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**The Prevalence of Covid-19 Pandemic: The Effect and the Remedies to Child (5-12)  
Education in Akwa Ibom State**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The role of Education in the development of the child and the Nigerian Nation as a whole cannot be over emphasized. Traceable to the backdrop of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, various policies aimed at checking the transmission and spread of the virus were initiated by the government. These policies spanned from closure of schools, lockdown orders, social distancing to orders against social religious gatherings, as well as others. This research study examined ways Covid-19 pandemic has affected the overall development of child education and also examines remedies aimed at improving child education in Nigeria. Twenty-five (25) child school teachers of the upper basic in Uyo municipal were randomly selected to serve as respondents for the study. A self-structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The data were analyzed using mean score. Findings revealed 13 factors traceable to Covid-19 affecting child educational development. Twelve (12) remedies for improving child education were also revealed in the study. Based on the findings, the government and educational administrators were advised to train teachers for effective teaching delivery of the times. It was also recommended that the government should equip schools and individuals with the tools that could improve effective teaching/learning within Covid-19 pandemic.*

**KEYWORDS: Child education, Covid-19 pandemic, Akwa Ibom State**

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**Introduction**

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, a pandemic (WHO Director General's opening remarks at the mission briefing on Covid-19-2020). On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) implemented national school closures as a result of the effect of Covid-19 on an estimated 107 countries and with effect on 862

million children and young people across the world (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>). Consequent upon this, the Nigeria government initiated a policy on school closure based on evidence and assumptions from Covid-19 outbreaks that it will reduce social contacts among pupils and interrupt the transmission of the virus (Jackson, 2016). According to Studies in United Kingdom (UK) children and young people, the mean daily social contacts during holidays are approximately half that of school term days (Eames, 2010). Meanwhile, contacts between children at different schools, mixing between children and adults, as well as general movements actually increases during holidays and school closures (Eames, 2011), (Hens, 2009). However, the policy on school closure and social distancing measures are initiated to curdle the effect and impact of Covid-19, believing that the transmission of the Covid-19 virus is most likely to be driven by children. But to what extent are these measures of school closure effective in curtailing coronavirus outbreaks and spread? According to four systematic reviews of effects of school closure on influenza outbreaks or pandemics, school closure can be a useful control measure, although the effectiveness of mass school closures is often low (Brooks 2020). As analyzed by Jackson et al (2014), school closure strategies, whether national, regional, local or reactive, are often in response to children's infection rates. A UK Department of Health, 2014 in a systematic review, stated that school closures can reduce transmission of pandemic influenza if instituted early in outbreaks. According to modelling studies, the greatest effect of school closure result in greater reductions in peak than in cumulative attack rate and has the greatest effect if the virus has low transmissibility, and if attack rates are higher in children than in adults (Jackson, 2014). To avoid pupils and people shifting social distancing practices through a shift of social contacts to other non-school sites, the government initiated a lockdown order, compelling 70% population and work endeavors to be indoors. In Akwa Ibom State, based on the report on transmission and spread of Covid-19 virus across the state by National Committee on Disease Control (NCDC), the lockdown proved effective as there had been no new case of transmissions, over a period of time.

Pertinent indeed, the school closure and general lockdown order has adverse effect on the school teaching/learning programmes, suspending assessments and cumulative process, and hampering productivity and skill development in both the learners and teachers. The lockdown has caused untold economic harm on parents and guardians, health-care workers, and those in other spheres of endeavours. Due to parental loss of productivity caused by the effect of coronavirus (Covid-19) and its resultant effect on the immediate society, family care ranging from nuclear to extended parental care has collapsed. Pupils, now home cannot be taken care of and their educational needs not provided for.

School closure and social distancing is considered to be one major antidote to spread and transmission of coronavirus in the society. As narrated by Cowling (2020) in a 2020 systemic review of school closures and other social distancing measures during influenza outbreaks, compelling evidence were found that the virus spread and transmission reduced, particularly among school aged children (5-12 years). When schools reopened, a substantial evidence was established that transmission of the virus surged again. One major way of making school closure effective and reducing the spread of coronavirus among children in schools is by forcing parents to work at home, thereby reducing walk-related contacts (Cowling, 2020).

