



EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE NIGERIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic was originated in Wuhan, China, in 2019 and gradually it crept into other parts of the world. In the year 2020, February precisely, the pandemic entered into Nigeria. This virus took the whole country by surprise and the effects were evident in all sectors of the Nigerian society especially the educational, economic and health sectors. It is on this platform that this paper considers the areas of damage done by the pandemic at the various levels of the Nigerian school system, highlighting some prospects and making suggestions on how to tackle further pandemic or disastrous challenges should there be any, to avoid the challenges the system of education is currently facing.

Keywords: *Coronavirus (COVID-19), Pandemic, Education, Economy, Virtual Education, Nigeria.*

Introduction

According to the ESPI (2019) in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics, about 40.1% of the population in Nigeria (The Giant of Africa in terms of oil production and population) is considered poor. This calls to say that for every fourth individual in a population of ten Nigerians, has per capital expenditure below \$400. Based on the report given by UNICEF (2020) 10.5 million of Nigerian children between the ages of 5 – 14 years, are not enrolled in schools. In fact, the report has it that basically, 61% of children between the ages of 6 – 11 years are unable to go to primary schools. Furthermore, the report states that many schools both in the northeast and northwest of the country record more than half of the female children not been enrolled in schools; this is as a result of cultural marginalization and thereby depriving the girl-child of acquiring the basic education (UNICEF, 2020). From the above report, it is needless to stress that a serious challenge was already on ground in the educational sector of the country before the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic therefore, gave

rise to more challenges not only in the educational sector but in the economic and general life of the global world.

Prior to the pandemic, the Nigerian society was already attempting to ensure that children of school age, are placed in schools with proper access to education, especially since the Nigerian population constitute about 20% of the total out of school population but the emergency of the pandemic halted that struggle. Despite the fact that the pandemic hit the country so hard in an unprecedented manner, it helped revolutionized digital and online education especially globally; although, children in rural and underserved communities in areas like Rivers, Lagos, most parts of the north, etc are left out because of the lack of basic information and communication technological facilities, to adapt or transit to the new and innovative instructional approaches.

On the economic aspect, there was a sharp drop in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. This was as a result of the slowdown in economic activities after the country resulted to a lockdown in the month of April, 2020 to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

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Prior to the emergence of the pandemic outbreak, there was a forecast by the World Bank, on the decline of 3.2% for the year 2020, a 5% point drop from its previous projections (NBS, 2020).

Despite the recession from 2014 – 2016, the World Bank asserts that Nigeria's economy may be headed towards the worst financial state the country has witnessed in four decades. The country depends almost solely on crude oil which is reflected in 80% of the nation's export. According to NBS (2020), with international travels halted due to the pandemic, there has been a record of an 18year decrease on fuel prices, at \$22 per barrel. Some economics experts furthermore assert that the country's revenue flow is likely to decrease to 1.1 trillion naira (about \$3 billion). This is about 4.4 trillion naira decline from the beginning of the 2020 year.

Based on the report issued by the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) 42% of almost 2,000 of the citizens interviewed, were out of job due to the pandemic. Of all the households interviewed, the report has it that the poorest households saw the highest share of unemployment, at a jarring 45%. Beside, in March, 2020, 79% of the reported households saw a decrease in their income.

Apart from the areas highlighted above, other sectors of the Nigerian society also partook in the hurting effects of the pandemic. For instance, the general price increase in common goods such as bread, water, oil (palm and groundnut oil), etc increased shortly after the lockdown. A single loaf of bread increased from ₦350 to ₦450 or ₦500 as the case may be (around \$1.09 to \$1.21). In fact, Nigeria's economy is currently facing a harmful downturn as the consumption of goods, investments and net exports decrease.

From the little introduction, we can deduce that the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Nigerian society is enormous and the far reaching effects on the society will linger for quite a long while except prompt and constructive action is taken. It is on this platform that this

paper seeks to research on possible solutions for the Nigerian society.

The Concept of Education

According to Okoh and Omordu (2014) education is the activity of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another. It breeds all round development of the individual for life in the society. It also brings about change (overt or covert, implicit or explicit). For Osaat (2002) the products of education are intellectual, economic, socio-political and moral development. These definitions simply put means that, education is the process by which a society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions by a morally acceptable manner transmits knowledge, norms/elements of culture, values and skills from generation to generation (Osaat, 2010).

A Brief History of the Emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus disease is defined as illness caused by a novel Coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome, Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2; formally called 2019-nCoV). It was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. However, it was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 31st, 2019. In January 30th, 2020, the WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global health emergency. In March, 11th, 2020, the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H₁N₁ influenza, a pandemic in 2009.

