AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.3, May-August, 2021https://ajemates.org

# TEACHERS' AWARENESS OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AMIDST COVID-19 ERA FOR ENHANCED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**Dr. Adaeze Oguegbu**
Liberty University, Virginia, USA
aoguegbu@liberty.edu

***ABSTRACT***

The study investigated the assessment of teachers' awareness of communicable diseases in primary schools amidst covid-19 era for enhanced academic performance. The study which was hinged on two research questions and one hypothesis adopted descriptive survey design. The population consists of all the primary schools in Idemili South Local Government Area. Using simple random sampling techniques, ten primary schools were selected and the teachers of these ten schools numbering 150 constitute the respondents. The researcher designed an instrument titled "Communicable Diseases Impact Awareness Questionnaire" (CDIAQ). The validity of the instrument was ensured. The reliability of the instrument was achieved through the internal consistency reliability method which was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test and 0.8 was obtained which certified the dependability of the instrument. Mean and standard deviation was used the answer the research questions. The findings revealed that the impact of communicable diseases among primary school children is enormous as many teachers allow these kids with such ailment to still attend school thereby aiding the spread which is detrimental to the academic performance of the children who often times miss school due to the intensity of the disease. The researcher thus recommended that teachers should be acquainted with the names and symptoms of communicable diseases so as to enable them dictate and identify them at the on-set and permit such child to remain at home until proven well so as to curb the spread of such contagious disease for enhanced academic performance for it takes a healthy mind to tackle academic work.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Communicable Diseases, Primary School, Covid-19 and Academic Performance.

## Introduction

Nigeria is one of the nations of the world that is stricken with high level of poor infrastructural and social amenities especially in education industry. Many Nigerian schools are totally deficient when it comes to school facilities as there are classrooms without windows, licking roofs, uncemented floor, no toilet facilities, unavailable water supply and a host of others. This lack of essential facilities exposed the children to health hazard. The open windows do not allow them to control the inflow of air and are therefore exposed to cold related sickness especially during the rainy season. The floor has to be swept of course for neatness not minding the inhalation of dust by the pupils who are so tender for any form of protection thus endangering their health status. To be precise, educational facilities in Nigerian schools is inadequate thus hampering objectives attainment (Anyanwu & Odunlami, 2020).

Even when the sickness rears its ugly head, the teachers are unable to identify and recognise such on time to avoid its spread by advising the sick child to remain at home until the child gets better thus put the entire class members and even the teacher in jeopardy. It is obvious that many parents are oblivious of the impact of

contagious disease on other occupants but teachers who could have enlighten them are either ignorant too and/or nonchalant about the whole scenario. This has negatively impacted the academic performance of these innocent children. It could also be that the teachers do not know that it is their obligation to permit such person to stay home and/or that the teachers are afraid of the reaction of the parents who may feel that their child is been stigmatized. All the same, the most important thing is to avert the spread of this contagious disease and put the child back to active life.

Communicable disease is that type of disease that can easily be transferred from one person to another. It is also referred to as transmissible or contagious disease. This disease could emanate from virus and/or bacteria. According to Ewuzie (2005), these ailments are certainly triggered by organisms such as viruses and worms upon finding its way into the human body. Most of these organisms could be transmissible from infected person to another person and this is what is called contagious diseases. Examples of communicable diseases are cold, measles, mumps and gonorrhoea.

Communicable diseases are classified into five groups depending on the channel through which they infect the body system as stipulated by Ewuzie: 52,thus;

1. Air-borne diseases
2. Water born/food-borne diseases
3. Animal/insect borne and other vector borne diseases
4. Contact disease
5. Parasitic infections (helminthes)

Kandola (2020) listed the causes to include pathogens like bacteria, viruses, fungi and protists. Mode of transmission is

- Direct contact with a person carrying the pathogen.
- Contact with contaminated fluids such as blood, mucus or saliva
- Inhaling contaminated droplets from another person's cough or sneeze.
- Receiving a bite from an animal or insect carrying the pathogen.
- Consuming contaminated water or foods.

On another development, Boutayeb (2010) posited that some of the causes of communicable disease include; lack of infrastructural facilities occasioned by poor economy. It could also be recalled on the impact of covid-19 in Nigeria affected not only the children but every aspect of the economy was crippled.

Types of Pathogens and Symptoms

Rhinovirus; these viruses cause common cold and the symptoms include;

a. A stuffy or runny nose
b. Sore throat
c. Headache

This can be transmitted from one person to another through inhaling contaminated droplets from the cough or sneeze of infected person. It could also spread through touching of surfaces already infected by the victim.

