping, and insecurity has no doubt brought unimaginable challenges and demand for adjustment for Nigerians in different spheres, domains and locations, including the religious, educational, social and economic communities. Based on the media, Nigeria Center for Diseases Control (NCDC), and other groups report on COVID-19, many Nigerian citizens and other inhabitants currently live in fear of the unknown. Many more are traumatised by the rising confirmed cases which are now all over the states



of the Federation. There are real challenges to isolation, quarantine, and the lockdown impositions by the Federal, States and local governments as strategies to curtail the spread of the disease. These have brought devastation, hardship and grief to Nigerians. The situation and many of the practices that has come up in the name of implementing government orders have made some people angry, frustrated and depressed, and so are ready to injure or kill at any little provocation.

According to Leitaio and Waugh, 2007, positive teacher-pupil interactions are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation. But the success of any interpersonal interaction is dependent to a large extent upon input from both teachers and the pupils. Thus in the classroom setting, it is the teacher who has the opportunity, and indeed, the responsibility, to initiate positive interpersonal interactions (Krause et al, 2006; McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Hence the teacher who is proactive in demonstrating acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation towards his or her pupils not only works at initiating positive teacher-pupil interaction, but also increase the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure the test of time (Leitaio and Waugh, 2007).

Teacher-pupil interactions are important for many cogent reasons. Teacher-pupils interactions greatly influence a pupil's ability to adjust to school, to do well at school, and to relate to peers (Sztejnberg, 2004). Teacher-pupil interactions have an impact on classroom management and affect learning progress (Klem & Connell, 2004; Sztejnberg et al, 2004). From a developmental perspective, the establishment of a positive teacher-pupil interaction aids a student's cognitive, social and emotional growth and enhances their mental wellbeing (Leitaio & Waugh, 2007). Also, stable teacher-pupil interactions impact positively on a pupil's developing sense of self and promote resiliency in them. Furthermore, the benefits of positive teacher-pupil interaction extend to teachers, contributing to an improved sense of job satisfaction (Leitaio & Waugh, 2007).

Although many private educational institutions saw that the usual classroom interaction was not likely to hold with the prolong lockdown and started distance learning as an option, the practice never see the light of the day. Before now, there has been the problem of helping children on improving their learning outcomes in the Nigerian educational system due to insurgency and insecurity in many parts of the country, especially in the North-eastern part. Besides, home-school collaboration effort has also been so neglected thereby impeding indepth assessment and correction of psychological blocks that may be identified in pupils through collaborative or join effort of the school and the home. Currently, the only option that is left for most societies around the globe to maintain the educational system is distance learning through the electronic media. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has created an emergency period. Learning in emergency period refers to learning in situations where children lack access to their national education systems due to man-made crises or natural disasters.

According to earliest census, Nigeria is said to be the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa with about 140 million people (NPC, 2007), occupying a landmass of about 923,768 square kilometers and with 274 ethnic groups making up the federation. The socio-economic dimensions of providing education for the population, within the context of prevailing national circumstances of dwindling financial and other resources in the face of developmental needs are heavy. The ever continuing growth in Nigeria's population, the attendant escalating demand for education at all levels, the difficulty of resourcing education through the traditional means of face-to-face classroom bound interaction, and the compelling need to provide education for all (EFA) irrespective of environmental, social or cultural circumstances have meant that the country must of necessity find the appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge unmated demand for education. According to Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008), all these emerging situations have signal to the need for a comprehensive search for a more viable, robust, reliable, efficient, effective, and cost-beneficial educational solutions, and the most logical pathway to achieve these is by embracing distance education method.

Distance learning is a system of education that has to do with physical separation between the teacher and the learner. In distance learning, the instruction is delivered through a variety of media including print and



other information and communication technologies (ICTs) to the learner. The learner may either have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have been denied the face-to-face formal learning due to socio-economic, career, insecurity, pandemic or other circumstances. Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008) defined distance learning as learning provided by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method whose goals are similar to and just as noble and practical as those of on-campus full time face-to-face learning.

Early childhood education (ECE) is the lower grade of education given to aid physical, social, psychological and cognitive or mental growth and development of the child. This form of education is what is captured differently as Day-care, Creche, Play-class, Kindergarten and Nursery and primary schools. It is the children's care, development and education from birth to the period of extending to upper basic education experience in the formal, informal and non-formal settings. The care in this context is given from birth and the aspect of education takes off from around the age of two when cognition begin to manifest, that is, ability to acquire knowledge: the mental faculty or process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition or perception. Both the care and education promote the child's growth and development.

ECE and Primary started as far back as the pre-colonial era in the form of nursery school and primary education, though the demand for each education was low until recent time (Oguntuase, 2010). Early Childhood Education in the form of nursery school and primary education as we know it today in Nigeria is largely a postcolonial development. The semblances of during the colonial era were the Kindergarten and the infant classes, which consisted of groups of children considered not yet ready for primary education. And since grouping for instruction in schools then was not age-based, some children aged six or even more, could be found in some of the infant classes (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016). With the phasing out of infant classes, some parents began to feel the need for nursery schools.

