

## COVID 19 PANDEMIC ERA: A SHIFT IN PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING CHILDREN LEARNING IN TODAY'S CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

*The study examines Covid 19 Pandemic Era: A Shift in Pedagogical Approach as a means in Improving Children Learning in Today's Classroom. The early years of a child's life are critical; these years determine the children surviving and thriving in life, and laid the foundations for their learning and holistic development. It is during the early years that children develop the cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills that they need to succeed in life. These early experiences are primarily determined by supportive family and early childhood educators, proper nutrition and health care, learning opportunities, which in turn are dependent on enabling policies and investments for young children and families. Pedagogy also is an important part of education and the recent role it plays show we can't but count on more utilization such as new pedagogy in daily class activities most especially in educating and training young children, most importantly due to the pandemic that struck the world as school and other part of the society now call and use contactless mediums in our dealings, one of which is the opportunity provided by some new pedagogies. This paper therefore addresses Covid 19 Pandemic Era: A Shift in Pedagogical Approach as a Means of Improving Children Learning in Today's Classroom. This paper covers some new pedagogies that promote more effective learning, reduce contact between teacher and learners, and among learner. It was recommended that there should be introduction of different innovative approach to explain the content to learners. It is a teacher who plays a vital part in pupils' success. So, it becomes the duty of a teacher to take a step towards accepting modern methods of teaching in teaching pupils.*

### Introduction

The early years of a child's life are critical, these years determine the child's surviving and thriving in life, and laid the foundations for her/ his learning and holistic development. During the early years that children develop the cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills that they need

to succeed in life. These early experiences are largely determined by supportive family and early childhood educators, proper nutrition and health care, learning opportunities, which in turn are dependent on enabling policies and investments for young children and families. In the last decade, a shift to greater societal reliance on technology as a result of Covid-19 Virus has mandated that young children's educators emphasize the use of technology as a play-based tool to tune into children's learning and cognitive engagement (Arnott, Palaiologou, & Gray, 2018; DeCoito & Richardson, 2018; Fleer, 2018).

The inescapable fact that digital technology is increasingly present within family life, and the reality that many young children are interacting with apps and high-tech toys, has driven early childhood education policy and research to unpack this for preschool teachers (Early Childhood Australia, 2018).

In March of 2020, most countries had to close all schools due to corona virus (COVID-19) school was closed down, classes moved online and remained closed for the rest of the academic year, teachers had to discontinue teaching in schools. As an alternative to pupil teaching, it was suggested that pupil teachers should observe videos of early childhood classrooms and present lessons to pupils online. The outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic across the world has profoundly altered almost all aspects of life, including education, young children in homes and schools, the lives of pre-service and in-service teachers, and the work of preschool teachers and Nigeria has not been an exception to these changes. The difficulty of handling the outbreak from spreading more widely has made world leaders develop super-strict rules so that the chain of the spread of COVID-19 can be broken.

Some standards that the World Health Organization (2019) has recommended, such as social distancing and physical distancing, have created difficult choices for each country to implement. In Indonesia, "large-scale social restrictions" were adopted in March 2020 due to the increasing number of people infected with COVID-19. These were other regulations followed these in the form of working from home for workers, praying from home, and homeschooling for pupils ranging from the early childhood education level to higher education. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020), as many as 1,186,127,211 learners were affected across the globe, or about 67.7% of the total enrolled learners from 144 country-wide closures, and nations had to change their learning systems due to COVID-19.

Changes in learning systems force schools to implement distance education or online learning, e-learning, distance education, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, and massive open online courses (MOOCs). The same conditions and rules apply in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), e-learning plans have been implemented, including digital and distance learning options, as feasible and appropriate to ensure the continuity of education for pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A report from The World Bank (2020) stated that several countries had implemented different learning systems as physical schools were closed due to COVID-19. For example, in early February 2020, China implemented an online learning system by holding simultaneous online learning exercises to ensure that learning for pupils was not interrupted. In Bulgaria, in early April 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science launched an e-learning system. In Finland, on account of school closures, instruction and guidance for pupils have been implemented by

distance learning, digital learning environments and solutions and, where necessary, independent learning. Several ways to support e-learning have been found that including creating an e-Content Repository, which publishes materials of pedagogical specialists for working in e-learning environments.