Influenza viruses are diseases that attack the respiratory system. The symptoms are;

- Chills or fever
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headaches
- Muscle or body aches
- Fatigue

Communicable diseases caused by bacteria include; Salmonella and Escherichia coli. This illness attacks the digestive system. It came through contaminated foods like uncooked meant, unwashed fruits and vegetables. Symptoms include;

i) Abdominal cramps
ii) Diarrhoea
iii) Fever
iv) Headache

In her submission, Boutayeb (2010) & Prince Edward Island (2016) reiterated that infectious disease happens when a microorganism enters a person's body and causes harm. The scholar added that they spread through skin contact, transfer of bodily fluids, contact with faeces, ingesting contaminated food or water, inhaling airborne particles or droplets, touching an object that a person carrying the pathogen has touched. Air borne diseases include chicken pox, mumps, measles. Whooping cough, covid-19 etc.''.Other communicable diseases according to Coordinated Student Health Services (2021) are lice (pediculosiscaptis), ring worm-scalp and body, scabies, etc. Moeti (2021) smallpox, cholera, lymphatic filariasis, etc. are all forms of communicable diseases. Mayo Clinic Staff (2021) described communicable disease as illnesses caused by organisms like bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites thus listed the general symptoms to include;

i) Fever
ii) Diarrhoea
iii) Fatigue
iv) Muscles aches
v) Coughing etc.

The scholars noted that such symptoms could escalate to;

a) Having trouble breathing
b) Severe coughing
c) Severe headache with fever
d) Rash or swelling
e) Prolonged fever
f) Visual problems

The scholars further stressed that infectious disease could be contacted through contaminated foods and water among others and emphasized that this mode of transmission enables the diseases to infect many people within a space of time.

Communicable disease is the kind of disease that can easily be transferred from one person to another through body contacts or injection of fluid from the affected person. The sufferer is in a state of discomfort, bodily pains and diseased. This condition according to Boutayeb (2010) sometimes results to negative impact in education thus hindering human development, bedridden and eventual death.

Prevention of contagious diseases means steps to be followed to avoid contacting transmissible diseases. Communicable diseases could be prevented by keeping the environment clean and staying away from infected person(s). Department of Public Health (2021) shared the same view and expressed that healthy habits prevents germs and infectious disease thus listed a number of healthy habits to include;

- Handle and prepare food under good hygienic condition. Food items could carry germs and therefore need to be washed with clean water.
- Hand washing should be done regularly with running water and soap.
- Clean surface areas with disinfectants.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or elbow.
- Do not share personal items like cup, spoon, towel etc.
- Go for immunization as and when due.
- Avoid close contacts with animals whether domestic or wild.
- Ensure you stay home anytime you feel sick.

Population Health Division (2021) itemized some infection control practices to include;

a) Hand washing
b) Infection control standard, contact, droplets and airborne precautions.
c) Procedures for decontamination of persons and disinfection of equipment and the environment.
d) Quarantine of contacts

e) Prophylaxis of exposed individuals.
f) Control of the vectors of infection

It is believed that when all these preventive and control measures are adequately put in place that primary school children will stand a better chance of living a healthy life thus desirous of academic pursuit.

**Statement of the Problem**

Incidences of children in school falling for one communicable disease or the other is eminent among schools in Nigeria and in Anambra State in particular. This disease definitely started from a particular pupil who kept coming to school amidst the ill health until it spreads to some other ones which often times results in closure of the entire school. The researcher is worried that if the teachers are aware of the names and signs of such diseases and their negative impact on the students and the attendant poor academic performance, the spread could have been averted upon noticing it on one or two persons. Early dictation of such sickness could also be addressed. Such contagious diseases have proven to be the of cause drop in school enrolment, inactive class participation, withdrawal from school and eventual death. The researcher is therefore desirous of ensuring that at the event of such ailment, actions are quickly taken to forestall its spread so as to enable healthy ones continue their studies uninterrupted for enhanced academic performance. This is even more crucial in this era of covid-19 pandemic. All of these warranted this study.

**Research questions**

1. What is the level of teachers' awareness on the names of communicable diseases among primary school children?
2. What is the level of teachers' awareness on the symptoms of communicable diseases among primary school children?

**Research Method**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population consists of all the primary schools in Idemili South Local Government Area. Using simple random sampling techniques, ten primary schools were selected and the teachers of these ten schools numbering 150 constitute the respondents. The researcher designed an instrument titled "Communicable Diseases Impact Awareness Questionnaire" (CDIAQ). The validity of the instrument was ensured. The reliability of the instrument was achieved through the internal consistency reliability method which was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test and 0.8 was obtained which certified the dependability of the instrument. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. The instrument utilized the four point Likert scale thus Very high extent, High extent, Low extent, very low extent and were weighted as follows; 4+3+2+1+=10/4=2.5. The criterion mean is therefore 2.5 which means that any ratings score that is 2.5 and above is accepted as high extent while anything short of that is taken as low extent. Out of 150 questionnaires distributed, 136 was retrieved and utilized for the study.