### **School Closure and Child's School Needs**

As a consequences of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, school closure had been instituted. This was meant to reduce transmission of the virus among pupils and teachers. To make the school closure effective, a total lockdown policy was created by the government, thereby forcing parents to work at home. With the Nigerian occupational and economic situation, a great percentage of parents are petty business dealers. The lockdown order meant to save lives by reducing the spread of the virus now generated untold hardship on parents due to low productivity on the parents. Children's welfare and provision of needs were hampered especially among the vulnerable children, free school meals and nutritional care of children were suspended, and social isolation on its own created a range of psychological harm on the generality of pupils' population... all these defects traceable to Covid-19 pandemic (Rashid, 2015). Emphasized by Nafisah et al. (2018), the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat Covid-19 is very weak and data from the outbreak and transmission impact suggests that school closures have relatively small effects on the spread within the Nigerian Community. The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General emphasized on March 12, 2020, that "all countries must strike a fine balance between protecting health, preventing economic and social disruption, and respecting human rights." (WHO, 2020). Today, children's school needs have been overlooked, instructions are spontaneously delivered to pupils through radio transmission, without some sense of diagnosis which is objective at meeting required instructional goals of teaching, which is to yield permanent change in the learner.

Consequently, Olaitan (2001) as sited in Shehu (2010), observed that there are insufficient number of teachers to teach technical skills and sometimes, complete absence of teachers who can manage digitalized instruction and training facilities. According to Mohammed (2012), this situation calls for urgent need to devise strategies for improving teaching/learning especially on radio and computer. Since the teacher serves as a mirror for the young learner to emulate or see himself, it is very important that a child sees and feels the presence of the teacher during instruction. The teacher's proximity to the learners is a motivating factor in learning especially when the teacher's creative potentials are high. As enunciated by Mohammed (2012), skills can only be learnt under a skilled teacher. Therefore, teachers are supported to undergo training on how to manage instructional delivery for effective skill development in the child using media/wireless channels within the lockdown period.

School closures has brought about much economic harm in the country and families. As suggested by Sadique (2008), in a UK study, approximately 16% of the workforce are the main caregivers for dependent children and are at very high risk of absenteeism if schools are closed, a proportion that rises to 30% in the health and social care sectors. Much as would be acknowledged by anyone, most care givers are either business men or health workers who have the obligation of providing for the children. School closure as mitigating interventions during influenza outbreaks like Covid-19 according to Bayham (2020) reduces clinical attack rate minimally but remarkably increases the economic cost to the nation, through lockdowns are forcing parents and guardians to stay at home. Disengaging caregivers from productivity hampers effective care of the children, thereby reducing on - time provision of the child's school needs. School closures and lockdown orders have resulted in rising cost of goods and services, taking gross domestic products for school related services to unbearable contentions. However, selected local closures has softened the situation as parents have access to services that boost productivity and enhance their productivity outputs. Sobers-Grannum (2010) suggests a less strict intervention than school closure, stressing that if schools stay open, with pupils who have chronic problems and other health calamities sent home,

productivity in the learners will be maintained. Fong (2020) emphasize that there are many other potential social distancing actions available for schools that are less drastic than full closure. Usher-Pines (2018) in a 2018 systematic review of such strategies noted that potential practices include suspending affected classes or year groups, changing school organization structure to reduce learners mixing up closely (such as closing play grounds, suspending non-essential activities and meetings). Increasing spacing between pupils in classes, shortening the school week, lunch times across groups or classes and creating teacher/learner sensitization models are key potential ways of managing schools and promoting productivity in teachers/learners while curdling the spread and inflicting effect of Covid-19. Studies suggest that this approach was an effective social distancing measure in this outbreak while reducing social disruption (Yen, 2014).