However, given the preschool context of the current study, amidst the varying play-based pedagogical practices in young children's education, the use of technology for preschoolers' science engagement remains rarely undertaken. The concept of early education lays emphasis on the fact that education should start as early as possible, this one being linked either to the preparation for a better understanding role in young children education, by parents or other persons that educate him, either to his enrolment in a kindergarten at the age of two. The second concept is more complex and rich in meanings, expresses the fact that early childhood education is a main domain, which should be described in multi-disciplinary way. In connection with this meaning of the term, concepts as child care, early childhood, and educational care for development are used.

According to Stephanie (2015) Pedagogy relates to the "how", or practice of educating. It refers to, "that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment" (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002). It concerns the "how" of adult and child interaction, whilst recognising that how children learn and develop at this stage is not just subject to what is intended to be taught, but it is also of particular importance how it is facilitated.

International studies recognise that children's capabilities are shaped by the quality and range of early experiences and interactions in both the home and ECEC environment. Experiences of young children in ECEC settings are defined by process quality. Process quality refers to the nature of the pedagogical interactions between ECEC staff and children, as well as interactions between peers, and with their environment. Research has shown these interactions and experiences are one of the most significant factors explaining the effects of care and early education on children's learning and development (Stephanie, 2015)

Pedagogical practice has been identified as a critical factor of pre-school children's learning and developmental achievements so this study aims to investigate current pre-school practice and to explore what should be done in the future. Quality pre-school education in the literature indicates the importance of teaching by using Learner-Centered Pedagogy. By definition, learner-centered pedagogy, also known as child centered learning, is a learning that mainly focuses on the needs and interests of the learners rather than those of other involved parties such as administrators and teachers in the education system (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Herbert, 2004, O'Sullivan, 2004). In this approach, the teacher is placed to facilitate the learning, and to focus on the needs, interests, and learning styles of the pupils. Previous studies indicate that the lack of pedagogical skills of teachers who work with young children is closely associated with children's delay in achievement of developmental goals and milestones and causes serious disadvantage in their future work and careers (Herbert, 2004, Sylva et al., 2003, Wood, 2004).

Learner-centered curricula have long been established in the education systems of the West, and have become increasingly desired in developing countries transitioning to democracy (Herbert, 2004, Mtika and Gates, 2010, O'Sullivan, 2004). According to Herbert (2004) "learner-

centered pedagogy becomes instantly appealing because it carries the promise of intellectual liberation from oppressive traditional approaches". Dewey considered education as a powerful agent of societal transformation; his model of education highlighted individualized learning based on active participation and empirical problem-solving (Dewey, 2004)/1916. Dewey's highlighted his views and interests in a democratic education, i.e a deeper perception must focus on the freedom to act as the only means of self-realization available to the individual in a school or classroom context.

On the other hand, Vygotsky's major contributions to today's pedagogical practice are his epistemological views on the nature of human knowledge and influential factors which determine its acquisition (Vygotsky, 1997). The central concept of Vygotskian social constructivism relevant to the present pedagogy is his claim that an individual's knowledge is not transmitted from one person to another (Tracey and Morrow, 2012), but rather it is actively constructed or rather, co-constructed through interactions among learners within a defined sociocultural context (Bell, 2011, Tracey and Morrow, 2012, Wertsch, 1991, Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, knowledge is not external to the learner and awaiting detection by her or him; rather, knowledge "is created through a process of new information interacting with the prior knowledge and experiences of learners" (duPlessis & Muzaffar, 2010). From this perspective, knowledge needs to be engaged rather than "delivered" or "transmitted".

Herbert (2004) asserts that the common aspects to both Dewey's and Vygotsky's approaches is heavy emphasis on learner-centredness, as well as the promotion of active knowledge attainment through exploration, discovery, and reflection rather than passive absorption of facts and skills through rote learning and drilling. Hence, today's pedagogies based on Dewey's and Vygotsky's ideas are "often referred to as learner-based and learner-paced, the latter highlighting the need to tailor instruction to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each individual learner" (Herbert, 2004). That means each person learns differently, hence an individual child's achievement should not be compared to that of other children, but only can be assessed in terms of his/ her own individual progress such as the use of standardized tests (Al-Zu'be, 2013).

