

Innovative Educational Practices in Early Childhood Education in Post Pandemic Era: Implication for Guidance and Counselling

Udechukwu, Joachim Amobi (Ph.D)

Dept. of Early Childhood and Primary Education
Federal College of Education (Tech)
Umunze, Anambra State
E-mail: obiandgold2@yahoo.com

Dr. Mbachu, C. U.

Dept. of Early Childhood and Primary Education
Federal College of Education (Tech)
Umunze, Anambra State

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Abstract

This paper established challenges and solution towards innovative educational practice in implementation of early childhood care education in post pandemic era. The paper explored the concepts of innovative educational practice and early childhood care education. This paper reveals some of the innovative education, challenges and solution towards innovative educational practice in implementation of early childhood care education in post pandemic era. The paper concluded that effective use of innovative educational practice in early childhood care education in post pandemic era cannot be overemphasized. Early childhood care education was the worst hit in this post period of the pandemic especially in Nigeria. It was recommended among other things that the government and parents should ensure that basic ICT gadgets like computers, laptops, iPads and other mobile devices be made available and accessible to all teachers and pupils in day care, nursery and kindergarten education through subsidies and loan facilities. This is to enable the pupils have effective teaching and learning through innovative educational practices in this post pandemic era and avoid the spread of Covid-19 pandemic again.

Keywords: *Innovative educational practice, early childhood care education, post pandemic era.*

Introduction

The world Health organization (WHO) Declared the 2019 corona virus disease as a pandemic in 2020 this was very devastating in numerous countries including Nigeria which made the Nigeria center for disease interventions and measures which includes the regular washing of hands with running water, the use of sanitizers, the wearing of nose masks social distancing and of course coughing and sneezing into your elbow especially when you are in public places and among a crowd. The presidential committee saddled with the responsibilities of Covid-19 control and update in Nigeria also came with other far-reaching measures such as closure of schools, markets, churches, banks and on social/public gatherings. This gradation negatively impacted on the educational, religious, social, cultural, economic and health sectors of both the stated and national economy resulting to unimaginable difficulty and hardship to both students who had to stop regular school and workers who were massively retrenched and others under-paid as a result of closure of most industries and work places.

The current Nigerian environment under the threat of post COVID-19 pandemic is causing series of transformation in the different spheres of social, political, labour, economic and educational life.

Different governments have launched emergency policy initiatives based on the suspension of classes and the closure of educational centers for continue teaching activities from homes telematically through a new innovative educational practices such as the use of information and communication technologies to be able to stop the number of infections (Zhang, Wang, Y., Yang & Wang, C., 2020). This study focused on the consequences of innovative educational practices in early childhood care education in post pandemic Era. Specifically, in the innovative educational practices that is assuming the transfer from face-to-face teaching to online teaching and how education professionals must face adaptation to the new global context through the online modality, a movement that has occurred and is occurring in a frantic and abrupt way. Consequently, education professionals are carrying out a process of assimilation toward new circumstances with a few difficulties, causing situations of high levels of stress.

A survey of more than 10,000 teachers according to Espino-Díaz, Fernandez-Camirero, Hernandez-Lloret, Gonzalez-Gonzalez and Alvarez-Castillo (2020), revealed that 92.8% of teachers suffered emotional exhaustion, stress, anguish, or anxiety due to confinement and distance education. Excessive bureaucratic tasks, unclear instructions, lack of support in teleworking and lack of technical means were the main problems pointed out by early childhood care teachers. Possible difficulties facing such innovative educational practices include poor online teaching infrastructure, lack of teacher training, information gap and complex home environment. In the same vein, Edeh, Nwafor, Obafemi, Sen, Atonye, Sharma and Alsayed (2020) also found that poor digital skills, school policies, digital divide, poor electricity, network issues, and inadequate facilities such as lack of computers, internet facility were some major barriers for innovative educational teaching and learning during and at the post pandemic era.

Conceptual Framework of Early Childhood Care Education

Early childhood care education is the earliest form of education given to children below the age of six years, parents, parents-surrogates and all other available relations. It is from this

type of education that parents launch the children into what is now known as formal education referred to as crèche, nursery and of course kindergarten.

