



REMOTE LEARNING FOR OPTIMIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING AND IN POST COVID-19 ERA: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Educational establishments in Africa of which Nigeria is one, practise mainly the conventional methods of learning. This means they adhere to the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning setting. However, when the killer disease known as Covid-19 which was caused by Coronavirus broke out and ravaged the whole world, educational institutions began to have a rethink. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease a pandemic. The pandemic has totally altered people's lifestyles across the globe, Nigeria inclusive. Governments of various countries have advised their citizens to limit travelling to the barest minimum as hand washing, face mask and social distancing have been made mandatory. The ugly condition challenged all educational systems all over the globe and educators were compelled to move to virtual teaching without delay. Many institutions of learning which were reluctant initially to embrace change and jettison their traditional methods had no choice but to divert to online remote learning. This article includes teaching and learning as epistemological tools, strategies for remote learning, the challenges encountered by educators and learners in the course of it and how remote learning can serve as panacea for optimizing teaching and learning during crisis.

Keywords: Remote learning, teaching, learning and Covid-19.

Introduction

Li, Ren, Zhao, Hu, Zhang, Fan, Xu, Gu and Cheng (2020), note that a new coronavirus known as covid-19 was found in 2019 in Wuhan. The Director General of WHO, declared the virus a pandemic in March 2020. This came after assessing the manner at which the virus and its severity throughout the world. As Coronavirus ravages the whole world, including Nigeria since 2019, schools and businesses were and some are still shut down. Some academic institutions especially the privately owned ones have resorted to remote learning. However, some schools especially the public schools lack enough resources to provide learning options for learners, and most learners cannot access internet at home. Remote learning can be defined as a technique in education which can help ensure that students don't miss out on their academics during school closures such as the one we encountered during the lockdown.

This tragedy of the pandemic has shaken up the education sector to no small degree. With little or no

training, educators made quick choices about how to review their curriculum for remote instruction. Educational units worldwide were grappling to discover solutions to overcome the challenging situation. Rieley (2020) notes that the circumstances made the world understand that scheme planning are a pressing need for schools. It was a condition that required compassion and oneness. Protection of the lives of all and sundry in the country was most paramount in people's minds.

Remote learning has become a conquistador amidst the chaos; it is no more an option but a necessity (Dhawan, 2020). As a result, the e-learning sector has experienced a boom. Apps such as Zoom, Webex, Google teams and WhatsApp are becoming a norm for students, teachers, and parents. With this boom comes the necessity to own a smart device and reliable internet connection.

Teaching and Learning as Epistemological Tools.

In philosophy of education, epistemological questions are made relevant to educational theory and practice.



Osaat (2010:47) avers that ‘‘epistemology is the aspect of philosophy that serves as the first to all matters of education including theory, practice and the problem of knowledge.’’ He professes that epistemological investigation deals with the nature of knowledge and truth, ground of experience and belief. The knowledge per se comes from various sources also called types of knowledge which include mystical, revealed, authoritative, intuitive, factual, common-sense, rational and empirical knowledge. The knowledge acquired by professionals from these sources must be transmitted to learners by the activity of teaching and learning.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are epistemological tools because knowledge must be transmitted to the learner. In teaching, something is made known to others. It is a medium of making something or knowledge known to others in a professional routine of the learning institution. Teaching stage must professionally set for successful teaching to result in effective learning. So teaching involves the teacher, subject matter and the students in a well-defined environment. Osaat and Ideri (2015) see teaching as involving more components than earlier identified. They identified a fundamental change in learning and also in teaching. This projection involving fundamental change in teaching and learning was made by Cheng. Cheng (2002) sees the 21st century perspective of education needs to be shifted from the ancient site-bounded paradigm to a new triplization paradigm. According to Qsaat and Ideri (2015), the new perspective stresses that learning should be without border. It should be distinguished by individualization, localization and globalization applying Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The teaching and learning procedures now involve more than subject matter, teacher and student/learner but including ICT, model facilities and complex teacher-model for the changing phases in education. Cheng (2004) emphasizes the fusion of ICT in teacher education and identified three waves in the employment of ICT to teacher education. They are:

The First Wave: Teacher Internal Effectiveness (TIE) - here efforts should be put in to enhance performance

through the procedures and techniques of teaching and learning in institutions of learning. There are three models in this wave namely: Goal and Task Model (GTM), Working Process Model (WPM) and the Absence of Problem Model (APM).