### **Pedagogy and its Forms**

According to Learning Portal (2021) Pedagogy refers to the "interactions between teachers, pupils, and the learning environment and the learning tasks." This broad term includes how teachers and pupils relate together as well as the instructional approaches implemented in the classroom. Pedagogical approaches are often placed on a spectrum from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy; though these two approaches may seem contradictory, they can often complement each other in the realisation of educational goals for example, a teacher-centered approach may be useful to introduce a new theme, while a learner-centered approach may be necessary to allow pupils to explore these ideas and develop a deeper understanding.

**Teacher-Centered Pedagogy:** Teacher-centered pedagogy positions the teacher at the centre of the learning process and typically relies on methods such as whole-class lecture, rote memorization, and chorus answers (i.e., call-and-response). This approach is often criticized, especially when pupils complete only lower-order tasks and are afraid of the teacher. However,

whole-class teaching can be effective when teachers frequently ask pupils to explain and elaborate key ideas, rather than merely lecture.

***Learner-Centered Pedagogy:*** This pedagogical approach has many associated terms (e.g., constructivist, pupil-centered, participatory, active), but generally draws on learning theories suggesting learners should play an active role in the learning process. Pupils therefore use prior knowledge and new experiences to create knowledge. The teacher facilitates this process, but also creates and structures the conditions for learning. Considerable research and advocacy has promoted learner-centered pedagogy in recent years for economic, cognitive, and political reasons. Some research suggests this approach can be very effective but it is also difficult to measure consistently. It is often challenging for teachers to shift from teacher-centered pedagogy to learner-centered pedagogy, and so considerable support may be needed if this is an important goal for a given education system.

***Learning-Centered Pedagogy:*** “Learning-centered pedagogy” is a relatively new term that acknowledges both learner-centered and teacher-centered pedagogy can be effective, but teachers must consider the local context, including the number of pupils in the class, the physical environment, the availability of teaching and learning materials, etc. It suggests that teachers should be flexible and carefully adapt their pedagogical approaches based upon the school environment.

### **Meaning and Nature of Pre-school**

A pre-school, also known as nursery school, Preschool school, or play school, is an educational establishment or learning space offering early childhood education to children before they begin compulsory education at primary school. It may be publicly or privately operated, and may be subsidized from public funds. Preschool is an early childhood program in which children combine learning with play in a program run by professionally trained adults. Children are most commonly enrolled in preschool between the ages of three and five, though those as young as two can attend some schools. Preschools are different from traditional day care in that their emphasis is learning and development rather than enabling parents to work or pursue other activities (Encyclopedia of Children’s Health, 2021).

According to the Encyclopedia (2019), Preschool is an early childhood program in which children combine learning to play in a program run by professionally trained adults. Children are most commonly enrolled in preschool between the ages of three and five, though those as young as two can attend some schools. Preschools are different from traditional day care in that their emphasis is learning and development rather than enabling parents to work or pursue other activities. Preschool may be privately owned and operate as for profits, independent, non-profits, and programs sponsored by religious organizations and maintain an educational philosophy in accord with the parent institution. Though the margin is small, private preschools still claimed the majority of total preschool enrollment. The educational quality of private preschools varies from program to program. Regulation is primarily by state child care agencies, but the arrangement varies from state to state (ESSLE, 2020). As a result of federal government policy on at least a year compulsory preschool education, a growing number of states have started to fund preschool



programs offered at public schools, called Preschool programs. They may be administered by the local school board or by an independent body form by the school. Preschool types in Nigeria as prescribed in the national minimum (NMS, 2004) standards for IECD implementation in Nigeria are as follows: Day Care/crèche (for ages 0-2 years), Pre-nursery/Play group; (ages 3-4 years), Nursery/Kindergarten (ages 3-5 years). These may exist together or independently. They may also be home based, centre based, or mobile.

According to Encyclopaedia Social Sciences and the Law Education (2020), Preschool is an early childhood program in which children combine learning with play in a program run by professionally trained adults. Children are most commonly enrolled in preschool between the ages of one and five, though those that are younger can attend. Preschools are more than traditional day care, in preschool, emphasis is on learning and development rather than enabling parents to work or pursue other activities.

