

The Perception of Primary School Teachers on the Impact of Covid-19 on the Social Behaviour of Children in Enugu Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The Corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected every aspect of human life, particularly the social behavior as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The COVID-19 precautionary measures, such as social distancing and restrictions in social gathering, have tremendously affected emotional stability as well as mental health particularly among school children. Hence, this study analyzed the perception of primary school teachers on the impact of COVID-19 on the social behaviour of school children in Enugu metropolis. The study raised two research questions and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study was 67 teachers. Primary school teachers were sampled from sixty seven primary schools in Enugu metropolis. Data were collected from sixty seven (67) primary school teachers using a well structured questionnaire. 63 out of 67 copies of the instrument were retrieved. Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the entire instrument. Data collected were used to analyze the two research questions using mean, grand mean and standard deviation. The results showed that teachers perceived emotional disability among school children, which was evidenced in anxiety, stress and depression among these children as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. Also, social distancing and financial constraint during the COVID-19 restriction was perceived by the teachers to have impacted on children's social behaviour most. Therefore, the study recommended that primary school curriculum be reviewed to include courses that address psychosocial issues, to help children manage mental health as well as social behaviours in any situation they find themselves.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Socio- Behaviour and Vulnerable Children.

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China [1]. It was initially reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency (Gallegos and The New York Times, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009. Illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 was termed COVID-19 by the WHO, the acronym derived from "coronavirus disease 2019". The name was chosen to avoid stigmatizing the virus's origins in

terms of populations, geography, or animal associations. In Nigeria, the issue of COVID 19 have continued to increase from one state to another with various domains reporting the disastrous effect it has on man and industry from different media domains. The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing). Individuals can also be infected from and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it. In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, most countries around the world temporarily close educational institutions but now open with strict restrictions especially in Nigeria. However, learning has not

stopped but place online for a while before reopening of schools with strict restrictions of Covid-19 rules. Using existing literature and evidence from recent international data (Eurostat, PISA, ICILS, PIRLS, TALIS), this report attempts to gain a better understanding of how the COVID-19 crisis affected conventional learning [2]. The truth remains that the crisis of COVID 19 affects all and sundry, it was during that period that the mode of studying exposed that majority of pupils who lacked the knowledge and Information about the virus. As such its spread was enormous then followed the difficulty of learning through electronic learning in schools. Most people and parents especially those in primary schools cried foul because it was their first time of coming in contact with e-learning as a result of school physical closure but brought an opportunity for all to be acquainted with the knowledge and operation of ICT technical know-how. In all, teachers perceive that pupils all over the world are the most vulnerable to this pandemic because it causes harm leading to emotional disability and the problems attached with social distancing such as loneliness and aggression (ACOG, 2020). Here, vulnerable children generally refers to individuals under age 17 whose safety, well-being, and/or development is at significant risk due to inadequate care, protection or access to essential services. These vulnerable children are essentially affected with the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic presents the greatest test the world has faced since the Second World War and the formation of the United Nations. Children that tragically lost their parent, family member, or caregiver to COVID-19 are most of the time affected in their relationship with their peers [3]. The personal social factors like social distancing, using of nose mask, fear impacts is seem to be alarming especially pupils in primary schools. Imagine a situation where most victims of Covid-19 pandemic are vulnerable children. It is a very a devastating impact that leads to restrictions of movement by the government of the day which is enforced by teachers through ministry of health,

high social and economic costs, furthering of inequalities based on financial background have affected all and sundry [4]. It is very unfortunate that Nigerian have no community-based child protection programmes, and case management for children living with disabilities. The impact of the pandemic extends far beyond the sphere of physical health. The pandemic is having profound effects on children's mental well-being especially those suffering from struggle to become safe, their privacy, their economic security, and beyond are under serious threat. Children living in refugee settlements and those living in refugee settlements or other crowded conditions are especially vulnerable. While children are not the face of this pandemic, its broader impacts on children risk being catastrophic and amongst the most lasting consequences for societies as a whole. It is in the perception of all citizens in Nigeria especially the teachers that before this crisis in Nigeria, we lived in a country that failed to care adequately for vulnerable children; where a child under age 15 dies every five seconds; where one in every five children is malnourished (stunted); over half (53%) of 10-year old children in Nigeria cannot read and understand simple stories; and one child in four under the age of 5 does not have their birth registered [5]. The longer the current crisis, the more dramatic the impacts on these children, as economies struggle/poverty, learning disabilities, and government spending is restricted; and the more likely the increase in their numbers. In active conflict situations, the pandemic response may increase the push and pull factors for child recruitment, as well as sexual exploitation and abduction [6]. For teachers what started as a public health emergency has snowballed into a formidable test for global development and for the prospects of today's young generation. In Nigeria, specifically, Enugu state, the COVID 19 pandemic impact on personal social behaviour of vulnerable children seems to be enormous as it exposes the negative impacts which leads to death even though there is a claim that COVID 19 vaccine is a remedy But

worrisome because vaccine do not bring cure. Women and men are dying everyday, schools are shut down, those that are opened are giving strict restrictions like social distancing etc. The overall impact of the pandemic on these vulnerable children in Enugu Metropolis