Illness caused by SARS-COV-2 was termed COVID-19 by the WHO, the acronym derived from "Coronavirus disease 2019". The name was chosen to avoid stigmatizing the virus' origins in terms of population, geography, or animal associations. In February 11th, 2020, the Coronavirus Study Group of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses issued a statement announcing an official designation for the novel virus severe acute respiratory syndrome, Coronavirus 2 (SARS-



COV-2) (David, 2019). Below is the statistical report of some frontline countries that were badly affected by the virus.

Table 1: Showing identified cases, deaths and recovered cases in some frontline countries

Countries	Identified Cases	Deaths	Recovered Cases
USA	34,242,866	613, 052	28,220,863
UK	4,528,442	127,854	4,279,393
Russia	5,156,250	124,895	4,761,899
China	91,316	4,636	86,267

The Far Reaching Effects of COVID-19 on Education in Nigeria

Like many other African countries, with zero recorded cases as of January, 2020, Nigeria was spared. The luck however did not last as by February 28th, the first case of the pandemic was recorded. Two months afterwards, about 343 confirmed cases of infected persons were recorded, with 91 recoveries and 10 deaths. This raised a pressing cause for alarm in the Nigerian society (Aduragba-Hussain, 2021).

This scary development forced the Nigerian ministry of education into announcing a temporary close-down of all schools in Nigeria, which was in March 23rd, 2020. This was in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. With the already prevalent state of the Nigerian education sector, a big challenge was posed. The question of how the education sector would cater for the academic needs of the 46 million affected students was a challenge coupled with the unavailability of technological tools in most public and private schools in the country. Other challenges that came up were, if individual households had the facilities to engage their children in remote learning and if teachers had the resources to deliver live lessons or recorded open online courses or even virtual learning.

The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education was unable to come up with a clear-cut policy measures on how to

India	29,089,069	353,557	27,504,126
Brazil	17,038,260	477,307	15,494,071
Nigeria	166,918	2,117	163,259
South Africa	1,704,058	57,183	1,587,015
Ghana	94, 228	787	92, 362
Total	92,111,407	1,761,388	82,189,255
Globally	174,802,787	3,764,256	158,228,033

Compiled by Osaat, Jerry & Elems-Ikwegbu (10/6/2021)

mitigate learning disruptions for children or how to address the digital divide created by the pandemic. The only well documented response was the Nigerian Education in Emergency Working Group (NWiWwg) Strategy, published in April 7th, 2020 (Aduragba-Hussain, 2021). The objective of the strategy was to mitigate the negative impacts of school closures on students and teachers in the North-East region of Nigeria.

Commendable was the efforts of the government in the health and economic sectors but ignoring the education sector would have been disastrous as that is the bedrock of the society. According to UNESCO (2020) the temporary school closures came with high social and economic costs, with severe impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Whereas children from poor socio-economic backgrounds were left behind, their counterparts (children with high end of the socio-economic spectrum) experienced less disruption to their learning because their private schools were well-equipped with ICT infrastructure, and they were able to afford remote learning resources while at home. This created a further divide among them as the former lagged behind in curriculum content while the latter, made reasonable progress. These students were left struggling because they were from vulnerable and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, where they could not have access to computers and other devices outside the school. These



were children who lived in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and unreliable power supply.

Although, there were some measures by some state ministries of education put in place, to carry all students along. Such states as Ogun and Lagos, adopted local media channels such as radio and television programmes, to reach out to students in remote communities but this could not achieve a 100% as most students in rural areas, lacked electricity supply and even such gadgets as radio and television.

The Impacts on Primary and Secondary School Pupils/Students

To successfully nurture and raise a child's latent skills and abilities, the child must be involved in regular school attendance. But unfortunately, schools in Nigeria were temporarily closed down for about nine months and this resulted to significant negative consequences on the skills acquisition and growth of the learners. Worthy of note is the key role played by schooling; it enhances adequate learning but when the students were made to stay at home almost without learning, learners were deprived of the opportunities for academic growth and development (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020).

According to Agbele and Oyelade (2020) the disadvantages of school closure are enormous for underprivileged students who tended to have fewer or no educational opportunities outside school. They further assert that, the closure of schools, colleges and universities does not only interrupt the teaching of students around the world, it also coincides with a key assessment period and many examinations were postponed or cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, Cambridge International Examinations that included Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge O' level, Cambridge AICE Diploma and Cambridge Pre-U Examinations for May/June, 2020, were all cancelled worldwide. Even though the candidates were awarded grades based on their forecast grades

forwarded by their teachers to a large extent, this cannot represent the students actual performance with the availability of some teachers' biased and influenced grading system.