### **Common pedagogical approaches in Early Childhood Education**

Scholars in the field of early childhood education are still debating the inclusion of digital technologies in play-based pedagogy and our understanding of digital play in early childhood education is still developing. Technology, digital media and popular culture form an important aspect of young children's life-worlds in contemporary post-industrial societies. A problem for early childhood educators is how to most effectively integrate these aspects of children's life-worlds into the provision of play-based learning. Traditionally, research has considered barriers to teacher uptake of technologies in the early years, or teacher beliefs and attitudes about using technologies with young children. An alternative perspective focuses on children's play as the foundation for early childhood curriculum provision and argues that what is needed instead are "new" concepts of play more appropriate for explaining children's contemporary play experiences in post-industrial societies. Although early childhood education teachers' are competent users of digital technologies in their personal lives and the classrooms have been digitalised to a large extent, the teachers are still hesitant in embedding these in their curriculum practices (Fayiz, 2016; Ioanna 2016 & Susan 2016).

There has been development of a pedagogy that enables young children to learn in developmentally appropriate play-based and pupil-focused environments (Sandra, 2016). Incorporation of digital technology into pedagogical practices has been seen in early childhood education (ECE). Teachers incorporated digital storytelling in their classrooms to enhance learning. The results emphasis on specific points may assist teachers, parents, educational researchers and education policy-makers in using technological tools in young children's learning environments (Pelin, 2016). A further area worthy of investigation involves the role of content in early childhood education, specifically the relationship between content, context and pedagogy. Digital literacy is an important aspect to consider within teacher education as a way to address twenty-first century learner needs, particularly in early childhood contexts where developmental concerns should be paramount in making instructional design decisions (Lee, 2017). A nature-based social-emotional approach to supporting young children's holistic development that can be applied in a range of early childhood settings from forest kindergartens and nature-based preschools to more traditional centre-based early childhood programs. "The Social-Emotional and Environmental Education Development (SEED) Framework" blends early childhood education,

environmental education, and social emotional development through the integration of best practice (Deborah, 2016).

### **Traditional Teaching Methods**

The traditional methods of teaching are still prevalent in most parts of our nation. In educational institutions, teachers are the only source to gain information. Teachers explain the concept to the learners with the use of blackboard and chalk. They write all the contents on the blackboard and ask the students to note it down in their notebooks and memorize and recite the notes (Eduvoice, 2021).

### **Advantages of Traditional Teaching Methods**

Traditional teaching methods have many advantages: Traditional teaching methods, i.e., classroom-based teaching, is not as expensive as modern teaching methods. So, the rural areas can practice it with no stress of finance; In traditional methods of teaching, pupils and teachers form strong bonds, and they interact more than modern teaching methods; Discipline can be maintained better in traditional teaching settings than in modern ways of teaching; There are some subjects such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics that need a blackboard explanation and can be understood well when explaining on a blackboard; Technical knowledge is not needed in traditional teaching methods like modern teaching methods require a more specialized approach; Unlike modern teaching methods, traditional teaching methods do not harm the eyes of pupils (Eduvoice, 2021).

### **Game Based Learning as Innovative Teaching Approach**

Taking into account the fact that games represent a main aspect of children specific trajectory of development, it is time to reconsider game influence. Starting from traditional games, as they are understood, also digital games can have their contribution to the child's education and evolution. When the game is used in education, it gets significant psycho-pedagogical functions, ensuring an active participation of children in learning process. Actually games can be used in education, bringing added value to educational practice. Game Based Learning (GBL) is an innovative approach, and the studies in the field of GBL show a clear relation between playing digital games and learning. A number of several reasons have been argued in favor of digital games as learning tools, with the more cited argument being that they can enhance pupils' motivation towards learning because of their engaging nature. Indeed, digital games can provide challenging experiences that promote the intrinsic satisfaction of the players, keeping them engaged and motivated.

### **Play-Based Learning**

Play-based learning is a fundamental concept for explaining how children in their early years learn and develop. The efficacy of a pedagogical practice and approach is linked to how well it facilitates play in the learning environment. A further dimension of this notion examines the forms of play used and which are found to be most effective in helping children to learn and develop. Traditionally, free play, that is, activities that are initiated and freely chosen by the child, and sustained without adult interference, is perceived as the purest form of play and is most highly

valued by early year's practitioners, especially in ECEC systems with socio-pedagogic traditions (Walsh et al., 2010).