### **Statement of Problem**

The emergence of coronavirus outbreak pandemic resulted in school closures and general lockdown orders, thereby forcing parents, children and caregivers to stay at home. This order aimed at controlling the spread and transmission of the virus among children and public has invariably hampered productivity and affected parental involvement in providing for child school needs. Low child care and total reduction in the provision of child school needs is tremendously evident as parental work and financial productivity are grossly cut down. This study is instituted to bridge the gap created by this pandemic which has vehemently reduced the provision of child-care and school needs and proffer means for provision of adequate resources to cater for the child school needs and family productivity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine effect and remedies of Covid-19 on child (5 -12) education in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study determined;

1. Factors that constrain child-education within Covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Remedies and ways to improve child education within Covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the constraints to the development of child education within Covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State?
2. How can child (5 -12) education be improved within a Covid-19 pandemic driven environment in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State. Uyo is the capital of Akwa Ibom State and shelters forty-five (45) government child schools, situated within and outside Uyo capital territory. Twenty-five teachers of the upper basic schools were used as the population for the study. The teachers were randomly picked across the city, irrespective of school or area of study as the number used for study was too minimal. The instrument used for data collection was a 25-item self-structured questionnaire, developed based on events surrounding Covid-19 pandemic and school closure with their effects on child educational development. The child here is aged 5-12 years. 13 items constituted the constraints to child education under Covid-19 pandemic situation while 12 items constituted ways to improve child education in a Covid-19

outbreak. The questionnaire was arranged in a 5 Point-Likert form, from strongly agree to strongly disagree from where the respondents picked their scores. Face validation of the instrument was handled by 3 experts and the reliability index was obtained at 0.82 and 0.80 for reliability coefficient at each cluster using Cronbach Alpha. The entire reliability coefficient yielded 0.81. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher through personal contact. Twenty-five (25) copies of the instrument were administered and on the spot, validly returned after completion. Data collected were analyzed using mean score. Items ranging from a mean of 3.0 and above were considered as agreed while items below a mean of 3.0 were considered as disagreed.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What are the constraints to the development of Child Education within a Covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents in factors that constrain development of Child Education in a Covid-19 driven area**

S/N	Constrains to Development of Child Education	Mean	Remark
1.	Lack of provision of child school needs	3.7	Agreed
2.	Lack of trained teachers	4.5	Agreed
3.	Teachers' negative attitude to instruction on Radio	2.8	disagreed
4.	High risk of absenteeism	4.3	Agreed
5.	Lack of practical	4.0	Agreed
6.	Reduction of school time	3.7	Agreed
7.	Use of lecture method for basic classes on Radio	4.5	Agreed
8.	Lack of accessibility of learning materials	3.8	Agreed
9.	Poor method of diagnosis/evaluation	4.7	Agreed
10.	Zero teacher/learner interactions	4.5	Agreed
11.	Lack of parental support	3.6	Agreed
12.	Total closure of schools	4.0	Agreed
13.	Lack of funds for executing the programme	3.8	Agreed
<b>N = 25 Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.9</b>	

Table 1: indicates 12 out of 13 factors are agreed by teachers in upper basic as constraints to child education in a Covid-19 pandemic environment. The factors that constitute constraints to child educational development are lack of provision of child school needs, lack of trained teachers, high risk of absenteeism, lessons lack practical, reduction of school time, use of lecture method for basic classes on Radio, lack of accessibility of learning materials, poor method of diagnosis/evaluation, zero teacher/learner interactions, lack of parental support, total closure of schools, lack of funds for executing the programme, with a mean score range of 3.6 – 4.7

## Research Question 2

How can child (5-12) education be improved within a Covid-19 pandemic in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents in way to improve child education in a Covid-19 pandemic driven environment in Akwa Ibom State**

S/N	Constrains to Development of Child Education	Mean	Remark
1.	provision of child school needs	4.5	Agreed
2.	employment of trained teachers	4.6	Agreed
3.	teachers' positive attitude to instruction on Radio	3.8	Agreed
4.	regular attendance to lessons	3.5	Agreed
5.	use of teacher-centred methods of teaching	3.9	Agreed
6.	accessibility of learning materials	3.5	Agreed
7.	high parental support	4.6	Agreed
8.	partial closure of schools	4.8	Agreed
9.	regular teacher/learner interactions	3.7	Agreed
10.	sufficient periods for practical	4.2	Agreed
11.	effective methods of diagnosis/evaluation	3.6	Agreed
12.	provision of adequate funds	4.5	Agreed
<b>N = 25 Grand Mean</b>		<b>4.1</b>	

Table 2: indicates responses of the teachers of upper basic rating on 12 ways of developing child education within Covid-19 crises. Perceived factors recorded that improves child education ranged from a mean of 3.5 – 4.7, which fell within the agreed level of 3.0 and above. The ways of improving child education include: provision of child school needs, employment of trained teachers, teachers' positive attitude to instruction on Radio, regular attendance to lessons, use of teacher-lectured methods of teaching, accessibility of learning materials, high parental support, partial closure of schools, regular teacher/learner interactions, sufficient periods for practical, effective methods of diagnosis/evaluation, provision of adequate funds for the school programme.