Furthermore into cancelled examinations are: the cancellation of International Baccalaureate Examination, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT) etc. Some West African examinations such as the West African Senior Secondary School Council Examination (WASSCE) was postponed too. The ugly implication of this was that the involved students were unable to study especially since there was lack of motivation in some homes and more of distractions with the availability of television sets, online games, social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, etc). For parents who could afford home lesson teachers, their children were kept academically busy but for majority who could not, their children were left unaided considering the literacy levels of some parents that even after resumption, the effect of a long stay without study on the students, posed a huge challenge to teachers.

For the children at pre-primary and primary levels virtual and online learning were proposed by the Nigerian government for them. Schools with high economic backgrounds were able to meet up this task but those in majorly rural and parts of urban areas, could not meet up. The implication of this was that, the pupils virtually lost out not only in curriculum contents for two terms but in knowledge retention. One can categorically say that the learners resumed schooling as tabula-rasa (blank slates) since most of what they learnt previously were lost by them.

According to Adalokun (2020) based on the account of the UNESCO, about 35.9 million primary and secondary school learners were during that period, out of school as a result of the school closures. He went further to assert that for primary schools, the number totaled approximately 25.6 million students, of which about 87% (23.5 million) are students enrolled in public schools. The members



were just as stark for secondary school learners. Of the roughly 10.3 million secondary school students who were out-of-school as a result of the closures, approximately 81% (8.4 million) of them were public school students. There is therefore, no assurance that all the learners who left the school came back after the pandemic lockdown. Some may have changed their lives' views seeing that going to school as a waste of time thereby engaging in trades, businesses, or even restive activities, shifting their attention away from school, and some may have even died, etc (Adelakun, 2020).

Furthermore on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the school system is the disruption of an already existing schooling activities such as the changing of the schools' annual calendar and schedules; and in fact for the Nigerian school system to be able to compete with the world's educational system, many grounds need to be covered seriously. Some school facilities were even damaged during the schools' lockdown as a result of not being used, especially in public schools while some were stolen. The far reaching effects of the pandemic on the schooling system are enormous and can't be overlooked.

The Effects on Teachers

The impact of the Covid-19 school closures was not evident in the learners alone but also the teachers. For instances, many private school teachers were not remunerated during the lockdown. Reason being that the school owners could not meet up with salary payments since students could not pay up their fees. Some of these affected teachers lost their jobs immediately after resumption as their employers could only make do with few teachers. This resulted to the inadequate provision of their family needs hence, starvation. Some resulted to certain psychological challenges such as fear, anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. Some lost their lives and even loved ones due to lack of financial backup. While this was their fate, some of their counterparts in private schools were being paid but deducted salaries which almost amounted to nothing, yet some got

commensurable remuneration. However, those in public schools were favoured enough. One can out rightly say that this led to a socio-economic divide among teachers.

The Effects on Universities and University Students

The pandemic severely affected the careers of university students and disrupted the tertiary institutions' calendar. The final year students were mostly at the sad receiving end. Some private universities that engaged their students in online teachings could not as a matter of fact, conduct examinations or assess their students as building a trust in their students was a major setback in an online learning environment (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020).

Furthermore, the graduation period for the final year students has been elongated and they are likely to graduate at the beginning of a global recession which implies a more critical state of unemployment for the Nigerian youth. In fact up until now, schools in Nigeria are yet to officially organize convocation programmes for their students except for a few virtual convocations organised by private schools like Babcock University.

The Effects on School Leavers and Young Graduates

It is evidently clear that students in terminal classes and even higher levels of education in Nigeria were held on a spot because they were unable to graduate and proceed to the next phase of their academic endeavours. Education is beautiful and fulfilling when there is a smooth progression in all of its levels especially getting graduated and contributing positively to the growth and development of one's society. The final year students never pleased with the emergence of the pandemic and the resultant closure of schools. This is particularly because they experienced major teaching interruptions in the final parts of their studies, assessments, and facing a dawn of global recession at the peak of their graduation which automatically implies a severe rate of unemployment. Judging from the fact that prior to the pandemic, there was a high rate of unemployment among the youth, there is every tendency that the economy of the country is experiencing a drastic economic meltdown or



epileptic after the lockdown, how then can graduates secure menial or desired jobs in such a situation. According to Adalakun (2020) evidence suggests that poor market conditions of labour market entering cause workers to accept lower paid jobs for survival first, and that this has permanent effects on the careers of some graduates because they have been doing the jobs far not related to their areas of specialization for so many years which has rendered them unfulfilled in their choices of careers.