Early childhood care and development (ECD) as defined by UNICEF State of the World's Children cited in Nzokurum and Nwankpa (2022) refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age. Early childhood care education is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entry to the primary school. The purpose of this level, according to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) include the norms to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; prepare the child for the primary school level of education; provision of adequate care and supervision for the children, while their parent are at work; develop a sense of cooperation and team-spirit; impart in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through exploration of nature, art, music and playing with toys; as well as teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes and the likes through play.

Maduewesi (2013) believes it encompasses the care, development and education of children below the age of six years. The earliest years of a child's life are very critical. This influence how the rest of childhood and adolescence unfold. Yet, in most developing countries including Nigeria, the policies, programmes and budget of the nations have not reflected the seriousness with which the matter ought to be addressed for sustainable development.

Before Nigeria became an independent country. It was rare to find Day Care Centers or Preschool institution. Most children stayed at home in the care of their grand parents, siblings, mothers, and relatives. There was also the extended family system, which helped in childcare and education through traditional methods, storytelling and folktales. These days' economic, demographic and social changes have brought about the need for extra familial early childhood care and education arrangements worldwide. Due to the economic situation or the country now, there is an increase in working women and the drift to the cities in search of white collar jobs. These had marked effects on the care and upbringing of children.

Early childhood care and education are given in day care centers, nursery and kindergarten schools. Patronage of these facilities is largely in metropolitan areas where those children are catered for either in an institution or at home by paid workers or helpers. For the purpose of this paper, early childhood education (ECE) is the education given to children between 0-6 years (pre-school) just before the start of formal primary education. It is the overall development of the child socially, physically and intellectually. So it is therefore conceptualized as encompassing the care, development and education of children below the age of six (6) years. It is a foundation for a lifelong learning from conception to six years old; children undergo rapid mental and physical development and must be encouraged to learn. Thus to achieve early childhood education, adequate attention must be given to early childhood development and care. Children need more stimulation and learning opportunities than their parents can provide. Therefore, the education of young children must be effectively organized and pursued vigorously by the government through well-articulated programmes like the day-care, nursery and kindergarten schools. The nature of this education that the child receives in the first five years of life is critical for his or her overall development and later life

chances. Early childhood education is thus considered as the bedrock upon which the other tiers of education are built therefore it must be given all the seriousness it deserves.

The goals of early childhood care education, according to Harvighurst cited in Nzokurum and Nwankpa (2022), include:

- a) Growing in independence.
- b) Learning to give and share as well as receive affection.
- c) Learning to get along with others.
- d) Developing self-control.
- e) Learning human and non-sexiest human roles.
- f) Beginning to understand their bodies.
- g) Learning and practicing large and small motor skills.
- h) Beginning to understand and control the physical world and
- i) Developing a positive feeling about their relationship to the world.

Concept of Innovative Educational Practices

Innovation is derived from the Latin word “innovatus” meaning altered. It is an aspect of educational change that involves the alteration of some aspects of educational programmes and practices. Sacks and Ruzzi cited in Nzokurum and Nwankpa(2022) reported on two popular innovative model approaches applicable to pre-school education. The first is the day-care, nursery and kindergarten philosophy built on the belief that children are highly capable learners who need minimal input to learn from their environments. Key elements of the day-care, nursery and kindergarten method are mixed age classroom (integrated), student autonomy in choosing learning tasks and experimental design. The second innovation is strong parent involvement to further the goals of promoting critical thinking and collaboration among young children. This one is popularly known as Reggio Emilia approach. It is focused on strong home-school relationships, long term projects, the recognition that children possess multiple symbolic languages, and the role of the child’s environment as teacher (Sacks & Ruzzi, 2015).

Meanwhile, innovative educational practice refers to the use of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) or multimedia technology as an innovative teaching and learning strategy in a problem-based learning environment by giving the pupils a multimedia project to train them in this skill set. This can be done through combination of various digital media types such as text, images, audio and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey information to an audience. It is any technology that enhances the learning experience. The term can be used to describe both analogue and digital technologies (Cullen, 2020). These innovative educational practices provided simulation features such as mock wards, patienthouses and intensive care surroundings as well as 360° field-of-view cameras for teaching and learning in early childhood care education.