**Presentation of Results**

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of teachers' awareness of the names of communicable diseases among primary school children?

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**Table 1: Response from the respondents on the teachers' awareness of the names of communicable diseases among primary school children.**

| S/N | Itm Statement | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | To what extent are the following illness regardedas communicable diseases; | | | |
| 1. | Cholera2.8 | 1.8 | High extent | |
| 2. | Measles | 3.5 | 1.3 | High extent |
| 3. | Chicken pox | 3.6 | 1.6 | High extent |
| 4. | Mumps | 2.6 | 2.1 | High extent |
| 5. | Ring worm | 3.0 | 1.5 | High extent |
| 6. | Whooping cough | 2.0 | 2.3 | Low extent |
| 7. | Covid-19 | 3.9 | 1.2 | High extent |
| 8. | Salmonella | 1.5 | 1.0 | Low extent |
| 9. | Dysentery | 3.0 | 2.2 | High extent |
| 10. | Conjunctivitis | 3.8 | 2.0 | High extent |
| | Aggregate | 2.97 | 1.7 | |

Table showed that the respondents regarded the diseases listed in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10 to high extent communicable diseases with the mean scores ranging from 3.9-2.6 while the SD fall within 1.0-2.3. It is only items 6 and 8 that agreed to a low extent that the items are communicable diseases with mean ratings fluctuating between 1.5-2.0 while the SD fall within 1.0 and 2.3. The aggregate mean and SD stood at 2.9 -1.7 respectively.

**Research Question 2:** What is the level of teachers' awareness of the symptoms of communicable diseases among primary school children?

**Table 2: Response of teachers' on the awareness of the symptoms of communicable diseases among primary school children**

| S/N | Item Statement | Mean | SD | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | To what extent do you agree with the following Are symptoms of communicable diseases; | | | |
| 1. | Fever | 2.3 | 1.8 | Low extent |
| 2. | Diarrhoea | 1.8 | 1.5 | Low extent |
| 3. | Fatigue | 2.2 | 1.6 | Low extent |
| 4. | Muscles aches | 2.5 | 2.0 | High extent |
| 5. | Chills or fever | 2.4 | 1.4 | low extent |
| 6. | Stuffy or runny nose | 2.3 | 1.8 | Low extent |
| 7. | Sore throat | 2.7 | 1.3 | High extent |
| 8. | Cough | 2.4 | 1.8 | Low extent |
| 9. | Headaches | 2.8 | 2.3 | High extent |
| 10. | Stomach cramps | 3.0 | 1.2 | High extent |
| Aggregate | | 2.4 | 1.67 | |

Table 2 showed that respondents agreed to a low extent on the symptoms of the communicable diseases as seen it items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 with the mean scores ranging from 1.8-2.4 with the SD falling within1.5-1.4. The respondents agreed to a high extent on the symptoms of communicable diseases as shown in items 4, 7, 9 and 10 with the mean score ranging between 2.5 and 3.00 with the SD of 2.0-1.2 in that order. The aggregate mean and SD stood at 2.4 and 1.67 accordingly.

**Discussion of Findings**

The first finding of this study was that primary school teachers are aware of the types and names of communicable diseases. This is necessary as these ailments discomforts the sufferer which could affect not only the academic achievement but also national development (Boutayeb,2010). This is the reason that identifying the cause could help in averting the impending dangers it has among school children. It is based on the hills of this development that (Adams, 2020) stressed that it could lead to bodily harm thus eventual death if not arrested from the on-set.

The second finding of the study is that primary school teachers are not familiar with the symptoms of the communicable disease and this attests to the fact that the spread is rampant as the teachers do not know when to permit the affected person to stay home pending when there is improved health status. Prince Edward Island (2016) acknowledged the dangers of the illness and emphasized that the signs should not be neglected to avoid intensifying to a more serious ailment. Ewuzie (2005) also reiterated that the organisms causing this havoc could multiply rapidly thus weighing the victim down in no distant time and such also applies to the swift spread of such deadly virus such as covid-19.

**Conclusion**

Based on the study, it is concluded that teachers of primary school children are aware of the types of communicable diseases by names but do not know the symptoms that accompany their presence. This is disastrous because before the teachers could ascertain that a particular child is diseased, the symptoms must have escalated and spread made to other pupils in the class. When the teachers are aware of the ailments and their symptoms, they stand the chance of instructing the affected ones to stay home thus curb the spread leading healthy, vibrant and enthusiastic children eager to participate actively in the academic milieu for a better society.

**Recommendation**

From the findings of this study, it is recommended as follows;

1. The teachers should not only be enlightened on the names of this transmissible ailments but should also be informed about the cause so as to see ways of preventing such for a healthier living and improved academic performance.
2. The teachers should again be sensitized on the symptoms of these ailments for early dictation is imperative.

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