The Place of Virtual Education in Nigeria During the Lockdown

Virtual education is an instruction in a learning environment where a teacher and students are separated by time and/or space and the teacher provides course content through ICT based methods such as internet, multimedia resources, and video conferencing.

Among the interventions to ensure continuous learning of children despite the closure of schools were: teaching via various online platforms; using the traditional media, radio and TV to disseminate education contents; and using home-based teaching by parents and caregivers including virtual learning. While these initiatives were great, some lapses were identified especially with virtual learning, at different categories (Oladunjoye, 2020).

One of the features of virtual education is its advantage in times of crisis such as man-made or natural disasters and pandemics such as Covid-19. It attempts not to keep or deprive students learning while at home. Agbele and Oyelade (2020) state that trends in educational issues indicate that online education would transform the education sector by eradicating manual processes across schools and replacing them with modern and dynamic online digital learning which will eventually create a more collaborative and interactive learning environment for students.

Irrespective of the many advantages attached to virtual education and the contribution it made during the

lockdown, there were still certain challenges it faced and even currently in Nigeria.

1) Cost and Time: Virtual education is time consuming especially in the areas of training ICT personnel and online development of content. It is also cost intensive because it requires large sums of money for acquiring the devices needed and their maintenance. With the sudden outbreak of the pandemic, the Nigerian government was caught unawares hence weren't ready for such. Some financially stabled private school owners were able to explore this though it cost the parents involved much money while those who could not afford it, were left behind.

2) Lack of Electricity Supply: Some authors have described the electricity supply situation of Nigeria as epileptic. Many cities in urban areas lack 24hours power supply talk more of rural areas. Virtual education requires constant electric power supply but unfortunately the Nigerian society is still battling with the possibility of that. The implication is that generators or plants will be used with fuel and diesel and this cost virtually exorbitant prices.

3) The Challenge of Slow Learners: One of the challenges of virtual education is the absence of direct communication between learners and the teacher. All learners are not the same. Some are fast learners; some are average while some are slow. Slow learners will certainly face the challenge of slow comprehension due to the absence of the teacher to carefully and slowly guide them through their learning pace.

4) Poor Network and Internet Services: The lack of effective digital devices, adequate internet services or WiFi connectivity will cause setbacks in virtual education. Not all educators and learners have access to adequate internet in their areas and this is a prerequisite in virtual education. Hence without it, virtual education will not be a successful reality.



5) Disparity in Curriculum/Scheme of Work

Content: There is curriculum content disparity as schools do not teach same topics. While some schools are ahead, some are behind. There is no clear stipulation by the government in their educational policies and there is no uniformity, adequate quality control as well as e-content delivery in the learning processes (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020).

Effects on the Economy of the Nation

With many Nigerians made unemployed by Covid-19, combined with lower volumes of exports such as oil, Nigeria's economy was contracted by 6.1% year on year in the second quarter of this 2020. 27% of Nigeria's labour force (over 21 million Nigerians) is unemployed. There is also little sign of a quick turnaround in Nigeria's economic woes as the World Bank predicts Africa's most populous country is set for its worst recession in four decades (N.B.S, 2020).

As with most other economies around the world, the sharp drop in Nigeria's GDP growth is largely down to the slowdown in economic activity after the country resorted to a lockdown back in April 2020, to curb the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. In the wake of the pandemic, the World Bank forecast a decline of 3.2% for 2020, 5% drop from its previous projections. Despite that the lockdown has been eased, the economy is yet to be fully revived. The economy has been crippled. The steep drop in oil prices amid a drop in global demand left Nigeria drastically short of earnings given its dependence on the commodity as its biggest revenue source (C.B.N.E.R, 2020).

So far, while Nigeria has avoided a public health crisis, on the economic front, the pandemic has disrupted lives and caused economic insecurity and hardship for households, business activities and severely impacted the government's finances. Due to restrictions on movement and travel, many of the country's formal 41.5 million micro-enterprises (96% of all businesses in the country)

which account for more than 80% of total employment, had to either close or scale back operations.

Since the pandemic began, the rates of moderate or severe food insecurity among Nigerian households have increased significantly. According to the National Bureau of Statistics NBS (2020), the Covid-19 impact monitoring report states that 68% of Nigerian households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in August, down from 78.8 in June and almost doubled to the rate of 37% measured in the NBS, Feb/Jun, 2019 General Household Panel (GHS) post-harvest survey. In fact, it is evident that the pandemic touched all spheres of human endeavours in the Nigerian society.