The Second Wave: Teacher Interface Effectiveness (TIE) emphasizes standard of education, stakeholders’ contentment and market competitiveness. It has four models which include: Resources Utilization Model (RUM), School Constituencies Satisfaction Model (SCSM), Accountability Model (AM) and Continuous Learning Model (CLM)

The Third Wave: Teacher Future Effectiveness (TFE) emphasizes strong future effectiveness as regards the applicability to the current education purposes and also to the latest paradigm of educators. In the face of Covid-19 pandemic, during and after, a new normal should be established by applying remote learning. This is imperative because to learn is to exist and to exist is to learn.

Remote Learning

Remote learning is the utilization of the internet and other technological devices, to create materials for the purposes of education, lesson delivery and management (Fry, 2001). Remote learning is an instrument that can enable the teaching–learning activity become more student-centred, more creative, and more pliable. ‘‘Most of the terms such as remote learning, online learning, open learning, web-based learning, computer-mediated learning, blended learning, e-learning etc, have in common the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means’’ (Cojocariu, Lazar, Nedeff & Lazar, 2014). Remote learning is defined as a short-term shift from the traditional face-to-face learning in a corporal classroom to learning online. Remote learning uses e-learning tools such as handsets, laptops, IPADS etc. with internet access to actuate distance learning for learners who, for some reasons, are unable to attend physical lessons. In the remote learning environments, learners can partake in the lessons as well as interact with educators and other learners from anywhere (Singh & Thurman, 2019). The



structure of the synchronous learning environment enables learners to attend live lessons, have actual interactions among them and their educators, and possibly receive prompt feedbacks from educators (Littlefield, 2018). As McBrien, Cheng and Jones (2009) rightly put it, synchronous lessons can create several occasions for social interaction. In the midst of the proliferation of the Coronavirus disease, online platforms like the ones mentioned above come handy where about fifty (50) learners can come together in a video conference, students can discuss with their teachers, lessons are accessible on handsets and laptops, one can watch already recorded lessons and feedback can be offered and taken instantly from students (Basilaia, Dgebuadze, Kantaria & Chokhanelidze, 2020).

Strategies for Remote Learning

There are strategies for remote learning as identified by Grills and Krull (2020). These strategies are:

Know your students' technological capacities and needs

Teaching in any circumstance, benefits more from knowing your learners well. This includes discovering what motivates them to choose the course. (Bricknell & Muldoon, 2012). Additionally, learners in remote learning are not necessarily technologically literate (Fish and Wickersham, 2009), so the school may consider employing ungraded assessments that offer learners practice, engaging with relevant online technology (Woodley, Hernandez, Parra & Negash, 2017). In a situation like the one occasioned by Coronavirus, where learners were prevented from attending physical classes because of the lockdown and recommended social distancing, their needs and challenges have probably altered, and educators may need to investigate and get acquainted with their learners' emerging concerns and questions. As it stands now, the pandemic has widened the disparity between the rich and the poor. People from the marginalized communities are the worst hit by it so teachers/educators are saddled with the task of trying to meet the emotional and psychological needs of these set of learners whilst they grapple with the challenge of teaching with technological tools for which they are ill equipped.

State your learning objectives.

Just as applies to any teaching and learning situation, the lesson should commence with plainly stated learning objectives (Martin, Albert, Swapna & Kiran, 2019). Once educators create the lesson's learning objectives, they can come up with hands-on activities that will help them achieve the specific objectives (Alston, 2017). This approach helps educators to make wise choices of devices which will aid learners to meet the lesson objectives instead of choosing new, flashy devices which may not serve the required purpose. (Woodley et al, 2017). In addition, educators should recognize that remote teaching does not just involve transferring already prepared materials online. Rather, content presentation, instructional activities involved, and lots more should be given serious attention (Bricknell & Muldoon, 2012).

