

Using Exercise Book Cover to Sensitize In-school Kids in Developing Countries about COVID-19: A Doable Prevention StrategyKehinde K. Kanmodi^{1,2,3,4}, Precious A. Kanmodi^{1,2,5}¹COVID-19 Research Team, Cephas Health Research Initiative Inc, Ibadan, Nigeria²COVID-19 Research Team, Mental and Oral Health Development Organization Inc, Birnin Kebbi, Nigeria³Dental Clinic, Adonai Hospital, Karu, Nigeria⁴Department of Community Health, Aminu Musa Habib College of Health Science and Technology, Yauri, Nigeria⁵Department of Statistics, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria***Corresponding author:**

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Abstract

The new coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a pandemic disease, affecting several millions of lives. As a way of curbing the spread of COVID-19, the governments of many developing countries recently imposed massive lockdown on its populace, involving closure of schools. Realistically, the closure of schools cannot be eternal, since school education of citizens is a vital component of sustainable development. Since there is a high possibility that schools will be opened in future, we recommend that relevant public health stakeholders involved in the prevention and control of COVID-19 should adopt the use of exercise book covers to relay information to school children on how to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 disease.

Keywords: *Children, Sensitization, School, COVID-19, Coronavirus.*

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COVID-19 is a deadly respiratory disease caused by a single-stranded RNA virus called SARS-CoV-2 (1,2). The disease was first reported in the City of Wuhan, China, around the end of December 2019 (3). From Wuhan, the disease had spread to other parts of China and also to other countries in the world (3). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 report on May 13, 2020, a total of 4170424 people had been infected with the disease and 287399 people had died as a result of the disease, globally (4).

As a way of slowing down the rate of spread of SARS-CoV-2, many of countries had enforced the use of massive lockdown strategies in order to restrict human movement so as to deter the rate of human-to-human transmission of the virus (5). However, due to the negative effects of lockdowns on the educational and socio-economic sectors, many countries had started easing the lockdowns, allowing for business enterprises and schools to re-open and continue their regular operations (5-7).

All countries under lockdown due to COVID-19 are in serious dilemma (6,7), as the persistent closure of schools due to fears of rapid COVID-19 spread poses a threat to the educational development and the future of a nation while re-opening up schools, so that educational activities can resume, will as well facilitate the rapid spread of COVID-19 among school children.

Importantly, it must not be forgotten that school children are very vivacious, irrespective of where they live (urban or rural), and they often play together in groups. Worrisomely, many schools in low-income and middle-income countries are understaffed (8); hence, it may be very difficult for school teachers and wardens of primary and secondary schools in these countries to always ensure that social distancing and other precautionary measures against COVID-19 are practiced among school children, more especially those in primary schools. To make it worse, many local communities in low-income and middle-income countries, more especially in African countries, lack access to electricity and internet facilities, and other basic social amenities, such as television, newspaper and radio services (9); hence, many families (parents and children) living in these deprived communities may not be well-informed about COVID-19. However, quite a number of these afore-described local communities have schools and this can be considered a fortunate situation.

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It is somewhat rare to see a school-going child that will not have at least one exercise book in his/her possession. Just as a hoe is a companion of a local peasant farmer, so also exercise books are companions of children in both primary and secondary schools, be it in an urban or local community. We, the authors of this letter, can vividly remember when we were in school. The covers of the exercise books we used back then had colorful prints with interesting information on soccer, amusement/recreational places (such as parks (e.g. Disneyland Park in California [USA], zoos, botanical gardens, game reserves, water falls, etc.), monuments (e.g. Taj Mahal building in Agra [India], Heifel Tower in Paris [France], Statue of Liberty in New York [USA], etc.), historical events (such as Nigeria Independence Day), food brands (such as milk, chocolate drink, and other beverages) mathematical operations, and others. Through our consumption of those interesting information printed on our exercise book covers, we got to know about some events, scientific facts, and places where we have never been before.

Based on our estimation, a full exercise book cover (front and back, together) can averagely take one hundred (100) words and a picture. A printed 100-word information and picture on COVID-19 on a full exercise book can be used to consistently sensitize school children on COVID-19. Also, on an exercise book cover, information on the emergency lines and addresses of surveillance offices can also be included.

Since exercise books are close companions of school children, as they use them (i.e. exercise books) to document notes in classrooms as well as assignments; hence, school children can always refer to such covers for COVID-19-related information if those exercise books have COVID-19 information on their exercise book covers. Therefore, the covers can consistently sensitize and remind school children about COVID-19 and its prevention strategies.

Based on all that have been said above, we highly recommend that:

- I. Relevant government agencies (such as ministries/departments of health and education) and other relevant stakeholders should adopt the use of exercise book covers in sensitizing school children about COVID-19 as part of COVID-19 prevention strategies (unfortunately, only the non-blind and non-mentally retarded school children can maximally benefit from this sensitization strategy; hence, we are

also recommending if workable strategies on how to sensitize children with special care needs (such as those with visual impairments, mental retardation, etc.) can also be developed, so that no child will be left behind in the sensitization campaign against COVID-19).

- II. In the information that will be printed on the covers of exercise books of school children, it will be very helpful if relevant and beautiful illustrations are added to make such information very interesting for school children to read and understand. Also, the content of the information should be centered on how to: identify a person with COVID-19 symptoms; prevent the transmission of COVID-19; how to report a suspected case of COVID-19 to a COVID-19 surveillance focal person; and how to disabuse the mind of children against COVID-19 associated stigmatizations.
- III. All concerned stakeholders that would like to adopt the use of this strategy (i.e. the use of exercise book cover to sensitize school children on COVID-19) should also adopt the use of scientific research methods to monitor and evaluate the level of efficacy of the strategy.
- IV. The strategy should be discontinued as soon as COVID-19 pandemic has been eradicated in a country affected by the disease.

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Authors' Contribution

KKK contributed to the conception and design of the study, acquired, analyzed and interpreted the data, and drafted and revised the manuscript. PAK contributed to the design of the study, data interpretation and critically revised the manuscript.

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