## Discussion

Findings in table 1 show factors that constrain the development of child education. The factors include lack of provision of child school needs, lack of trained teachers, high risk of absenteeism, lessons lack practical, reduction of school time, use of lecture method for basic classes on Radio, lack of accessibility of learning materials, poor method of diagnosis/evaluation, zero teacher/learner interactions, lack of parental support, total closure of schools and lack of funds. The findings of this study re in agreement with that of Olaitan (2001) as cited in Shehu (2010) that there are insufficient number of teachers to teach technical skills meant to develop and sustain the child. Again, Mohammed (2012) postulated that skills can only be learnt by a skilled teacher, confirming that teachers should be trained to be able to contribute to the education of the child.

In line with these findings, Sadique (2008) emphasized that school closure results in real economic learn, resulting in parental unproductivity. Sadique (2008) stresses that this leads to high risk of absenteeism if schools are closed. The findings of this study is also in line with Fong (2020) who emphasized that there are potential social distancing actions for less drastic school closures.

Among them, Fong emphasized shortening the school week, changing school organizational structure to reduce learners mixing up closely and yet, learning effectively, spacing between pupils

in classes creating teacher/learner sensitization models are ways of promoting productivity in schools and supporting child educational development. According to Yen (2014), this model is an effective measure in this Covid-19 outbreak which while reducing social disruption, creates awareness for children to learn, have parental support and sustain learning skills.

The result from data 2 showed ways improving child educational development. These include employment of trained teachers, provision of child's school needs, teachers' positive attitude to instruction, regular attendance to lessons, use of teacher-centred method of teaching, accessibility of learning materials high parental support, partial closure of schools, regular teacher/learner interactions, effective methods of diagnoses/evaluation, and provision of adequate funds.

This is in line with the findings of Shehu (2010) that only a competent and qualified teacher should be employed to teach the child for positive and sustainable development to prowl. In support of this finding, Bayham (2020) emphasized school closure and lockdowns disengages parents and caregivers from productivity and thereby hampering effective care of the child, causes rising cost of goods and services, taking gross domestic products for school related services to unbearable contentions. Bayham (2020) calls for selective local closures and opined the situation softens closure effects as parents have access to services that boost productivity and boost outputs. This finding is in tandem with Sobers Grannum (2010) who suggested a less strict intervention than school closure as productivity in the learners will be sustained.

In support of learner/teacher interactions, Rashid (2015) reiterated social isolation on its own created a range of psychological harm on the generality of pupils' population. Usher-Pines (2018) revealed that creating teacher/learner sensitization models, keeping pupils in constant class groups while maintaining social isolation principles are ways of facilitating learners' productivity within Covid-19 crisis period. This is support of regular attendance to lessons, partial closure of schools, effective diagnosis and regular teacher/learner interactions.

## **Conclusion**

The effect of Covid-19 outbreak on child educational development cannot be over-emphasized. Curdling the negative effect of coronavirus pandemic on child educational development can be easy by employing trained teachers, having high parental support, regular teacher/learner interactions, applying effective method of learner diagnosis and providing the child's school needs, as well as other ways confirmed herein, in the findings. Effective child education is a fundamental means of developing the child to sustain the future and contribute to societal growth, for the good of the nation.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion that there are factors that constrain child educational development under Covid-19 pandemic and resultant remedies for curbing these constraints, the following recommendations are proffered. They are that,

1. Educational administrators should insist on employing trained and qualified teachers to manage child educational development.

2. Government, through the prudent potentials of administrators, should provide adequate funds to support child education.
3. Sensitization of teacher/learner for the maintenance of social distancing by the government will slow the spread of the virus while allowing productivity in learning and skill development.

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