Statement of the Problem

Measures to curb Covid-19 pandemic which includes physical distancing and lockdown measures risk spelled out by the government as measures seems to speed the spread of the pandemic vulnerable children because they lack the requisite knowledge to maintain frequent hand-washing and the constant use of sanitizer while in school. Those vulnerable children at home and in school face similar challenges. The aim of the restriction is to prevent the spread but contrary, these vulnerable children are excluded from social protection. By implication they are negatively affected by movement restrictions that may keep from them obtaining a more secure status even though the teachers perceive the contrary that children from poor financial background cannot afford to keep private teachers because of financial constraints. All these affect the children since they considered that their personal social life have been affected by suspension that led to the closure of their schools. The suspension has been part of social distancing and lockdown measures. They are least likely to benefit from distance learning solutions. Their continued care is easily put in jeopardy at a time of crisis. Worst of it all is that lockdown measures risk ensnaring children in unsafe situations. The ultimate impact of the crisis on children hinges on how much time it will take for

reflects the combined effects from these three directions which made the researcher to sought to find out the perception of primary school teachers on the impact of Covid-19 on the social behaviour of children in Enugu Metropolis.

the pandemic to end. A longer struggle to contain the virus not only prolongs the pain caused by the pandemic, but raises the prospect that the pandemic's impact will have lingering or persistent effects on vulnerable children.

For instance, the longer economies are on shutdown, the less likely they are to flash back. At the household level, struggling families will increasingly see breadwinners lose their jobs or be forced to sell productive assets in order to survive, with long-running consequences for child poverty. The same holds true for other impacts of the pandemic. The longer schools remain closed, the less likely vulnerable children are to catch up on learning and essential life skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood. Meanwhile, children facing acute deprivation in nutrition, protection or stimulation, or periods of prolonged exposure to toxic stress, during the critical window of early childhood development are likely to develop lifelong challenges as their neurological development is impaired. Given the vulnerable situation of primary school children to understand how they emotionally cope with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the study sought to find out the perception of primary school teachers on the impact of Covid-19 on the social behaviour of children in Enugu Metropolis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study sought to find out the perception of primary school teachers on the impact of Covid-19 on the social behaviour of children in Enugu Metropolis.

Specifically the study sought to:

1. To determine the perception of teachers on the impact of COVID-19

pandemic on school children in Enugu Metropolis

2. To determine the teachers perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were raised to guide this study.

1. What are the perceptions of teachers on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic

on school children in Enugu Metropolis?

2. What are the teachers perception of the factors that affects children's

social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The area of the study was some selected primary schools in Enugu Metropolis. The population for the study consisted of 67 teachers in some selected primary schools in Enugu Metropolis. Of these 39 are female teachers while 28 were male teachers. The population is small so no sampling was done. The instrument used for data collection was a 10 item questionnaire called the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the social personal behaviour of vulnerable Children Scales (IOC-19P. OTP-SBO-CS). The instrument had a 4-point response scale with response category of Strongly Agree (SA)-4 points; Agree (A)--3 points; Disagreed (D)--2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD)-1 point. The instrument was validated by three experts; two from Guidance and counselling Department and one from

measurement and evaluation, all from Faculty of Education, Enugu State university of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate and it yielded a reliability coefficient of .69 for cluster 1 and .73 for cluster 2. The coefficient for the entire instrument stood at .75. The study was carried among the teachers from the selected primary schools in Enugu State. One hundred and three copies of the questionnaire were distributed but ninety three copies were retrieved from the respondents representing 89.42 percent return rate. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and grand mean. Any mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agree while any mean below 2.50 was regarded as Disagree.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study according to the

research question that guided the study.

Analysis of Data

The data analyzed was presented in Tables 1 Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of teachers on the impact

of COVID-19 pandemic on school children in Enugu Metropolis?

Table1: Mean (\bar{x}) Rating with Standard Deviation of the Perception of Teachers on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on School children in Enugu Metropolis

S/N	Items	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁
Decision			
1.	Emotional stress of vulnerable children increases due to social distancing	3.35	0.81
			Agree
2.	Long term school closure makes some of them to become a truant	3.00	0.93
			Agree
3.	COVID-19 pandemic increased risk of psychiatric problem among vulnerable children	2.68	1.20
			Agree
4.	COVID-19 pandemic increase conflict and vulnerability among vulnerable children	2.25	0.44
			Disagree
5.	Covid-19 pandemic increases the risk for emotional disturbances among vulnerable children	3.60	0.83
	Agree		
Grand Mean		2.98	0.84
			Agree