Some Innovative Practices in Education

Innovation is the act of introducing something new, something unique and recreating of existing thing to be more functional. Some innovative educational practices currently referred to as the new normal include what Sheetal (2019) viewed as:

Constructivism and Teacher Education

The concept of Constructivism has evolved from cognitive psychology .Constructivist paradigm is based on the contributions of Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, Dewey, Tolman and many others. Thus, it is synthesis of many dominant perspectives on learning .It is believed that the key element of constructivist theory is that people learn by Innovative Practices in Teacher Education .An Overview Manisha Das Volume –I, Issue –IV .May 2015 17 actively constructing their own knowledge, comparing new knowledge with their previous understanding and using all these to come to new understanding. Constructivist learning is based on student's active participation in problem-solving and critical thinking regarding a learning activity. Students construct their own knowledge by testing ideas and approaches based on their prior knowledge and experience, applying them to new knowledge and with pre-existing intellectual constructs. The Teacher is a facilitator or a Coach who guides the student's critical thinking, analysis and synthesis abilities throughout the learning process. The Teacher is also a co-learner in the process. Hence, teachers should facilitate cognitive change by presenting difficulties through specific tasks that pose dilemmas to students .In this context, problem-solving teaching procedure is defined as a process of raising a problem in the such a way to stimulate purposeful, reflective thinking in arriving at a rational solution.

Blended-Learning and Teacher Education:

Blended-learning describes an approach to learning where teachers use technology, usually in the form of Web-Based instruction, in concert with and as a supplement to live instruction, or perhaps utilize components of a learner-centered Web course with components that require significant instructor presence and guidance. The strength of a blended-learning approach is that it provides a means to ensure learners are supported and guided as they undertake independent learning tasks. Use of the Web in such settings provides many affordances for the teacher and students in the form of communication channels, information sources and management tools. These aspects appear to make blended-learning particularly well suited to teacher training students, especially those in large groups where direct instructor support may be difficult to deliver.

Challenges on the Use of Innovative Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Education in Post Pandemic Era

In the period of lockdown, the situation in the society, that is, the covid-19 pandemic forced schools; day care, nursery and kindergarten, primary, secondary, and universities to adopt online teaching and learning. Therefore, some schools employed varied teaching and learning platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Google classroom, Microsoft teams, Edmodo, Skype, Google meet and school's learning management systems. These are beautiful technology-enhanced learning (TEL) or multimedia technologies for teaching and learning.

Despite their usefulness in helping learners improve their academic performance, there were some common problems that created a barrier to the innovative educational practice called technology-enhanced learning (TEL) teaching and learning. To Mahdy (2020) some of the common problems with innovative educational practice like technology-enhanced learning (TEL)during and after covid-19 pandemic were as follows: poor internet connection in rural areas, low speed and high cost of the internet, inadequate learning devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, and poor electricity generation. In the same vein,

Edeh et al. (2020) also found that poor digital skills, school policies, digital divide, poor electricity, network issues, and inadequate facilities such as lack of computers, internet facilities were some major barriers for innovative educational practices which is online teaching and learning during and after the covid-19 pandemic by schools. Adeoye, Adanikin and Adanikin (2020) noted some of the challenges to includes lack of preparedness of the institutions, lack of infrastructure, an epileptic power supply, high cost of Internet data services, paucity of funds and policies and issues in the education sector among others.

Possible Solutions to Remedy the Challenges on the Use of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Practices in Early Childhood Care Education in Post Pandemic Era

To address the specific problem of innovative educational practice called technology-enhanced learning (TEL) at the post pandemic era, Zhang, Wang, Y.; Yang and Wang, C. (2020) reported early child care educator should have digital competence and knowledge of the use of ICTs. This question becomes a crucial issue in the current context of early childhood care education in post pandemic era and its necessary adaptation. Different empirical studies have reported the improved knowledge of teachers' digital competence. In this sense, there are studies that report an alarming difference between the competencies that teachers should have to develop digital competence in their students and the ones they truly have (Fernández-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2016). This paper has confirmed the existence of an important gap in the teacher training in the use of innovative educational practices (ICT and its application) in the classroom. The new educational panorama requires the taking of a series of measures, among which the training needs of education professionals to facilitate the assimilation of the current context in which online teaching and the use of ICTs stands out. This implies that the covid-19 pandemic was a big determinant factor that moves towards to post pandemic era for early Childs' academic. It is against this background that the current paper focused on the challenges and solutions to improve on innovative educational practices in early childhood care education in post pandemic Era in Nigeria.