During the pre-colonial period also, all efforts for provision of early childhood education were confined to the voluntary sector and received little or no support from the government. It was for the first time in 1977 with the introduction of the National Policy on Education by the then military government of Nigeria that the importance and need for ECE and Primary was given official recognition and linked with the child's educational performance in primary school. Gradually, early childhood institution stayed, and by 1985, Nigeria has about 4,200 early childhood education institutions. Then by 1992, the number increased to about 8,300 (Federal Government of Nigeria/ UNICEF, 1993).

Currently, ECE (lower grade level) are managed by local Government under public and private administration located at villages and cities organizations, institutions, worshiping places and buildings. An investigation conducted in 2003 revealed that more than two-fifth (42%) of the sample ECCE facilities in Nigeria was private-owned. Government owned accounted for 34% and 21% by local communities Education for All Global Monitoring Report, (2007). As time went on, it became necessary for the government to increase its involvement in pre-school education in Nigeria. By 2004, this segment of education had been integrated into the Universal Basic Education programme by the UBE Act 2004. All children within the pre-school age bracket were entitled to be admitted without paying school fees into any ECE Centre and primary school. For the year 2003/2004, the gross and net enrolment ratios were 14.7% and 10.9% respectively and the normative age groups under consideration were 3 to 5 years of age (EAGMR, 2007). In the National Policy on Education, Early Childhood Education is labelled as pre-primary education and is defined as the education given in an educational institution to nursery school children prior to their entering primary school (NPE, 2014).

An educational emergency is a crisis period created by conflicts or disasters which have destabilised, disorganized or destroyed the education system, and which require integrated process of rises and post-crisis response. For UNICEF, emergencies include natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, and human-made crises such as civil struggle and war as well as silent emergencies such as HIV/AIDS, extreme poverty and children living in the streets (Pigozzi, 1999). Disasters or crisis affects all aspects of child development – physical, mental, and emotional – and to be effective, help must take each into account to ensure that the psychosocial concerns intrinsic to child growth and development are addressed.



Teacher-pupil interaction is the meaningful relationship that occurs between the teacher and the pupil. It is simply the healthy and productive relationship existing between the teacher and pupils. Teacher-pupil interaction is an indispensable feature of the society. It is a useful and dependable medium for transmitting and imparting worthwhile knowledge, value orientation, ideas, skills, and norms capable of fostering the continued growth and development of both the child and the society. When teacher-pupil interaction is harmonious, the transfer of knowledge or quality education is possible, but if otherwise, it is a mirage.

This chapter attempts to answer five questions: (1) Why is education necessary in early childhood in emergency periods? (2) How technologically and mentally prepared are the early childhood educators on rapid response to meet the educational needs of emergency affected children? (3) What are the basic principles for early childhood education in emergency periods? (4) What are the roles of home-school collaboration in education in emergency periods? and (5) are there current early childhood education practices in emergency period in some countries?

Theoretical Framework

There are theorists who influenced modern early childhood education (ECE) training such as Sigmund Freud, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), John Dewey (1859-1952) and so on, but this opinion will be hinged on the principle of Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel (1782-1852) who is an ECE pioneer. Children were considered incapable of any real learning until they were closer to preteen age, and were largely left to their own devices during their early development. It took decades of innovative work from psychologists and educators to change people's mindsets and convince society of the importance of early learning. Friedrich Froebel, the German educator founded the first school for children under seven in 1837. He named it 'Kindergarten' which literally means 'Child's Garden', a name which is still widely used today in Nigeria for early childhood education. Froebel believed that children's play activities could be guided by a teacher to help them explore and interact with their surroundings. Rejecting traditional notions that small children lacked the cognitive skills to be educated, he argued that because learning begins when consciousness erupts, education must also. Early childhood has become a vital integral robust part of Nigerian education and literally around the world. Thus teachers must serve as guides rather than instructors, encouraging learners to make mistakes and asks questions to aid learning and growth.

Background of Distance Learning in Nigeria

The historical background of distance learning in Nigeria could be traced back to the correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for General Certificate in Education (GCE), a prerequisites for the London Matriculation Examination (LME). Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008) reported that the first indigenous distance learning programme was the English by Radio Programme of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that followed independence in 1960. The programme as mentioned here was primarily targeted at primary and secondary school levels and covered core courses at both levels with more emphasis placed on the teaching and learning of science, mathematics and English language. The technology driven distance learning came into being almost the same time with the first indigenous distance learning with the emergent of Educational Television programs of the then National Television of Nigeria (NTV). There was also a school Educational Broadcast of the Radio Nigeria stationed in Lagos and relayed all through the federation. When that happened, all Radio stations were required to tune in at specific times of the day during school hours for broadcasting of programs.