Choose the appropriate e-learning tools

There are so many e-learning tools available to educators for remote learning; however, an educator must be careful to choose the tools which can help them to achieve the lesson objectives. A teacher may fulfil his lesson objectives a synchronously through discussion fora or synchronously through conversations held in batches on Zoom app or Google meet. As a matter of fact, Google offers assorted amazing tools like Jam board, Google form, docs, sheet etc which educators can utilize to make remote lesson interactive and fun. However, in using these tools, it behoves educators to decide on the best form of technology suitable for achieving their learning objectives and for meeting the set standard for best practices. A good instance of this is the utilization of the discussion fora. An educator who decides to apply this method must realize that it is most productive in enhancing learning when clear, well-structured guidelines are provided. (Andreson, 2009; Hsiao, 2010). Educators would have to state their conditions for participation in the fora and provide headings for areas of assessment of learners (Clark-Ibáñez & Scott, 2008). They should also develop well-structured questions that encourage critical thinking rather than open ended or free response questions. An educator can appoint a learner who explains the key



points in a passage they read and another learner who answers to the queries posed by the first learner or they can ask learners to relate the concepts taught to personal experiences (Andreson, 2009).

Content(s) Identification

Developing content which covers curriculum and at the same time engages the learners during a virtual experience is quite challenging. However, the educator must strive to identify content that will be of value to the learners. The educator must also have mastery of the subject matter in order to deliver it effectively in a remote teaching and learning situation.

Set clear Expectations and be Organized.

One great way of ensuring learning takes place, students are engaged and have fun when engaging in remote lessons is to have explicit expectations and organization (Bailey & Card, 2009). The lesson content should be delivered consistently in concise measures. Furthermore, learners should be informed from the onset, about the modalities for participating in remote learning (Price, Joy, Cecilia, Melissa & James, 2016). High expectations from the school encourage learners to be committed to their learning (Bailey and Card, 2009). Should there be a reason to shift to remote learning suddenly, like the situation caused by the Coronavirus ravaging the whole world presently, new organizational procedures should be developed without delay.

Communicate Often, Clearly, and Consistently.

Educators should consider how they often communicate with their learners and where possible, they should use the same method and means that they would have utilized during face-to-face lessons. Alston (2017), states that educators should visit the digital platform regularly, attend to learners' concerns always, and return their grades on time. Martin et al, (2019) on their part feel that promptness is more important for the success of learners' rather than trying to facilitate synchronous meeting for remote learning. Educators should send emails to their learners, send announcements via the learning platforms and leverage on social media. They should keep their interactions easy and straight to the point with achievable tasks and items that learners need to know.

Challenges of Remote Teaching and Learning

The covid-19 pandemic has made it clearer than ever that our educational system is inclined to external factors (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Little wonder then that Ribeiro (2020) notes that the online shift of lesson delivery arrived with huge logistics problems and behavioural changes. The issues discussed below are some of which both learners and educators face in a virtual learning experience.

Technological Challenges

The success of remote teaching and learning depends entirely on the use of digital tools and the availability of internet. What this implies is that instructors and learners who reside in areas with frequent network glitches will likely be denied access to remote lessons. That was actually the fate of many educators and learners during the lockdown when some schools tried their hands on remote lessons. Internet glitches are capable of making synchronous online interactions very challenging. In addition, unexpected internet loss could be frustrating in asynchronous settings, especially, when one is engaged in a virtual examination (Ryabov, 2012). In a period of crisis, similar to the Covid-19 experience, the situation is even made worse due to social distancing which was recommended to curtail the surge of the disease. Learners who ordinarily, would have sought solace in the school library when they experience internet disruptions in their houses, no longer had that option due to the lockdown. Also, when schools and businesses are shut down, family members are forced to discharge their official duties from the home concurrently, hence, internet slowdowns are inevitable. This makes virtual lessons extremely hard for some learners to attend. Instructors are not also left out as some of them may also not have sufficient internet access or technological tools to operate from home (Dhawan, 2020).