However, research by Sylva (1984) demonstrates that some activities are more engaging and stimulating for children (e.g. art, puzzles and games, constructional materials) than others (e.g. dough, sand and dressing up). Play has been found to contribute to a child's development most when it is regarded as meaningful. Meaningful play is seen as a medium for learning when "play opportunities offered to children are playful and engaging to them" (Stephen, 2010: pp.4). It is thus worth differentiating between unguided and guided free play. Unguided free play is found to be far less effective in stimulating early learning than guided free play.

### Delivering Pupils' Teaching Online

The following sections describe the different phases of planning, implementation, and reflection in redesigning the process for the practicum for the pupil teachers. Many problem-solving skills are required for any teacher educators, whether they are teaching online or in face-to-face classes. With no other option but to offer courses online due to recent school closures in the USA as a result of COVID-19, teachers decided to take a new path and design an online course for the pupil practicum which was required to teach in 2020.

### Advantages of Modern Pedagogical Approach

Modern pedagogical approach has many advantages: Unlike traditional teaching methods, modern teaching methods are more interactive and keep pupils intact. It maintains the interest of pupils by animations and videos; the visual medium is way better than any other medium to give instructions. It helps to memorize the concept fast and for a more extended period than reading; Modern teaching methods are less time-consuming. Teachers take less time to cover the syllabus. Writing on the blackboard is not required; Blackboard explanation of content is less explanatory than a representation of videos and animations used in the modern teaching methods (Eduvoice, 2021).

### Conclusion

After a detailed study of different pedagogical approach, it is difficult to select which pedagogical way of teaching is better, both traditional teaching methods and modern teaching methods have their pros and cons. They are similar but also different from each other. Modern teaching methods should consider conventional methods of teaching as its base and teachers should not neglect it completely while incorporating the new ones. However, modern teaching methods are suitable for the current century to cope up with surroundings and recent happenings in the environments. While technology undoubtedly has changed education, many educators opt to use a more traditional, low tech approach to learning. Most pedagogical approach requires a physical presence and interaction between the educator and the pupils. Additionally, some research has shown that low-tech classrooms may boost learning. For example, pupils who take handwritten notes have better recall than pupils who take typed notes.

Another downside of technology in the classroom may be that pupils exposed to spell check and autocorrect features at an earlier age may be weaker in spelling and writing skills.



Ultimately, tailoring the learning experience to different types of learners is incredibly important, and sometimes pupils work better with a low-tech approach. As the primary teaching strategy under the teacher-centered approach, direct instruction utilizes passive learning, or the idea that pupils can learn what they need to through listening and watching very precise instruction. Teachers and caregivers act as the sole supplier of knowledge, and under the direct instruction model, teachers often utilize systematic, scripted lesson plans. Direct instruction programs include exactly what the teacher should say, and activities that pupils should complete, for every minute of the lesson. Because it does not include pupil preferences or give them opportunities for hands-on or alternative types of learning, direct instruction is extremely teacher-centered. It's also fairly low-tech, often relying on the use of textbooks and workbooks instead of computers. The new ways of teaching make pupils more productive and encourage them to collaborate. Both methods are effective but which will be done during this time is the question, and clearly, the importance of modern teaching methods can be felt clearly.

### Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social inequalities, inequity and exclusion, while paradoxically presenting an opportunity to strengthen social relations, guided by solidarity and collaboration in pursuit of the common good, and also by responsibility for the care of others, as an essential dimension of one's own care and survival. The current crisis has given new meaning to educational system globally, it is highly recommended that:

- i. The introduction of different innovative approach to explain the content to learners is the responsibility of teachers to teach pupils with suitable and modern methods. It is a teacher who plays a vital part in pupils' success. So, it becomes the duty of a teacher to take a step towards accepting modern methods of teaching in teaching pupils.
- ii. To provide a sound education, there should be an amalgamation of a skilled teacher and innovative ways of teaching, so that pupils' will be ready with not only theoretical knowledge but also with practical experience of subjects to face the world and compete against their competitors.
- iii. Further studies and research into the success or otherwise of this sudden migration from traditional face-to-face teaching to online education is therefore recommended as this will provide the necessary data and findings on how effective this sudden change has been to students.

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