In addition, Nwafor and Osuji (2021) revealed that:

- a) The government and non-governmental bodies should ensure that basic ICT gadgets like computers, laptops, iPads and other mobile devices be made available and accessible to all lecturers and students in education through subsidies and loan facilities.
- b) The school management through the ICT department should ensure that broadband facilities are readily available in the schools to enhance the use of e-learning platforms for teaching and learning.
- c) Lecturers, students and parents should avail themselves for in-service training on the use of ICTs in teaching and learning.

Implication for guidance and counseling

Guidance by way of definition is a cluster of educational activities geared towards the creation of awareness which will in turn prevent problems and challenges for a social group. While counseling on the other hand is that process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between an individual troubled by problems with which he cannot cope alone, and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties (Udechulwu, 2014). This definition

clearly depict the fact that guidance is preventive while counseling as the other side of the coin, is curative. Moreover, the definition clearly show that is group-oriented while counseling is person-oriented. Both concept work hand in hand and are not by any means limited to what happens within the school settings especially after the horrifying effects of Covid-19 pandemic.

The post-pandemic era therefore yearn to parents and individuals to be more innovative and creative if the education of their children are going to be effective. Educationists and developmental psychologist posit that the type of guidance services we need in the post-pandemic era should be geared towards activity-centered learning. In this case, the preferred activity must be initiated by the pupils while the caregivers follow as participant-observers. In this type of innovation, physical activities are emphasized as well as graduated and systematic guidance in oral/verbal expression.

In the post pandemic era, guidance counsellors should emphasize aesthetic appreciation which must be taught and learned at the early childhood education stage through sketching/drawing with coloured pencils, appreciation and love for poetry through observation and listening to recitation of letters of the alphabets and numerals. This can be enhanced through television and DVD players.

Guidance counselor working with minders and caregivers encourage them to see their work with the babies as a calling and therefore should be done with deep passion, empathy, commitment and diligence. They must lead by example, knowing fully well that human beings, especially children between the ages of zero to five (0-5) years learn by observing and imitating those things the observed caregivers are therefore, to motivate the pupils' active and lively participation through arranging the classroom environment to be vibrant while they (the caregivers) will be acting as models, mentors, managers and moulders of characters and behaviours of the children towards to the desired set objectives.

As a final comment to be made in this regard, the guidance counselors should work with children/caregivers and minders towards inclusive education. Inclusive education as a concept is an educational setting where every child belongs and is accepted and supported by his or her peers, the teachers and of course with the collaboration of the Community to develop and achieve his/her potentials.

A careful reader will notice that the post-pandemic era came with numerous innovations in the educational sector. This included, the new normal characterized with e-learning, online education, television, inclusive education and activity- centered learning to mention but a few, which have all made early childhood education more vibrant, exciting, inspiring.

Conclusion

The study concluded that effective use of innovative educational practice such as technology-enhanced learning (TEL) in the implementation of early childhood care education in post pandemic era cannot be overemphasized. Early childhood care education were the worst hit in this post period of the pandemic especially in Nigeria. That was the need for this study to establish the challenges and solutions to the implementation of the innovative educational practices in early childhood care education. The study revealed myriads of challenges ranging from poor internet connection in rural areas, low speed and high cost of the internet, inadequate learning devices such as laptops, tablets, network issues, smartphones

and poor electricity generation. However, possible solution such as the digital competence and knowledge of the use of ICTs among others were the key to the success implementation of early childhood care education in post pandemic Era.

Suggestions

In the view of conclusion of the paper, the following suggestions are hereby made:

1. The present scattered curriculum, used by pre-primary schools in the country especially in Anambra State should be collated. Missing links such as value education, peace education, international language studies, computer studies and entrepreneurship, hospitality education etc, should be included to make it more robust in programme of activities.
2. Government at all levels and stakeholders should continue to organize seminars, workshops, conferences for teachers at the pre-primary level to enable them acquire the pedagogical know-how for teaching at that level.
3. Religious leaders, institutions and royal fathers who give awards should use such awards to show that the education of pupils and their caregivers are recognized and rewarded instead of giving such awards to the highest money-bags.
4. Government at all levels should sponsor guidance counselors and train them in ICT and e-learning, at the pre-primary school levels.

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