Socio-economic Background

As educational systems transitioned into novel means of learning aided by the internet, at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, learners from the rural communities of Nigeria were completely left out (Amorighoye, 2003). Having access to digital devices and internet connectivity has often been a distinguishing factor



between the rich and the poor in the society. The poor citizens who live in remote areas cannot afford computers or data with which to connect to the internet. (Hargittai, 2003). According to Azubuike, Adegboye and Quadri (2021), findings from the TEP Centre (2020) research proved that 28% of educators complained that their learners were not actively involved in learning at the peak of the spread of the virus as a result of their inability to access digital tools for learning. Hargittai (2020) argues that this disparity in accessing digital devices is capable of increasing the rate of digital illiteracy which is a disadvantage to learners in light of the era we are in. Vogels, Andrew, Lee and Monica (2020), state that researches carried out at the wake of the pandemic showed that such disadvantages emerged few months into the pandemic. Furthermore, the restrictions and barriers experienced at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic may make it difficult for learners to prioritize school work, especially for learners from poor background. Fear and apprehension are intensified during Covid-19; educators and learners are bedevilled with so many concerns ranging from technology to health, finance and safety at home.

Lack of Motivation

Among the challenges educators and institutions of learning face in virtual learning is learners' motivation towards online lessons. It poses a huge challenge for educational institutions to actively engage learners and hold their attention to be actively involved in the teaching-learning activity. Motivation, according to Brophy (2005), is the student's desire to learn something in a study environment. He explained further that learners' motivation is gotten from the discussions among the educators and their learners. The commonly used physical method of learning employs the physical interaction and communication of learners with their educators and classmates in the classroom. However, as Covid-19 ravages the whole world, educators are faced with the problem of motivating learners to participate and concentrate during remote lessons. There are usually so many things which serve as distractions for learners especially as they are learning from the comfort of their homes. Mardesci (2020) identified teaching method,

lack of digital resources and internet connection as factors that distract learners during remote lessons. Effective remote teaching and learning would be difficult without motivation from both educator and learner. Interacting with and monitoring students successfully is an additional problem given that the meeting is a virtual one.

Problem of Quality

The standard and quality of remote learning programs pose a great challenge. There is lack of standard for monitoring the calibre of the online materials created and the method of e-content delivery. Cojocariu et al (2014) posit that the issue requires urgent attention for everyone to appreciate the gains of standard education through remote learning. In support of this, Affounneh, Salha, and Khlaif (2020), aver that focus should not be on only the merits of shifting to remote learning during the pandemic, rather, developing and improving the standard of e-contents delivered during such emergencies should be considered.

Time and Cost

So much time is invested in planning remote lessons. The educators need ample time to prepare their lessons since they must adapt to teaching in a not so familiar environment. Cost implication is an issue as well. A huge sum of money is required for data purchase, maintenance of tools, personnel re-training and creating quality online content. For this reason, it has become necessary to develop a strong educational system which can foster education through remote teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020).

Remote Learning as a Panacea

Accessibility

Remote learning is simply attainable by both those in the rural and urban areas provided they have the required digital tools. During the lockdown, academic institutions which ventured into virtual learning succeeded in connecting with their learners residing in the rural areas who had access to internet connection.

Affordability

Remote learning is relatively cheaper than face-to-face as the participants don't have to worry about such expenses as transport fare to lectures, accommodation



fees and other expenses learners are bound to incur during school sessions. Education providers also save the resources which would have gone into maintaining equipment and employing more staff. Remote learning encourages academic institutions to go paperless since their teaching resources would be stored in the Google classrooms or other online platforms where learners can easily access them. Cost is less on learners who are no longer compelled to pay for amenities. In addition, since learners are studying from home, families have no need to invest in care givers.