Data in Table 1 indicates that of the 5 items of the perception of teachers on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on school children in Enugu Metropolis, the respondents agreed with 4 items (1, 2, 3 and 5) as they recorded mean scores of (3.35, 3.00, 2.68 and 3.68) which are above the cut-off point of 2.50. They however disagreed with 1 of the items (4) with a mean score of (2.25). The standard deviation for all the items are small signifying that there is homogeneity in the responses of the respondents. The Table also shows that the respondent's grand mean score for the items raised is

Table 2: Mean (\bar{x}) Rating with Standard Deviation of the Teachers Perception on the Factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis

S/N	Items	X_1		SD ₁
6.	Covid-19 affects the movement restrictions of vulnerable children	3.25	0.09	Agree
7.	Covid-19 carry high social and economic costs for children across communities.	3.48	0.67	Agree
8.	Covid-19 impact is particularly severe for the most vulnerable children in primary schools	1.43	0.59	Disagree
9.	Covid-19 further inequalities vulnerable children in primary schools	2.83	0.49	Agree
10.	Children from low income home suffer more as a result of financial constraint	3.68	0.74	Agree
Grand Mean		2.94	0.70	Agree

Table 2 indicates that of the 5 items on the teachers perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis Nigeria, the respondents agreed with 4 items (6, 7, 9 and 10) as they recorded mean scores of (3.29, 3.48, 2.83 and 3.68) which are above the cut-off point of 2.50. They however disagreed with 1 of the items (8) with a mean score of (1.43). The standard deviation for all the items are small signifying that there is homogeneity in the responses of the respondents. The

(2.98). From the foregoing, the answers to research question one indicates that teachers perceive that emotional stability of vulnerable children is as a result of increase in emotional stress of social distancing, the pandemic makes them truant, the pandemic increases risk of psychiatric problems and risk for emotional disturbances in Enugu Metropolis. Research Questions Two: What are the teachers perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis?

Table also shows that the respondent's grand mean score for the items raised is (2.94). From the foregoing, the answers to research question two indicates that the teachers perception of the factors affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis is because it affects the movement restrictions of vulnerable children, it carries high social and economic costs, further inequalities and increases suffering as a result of financial constraint.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The first research question sought to determine the perception of teachers on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on school children in Enugu Metropolis. The result in Table 1 indicated that teachers perceive that emotional stability of vulnerable children is as a result of increase in emotional stress of social distancing, the pandemic makes them truant, the pandemic increases risk of psychiatric problems and risk for emotional disturbances in Enugu Metropolis. The finding agrees with [4] noted that pupils all over the world are the most vulnerable to this pandemic because it causes harm leading to emotional disability and the problems attached with social distancing such as loneliness and aggression. The second research question sought to determine

the teacher's perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis. The study findings revealed that teachers perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis is as a result of movement restrictions of vulnerable children which carries high social and economic costs, further inequalities and increases suffering as a result of financial constraint. The finding is in consonant with [6] who remarked that the impact of Covis-19 on vulnerable children is a very devastating impact that leads to restrictions of movement, high social and economic costs, furthering of inequalities based on financial background.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and interpretations done and the information from related literature, it implies that:

1. Teachers perceived that emotional stability of vulnerable children is as a result of increase in emotional stress of social distancing, the pandemic which makes them truant, the pandemic increases risk of psychiatric problems and risk for emotional disturbances in Enugu Metropolis.

Educational Implication of the Finding

The finding of this study holds implication for teachers and counsellors and pupils. For teachers, since they are not professionals in handling problem associated with vulnerable children, they are meant to refer this pupil to the professionals such as counsellors to care for them. In such an instance any counsellor will understand that a key means of meeting the counselling needs of vulnerable children in primary school is by institutionalizing an effective and professional counselling service centers in inclusive schools. [9], counselling services are necessary in inclusive schools due to the diverse needs of pupils in inclusive classrooms. Counsellors should take care of their needs in the teaching learning situation if not the negative implication will be alarming.

2. Teachers perception of the factors that affects children's social behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu Metropolis is as a result of movement restrictions of vulnerable children which carries high social and economic costs, further inequalities and increases suffering as a result of financial constraint.

Teachers should employ teaching materials that will accommodate vulnerable children and their challenges. Regular seminars or workshops should be organized by counsellors to create awareness of pupil vulnerabilities. Counsellors and psychologists should come up with intervention programmes for parents, siblings, teachers and administration to manage vulnerable pupils in the home and school environments. Equally important is the finding that vulnerable pupils desire counselling services at the upper primary school. Essentially, pupils at the upper primary classes are considered more matured to take advantage of available school resources to meet their personal needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve this mission the following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study. They are:

1. Individualized education programme (IEP) for vulnerable children should be established to meet their needs and challenges.
2. To avoid work overload among for teachers, counsellors should be employed. This would establish a therapeutic environment to curb the effect of social distancing as

highlighted by Roger's client-centered theory in the schools to facilitate the pupils' development. Term reports on the activities of the counselling centres must be presented to the special education Units at the zonal education service offices. Personnel from these zonal education units should also monitor the activities of these centers at least once a term to ensure that work is going on efficiently.

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