In the past 60 years, University education programs in Nigeria begin to witness a lot of transformations in terms of instructional delivery method in some of the tertiary institutions. The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) of the University of Lagos which started in 1974, which later changed to Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSI) and now known as Distance Learning Institute was the first attempt made to establish a distance education unit as part of a University in Nigeria. It began initially to offer programs in science education at first degree level in Biology, Chemistry, mathematics, Physics and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for degree holders that did not possess teaching qualifications. The National Teachers'



Institute NTI started as a distance education institution in 1976 (the first committed distance education institution) with the support of UNESCO (Ajadi et al, 2008). It began by training Grade Two Teachers (TC II). In 1990, the Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE) programme was introduced when the expectation was that the minimum teaching certificate in Nigeria was expected to be NCE. The Institute also introduced the PGDE programme in the year 2005. Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (ABU, Zaria) also started distance learning through a training programme referred to as Teachers-in-service Education Programme (TISEP) for Grades Three and Two teachers and later the NCE. Also in November 1972, the University also established a University of the Air Programme for teachers in secondary schools and teacher training colleges. The Distance Degree Programme of the University of Ibadan which started in 1979 as an external degree programme of the university is another institution which adopted the distance learning method.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established in July 1983 by an Act of the National Assembly as the first Distance learning tertiary institution in Nigeria. It became clear to the then Federal Government that the ever growing demand for education by her people cannot be attained by the traditional means of face-to-face classroom interaction. This institution was however shut down few weeks after its establishment and the Act that established it was suspended in 1984 by the then Federal Military Government that overthrew the civilian government. Many years after the closure, the compelling reasons that informed the earlier establishment of the university as well as the need to fill the gap created by the Federal Government clamped down on unapproved outreach study centers of many conventional universities all over the country and the need to take advantage of emerging developments in the field of ICTs which have revolutionised the techniques and methods of instructional deliveries in the distance learning mode necessitated the reactivation of the suspended NOUN Act of 1983 in 2002. This paved way for the resuscitation of NOUN.

Nowadays, in Nigerian schools, the commonest type of distance learning is e-learning adopted in form of lectures note on CD-ROM which can be played as at when learners desires. The challenge of this method is that the numbers of students per computer in which these facilities are un-interactive as compared to when lectures are being received in the classroom. Some institutions adopt the use of internet facilities such as Zoom and or Skype; however, this too is not well maintained because of incessant power problem and the high cost of running generating set. Most students go to the cyber café but because there are people of diverse intention on the net at the same time, and the bandwidth problem, a multimedia interaction cannot be done.

Presently, Nigeria has a total of 170 universities; 47 of which are Federal Universities, 48 belong to the State governments, and 79 are for private individuals and groups. Despite all these challenges facing e-learning in the educational institutions, a few of these universities have the facilities for e-learning while some have started setting up their ICT centers for internet services. But because of location of some of these institutions, bandwidth issue and the challenge of electricity is likely an obstacle.

The Need for Distance Learning in Early Childhood in Emergency Periods

In all countries of the world, including Nigeria, education remains the instrument for effective national development. Education provides consciousness, awareness and enlightenment to individuals in order to effectively pursue their aspirations and yearnings. Development is champion through education because it is always the most useful channel that has very significant influence. This is also because education entails the enlightenment of people in their ways of pursuit in life. Education at all levels and in all its forms constitutes a vital tool for addressing virtually all global problems. Education is not only an end in itself. It is a key instrument for bringing about changes in knowledge, values and behaviours and life styles required to achieve sustainability and stability within and among countries (Boyi, 2013). Education provides humans with the necessary know how and skills to win a nation's state and even export brains.

From the foregoing, it is important to note that distance learning in ECE in emergency periods in Nigeria is an important issue for several reasons:



1. Open and distance education or learning can provide needed access to Nigerian children who are presently disadvantaged through the conventional educational system due to COVID-19 and insecurity.
2. The Nigerian educational system will benefit from a hybrid of traditional classroom learning and online learning.
3. Every child will have access to quality education and will receive quality education.
4. Insecurity in Nigeria is becoming a permanent challenge. Nobody knows how and when it will last as at the moment, many schools are under lock and key.

These are some of the major factors responsible for why distance education is very necessary in Nigeria. Distance education provides avenues for education for mass under-privileged population. Nigeria is generously endowed with human and natural resources that need to be well equipped with literacy and skills to contribute to economic development, which is badly needed for this country. This brings it to bear that the way forward is to embrace distance learning using teachers, parents and caregivers, supported by all necessary financial and infrastructural commitments.

Conclusion

Children learn best when the significant adults in their life, such as parents, teachers, and other family and community members work together to encourage and support them. This basic fact should be a guiding principle as we think about how schools should be organized and how children should be taught. Schools alone cannot address all of a child's needs. The meaningful involvement of parents and support from the community are essential. Teachers and parents need to be reoriented to be able to effectively collaborate to promote pupils success in school.

Based on the foregoing, for distance learning in emergency periods to work, government must promote school-home collaboration and early childhood educators must be technologically and mentally prepared on rapid response to meet the educational needs of emergency affected children.

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