Pliability

Remote learning is flexible. Learners can be taught whenever and wherever. Learners can complete their assignments, tests and courses at their convenience. They can as well watch video recordings of lessons they missed. It affords learners the opportunity to venture into other careers or run different educational programmes concurrently. Combining face-to-face lessons with technology encourages blended learning and flipped classrooms which is capable of increasing the assimilation capacity of students (Dhawan, 2020).

Life-Long Learning

The best-selling point of remote learning is the fact that it offers learners flexibility and control over their training schedule. Learners have the option of reading and studying what is taught at their convenience and by methods that work for them. When learners are allowed to take responsibility for their learning, they acquire new skills which lead to life-long learning.

Remote Learning as a New Normal

It is about time the government recognized the soaring relevance of online learning to our dynamic world. Anunobi and Ogbonna (2020) affirm that “we are going through a phase of rapid change in an increasingly globalized world” (p.258). The unexpected breakout of Coronavirus disease has made researchers raise another argument in favour of e-learning which is that remote teaching/learning is a panacea during a period of crisis (Dhawan 2020). The government needs to put in efforts to bridge the gap in digital divide by ensuring that all the participants in our educational institutions who are involved in remote learning have all the needed digital

resources. Educators must ensure that they employ educational apps that work on phones as well, so that learners who cannot afford laptops do not miss out. Most instructors and learners across our academic institutions, especially the public schools, have never practised remote teaching and learning. They are comfortable with the face-to-face ancient method of teaching. According to Anunobi and Ogbonna (2020), “educators in public schools are not provided with the necessary skills and enabling environment to create a modern learning condition.”(p.259). This attitude must change if we want to enjoy the global benefits. We must adjust to and embrace the new normal.

The outbreak of Coronavirus presents a golden opportunity for us to change the narrative. There is need for a quick shift to remote learning in order to optimize teaching and learning. A lot of tools and apps abound which educators can utilize to make remote learning interactive and fun. Google tools can really be handy for remote lessons. They are: Gmail, Google forms, Calendar, Google Drive, maps, sheets, docs, slides, Chromebook, Hangouts, Jam board, Google Earth, YouTube, Email, Search, Google Meet and Google Classroom. There are also Open Board Software, Kami and Quizizz which are not Google products but are very useful for remote teaching and learning. Educators can use these tools successfully as alternative for face-to-face lessons (Basilaia et al, 2020). Academic institutions can invite professionals to give their staff and learners a step-by-step guide on the use of the various technology tools available. This will go a long way to minimize the computer illiteracy inherent in our public schools. Anunobi and Ogbonna (2020) argue that educators should not only be concerned about learning how to use digital tools to deliver their lessons, they should also learn how to guide learners to facilitate their own learning. This however, is only possible if the educators are technology driven. Remote learning at this point, seems to be our best but amidst the chaos of the coronavirus pandemic. Accordingly, the standard improvement of remote teaching and learning has become very crucial (Dhawan, 2020).



CONCLUSION

This paper identified the challenges faced by institutions, educators and learners during school closure caused by Coronavirus pandemic. It also identified teaching and learning as epistemological tools. The paper suggested some strategies which academic institutions and educators can employ to achieve a successful remote teaching and learning experience. The researchers conclude that remote learning can aid in providing inclusive education during the time of calamity. The move from physical to remote learning is the sole feasible remedy to optimizing teaching and learning during and in post Covid-19 era. It is a new normal that has come to stay. It ought to be adopted and appreciated by all concerned as a way of optimizing teaching and learning during and in post Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers suggest the following as remedies to surmounting the problems encountered during remote teaching and learning:

1. Development of a reliable network infrastructure which enables educators and learners to have connectivity which permits them to take lessons remotely even when other members of their households are doing different online activities in the same space.
2. Provision of cheaper digital tools by the government. Devices like computers and tablets which are used for remote learning should be made cheaper and the government should give families incentives to purchase them.
3. Provision of training programmes to improve the digital skills of educators and learners.
4. Creation of strategies for communication and online learning assessment.
5. Introduction of intelligent technologies like artificial intelligence into remote teaching and learning. This will encourage personalized, inclusive and interactive online learning experience.

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