Prospects of the Pandemic on the Nigerian Education System

There remain reasons to be hopeful for Nigerians' economic, social, and educational lives despite the far reaching effects of the pandemic. Early in the pandemic, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) performed contact tracing calls to prevent the spread of Covid-19. These calls were made to people deemed "passengers of interest", or those who travel in recent weeks. Not only did these call help slow the spread of the virus by enforcing self-isolation, they also created a sense of comfort. The calls aided monitoring symptoms and provided psychological encouragements during an unprecedented time.

The Strategic Advisory Group of Education in Emergency working group has identified and agreed on objectives, activities and indicators for the Education Covid-19 response strategy. Response framework has been designed according to a specific need resulting from Covid-19 crisis. This response framework was defined to give partners ideas on how they could support in the prevention, how they can continue to support learners during this period and more detailed guidance on how the education partners could support the Ministries of Education for the restarting of learning and the activities to prioritize when the shutdown of schools was lifted.



As a control tool, it ensured a harmonized response across schools and minimized duplication of efforts across Education Cluster partners. The three strategic selected objectives that linked the Covid-19 main consequences on school system, school closure (before, during and after school reopening) were:

- (1) Prevent spread and transmission of Coronavirus through and among learners, teachers, parents and SBMC.
- (2) Mitigate/minimize the impact of school closure due to Covid-19 on learning and wellbeing of learners, teachers, parents and SBMC through alternative solutions.
- (3) Ensure effective, inclusive and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers and SBMC (NEEWG, 2020).

The expected result of this is that, learners, teachers and school SBMC are aware of the pandemic, the mode of transmission, signs of infection and mitigation/referral measures, they also received updates on the pandemic situation and information and guidance on alternative learning solution, and the enablement of children easily accessing quality educational opportunities through learning at home/distanced or radio/tv education programmes and virtual learning also, keep their learning behaviours at home (NEEWG, 2020).

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the national school closure was executed on more than half of the world's student populace, in a bid to stop the spread of the pandemic. Despite the sit at home/lockdown ordinances, learning should be a continuous process. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, made some countries including some states in Nigeria such as Borno, Kaduna, Lagos, Oyo and Ogun, to consider a web-based learning approach. E-learning is no more to be thought of as in future tense; it is here already, and thankfully, it is an answer to teaching problems. Although, a few Nigerian schools such as the University of Ibadan's distant learning centre, National

Open University of Nigeria, and some private universities, in addition to the traditional face to face method of learning currently offered e-learning at most levels of post-secondary education.

However, with the emergence of the pandemic and the drastic effects it had on the educational level, the eyes of the Nigerian ministry of education got opened to the fact that enormous strategies and efforts should be given to virtual learning or education with regards to its benefits. If virtual education had been taken serious in the Nigerian school system prior to the pandemic, certainly, the negative effect the school system suffered wouldn't have amounted to the level it found itself. Hence, the Nigerian government should ensure to prioritize digital learning so as to measure up with the worldwide standard of education.

Conclusion

We cannot overlook the disastrous effects the Covid-19 pandemic had on all sectors of the world especially education. The Nigerian system of education was among the many systems in the world that was badly affected. A large number of students got their education disrupted while some few were able to scale through especially since they could afford digital learning.

The economy of the country bled and even after the ease of the lockdown, the effect is still being felt by the Nigerian populace. The situation affected all aspects of life especially education. In this process, many came to the realization of the importance of virtual/digital learning in the Nigerian school system. Although the Nigerian government through certain agencies, tried to face the challenges the pandemic caused, through the introduction of tv/radio programmes and other media but all of these were not without challenges which to an extent, frustrated the efforts of the government.

On this note, there is a wake-up call to the Nigerian government to look critically into the system of education, make reviews and adopt pragmatic educational policies should there be further cases of disasters or



crises, and more especially, for the Nigerian school system to meet up with the world's standard of education.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges raised in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- The Nigerian government should endeavour to build standard schools with well-equipped digital learning facilities such as videos, lesson broadcasting (radio and tv), free Google classroom, zoom, cloud-based peer-to-peer, inclusive of the traditional method of instruction, so as to meet up against future pandemic situations.
- The government should ensure there are improvements in the educational sector especially in the curriculum planning, putting into consideration impending pandemic situations in order to bridge the gap of inequality of educational opportunities.
- The teachers and students/learners should be trained on how to make use of digital learning facilities and instructions should encourage learner-centred learning, lessons should be made interactive enough with the promotion of group-based learning.
- The job security of private school teachers should be guaranteed especially in pandemic situations. The government should therefore monitor, supervise and regulate the affairs of private schools for the interests of the welfare of private school teachers.

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