Covd-19 Pandemic and Education in Nigeria

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Review Article

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic caused great destruction to different aspect of the world order. This include but not limited to the: economy, social, political and education sector which was the focus of this study. The educational most especially in developing countries was one of the worst hit sectors. This is because before the emergent of the pandemic, the educational sector in Nigeria was battling with underlying educational challenges that have kept the country behind in getting young people ready for the dynamic workplace and the sector also adopted mainly face-to-face teaching and learning methods. It was an offence in many schools for students to come to school with phones. However, with the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 which made the government to lockdown all schools in the country; the government, teachers, students and other stakeholders were helpless on how to continue learning. This study investigated the challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria. An exploratory design approach was adopted for the paper. It concluded that the consequences occasioned by academic lockdown in schools in the many Nigerian states as witnessed were most students were not engaged in learning for a long period (one term), yet were promoted to the next class, this by no means will affect their fragile education foundation. It was concluded that Covid-19 has negatively affected education in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization declared Covid-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of international concern on the 30th of January 2020, and a pandemic on 11th March, 2021 [1]. The virus which broke out in China affected every aspect of the global world system including education system. In Nigeria, the first case of the disease was reported on the on 27th February 2020 when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus [2]. Since then, the number of people infected with the virus as reported by NCDC has been increasing daily across the country. In order to manage the situation, halt spread of the disease and flatten the epidemiological curve which will therefore reduce morbidity and mortality of Covid-19; several containment measures, including a range of physical and social distancing measures were introduced [3].

Different countries following the recommendation from World Health Organisation (WHO) directives introduced and implemented measures such as: physical distancing, complete closure of the economy except essential services, closure of the airspace, schools, religious centers, limiting public gathering to less than ten, the use of face facemask, avoiding of handshake, avoiding crowded places etc. The educational system was severely affected by the pandemic; as all levels of the education system, from pre-school to higher education leading to serious economic loss and other [4]. For instance, a four-week school closure in New York City translated to an economic impact of about $10.6 and $47.1 billion [5].

Furthermore, the far-reaching effects of social/physical distancing and the associated lockdown measures, as well as school closures, have thwarted the education sector and are expected to leave an indelible mark on the education system [6]. The Federal Government was not left out as it set up the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 (PTF on Covid-19) which comprises of the Minister for Health, Ministers for Education and other relevant stakeholders but was headed by the Secretary General of the Federation (SGF) Boss Mustapha. Following experts' decisions, the task force closed down all schools in Nigeria on the 27th of March, 2020 as one of the Federal Government measures to limit the spread of the disease.

Education which is a means of self-development through learning, knowledge, skills, and habits conveyed across generations. The importance of education for the economic, social and moral development of nations cannot be under-estimated to have the ability to attend classes to run live translations of study by using pre-recorded video lessons and also have their test online through same means. But this appear not to be the case in most cities in Nigeria, as it was observed that in many parts of Nigeria most teachers lacked online teaching skills as well as the use of technologies that are associated with online teaching thereby making it difficult for teaching and learning to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pointed out that the indirect effects of the pandemic include disrupted schooling and lack of access to school, more especially in low income countries to which Nigeria falls [7]. In Nigeria, the impact of Covid-19 is particularly threatening to education given that the sector is largely underdeveloped with little financial resources [8]. The pandemic therefore has a negative impact on education in Nigeria and other countries through decreased level of education, broadened existing divide in learning access and outcomes and increased school dropouts [9].

LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition, the threat posed to education in Nigeria is compounded due to peculiar vulnerabilities, including insecurity caused by the emergence of separatist groups across the country, poor health systems, poverty and inequality, hunger, internally displaced populations, high population densities, urban-rural divide and out-of-school

population [10]. Prior to COVID-19, Nigeria accounts for one in every five of the world's out-of-school children. About 10.5 million children aged 5-14 years in Nigeria were out of school, and only about 61% of 6 to 11-year-old children receive primary school education on a regular basis (UNICEF Nigeria, n.d.). Hence, while Nigeria is battling with underlying educational challenges that have kept the country behind in getting young people ready for the dynamic workplace [8], COVID-19 impacts further exacerbate this problem. As the closure of schools translated to a contextualized state-wide school closure across the 36 states in the country, in response different states' Ministries of Education have been releasing modalities for radio and TV schooling and internet-based learning for students in public primary and secondary schools. Though these efforts could be effective, with experience from developed countries, it can amount to a far-reaching negative impact on the education system in developing low-income countries like Nigeria [10]. For instance, as the COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally, primary and secondary school learners in rural and under-served communities remain behind due to lack of skills and resources to adapt or transition to the new learning avenues. In addition, university students who may have the skills to undertake internet-based learning face poor internet infrastructure and a lack of reliable electricity supplies [11]. Thus, learning remotely (including ratio, TV schooling, and online learning apps for primary and secondary learners, virtual libraries and online classes in the universities) is practically not feasible in most Nigerian communities. Poorly resourced institutions and socially disadvantaged learners where limited access to technology and the internet, as well as students' inability to engage in an online environment, undermine Government response [12].

Since education is the bed rock of national development which instills beliefs, norms, values, knowledge and skills, hence the consequences of education shutdown is such that schools in Nigeria which is considered as the critical foundation for development was affected. In that regards the income of teachers and supports staff were affected, those who used the school environment as their source of living were also affected among others. This raises some salient questions such as, to what extent has COVID-19 pandemic affected teaching and learning process in public secondary schools in Nigeria? In what ways did modern technology help in the teaching of students during the lockdown? In what way were the income and other sources of living of teachers in public secondary schools in Nigeria affected? What were the changes that took place in the pattern of food and non-food consumption during the pandemic? The answer to these and other questions are critical for policy purpose. To achieve the objective of this paper, desk research was adopted and recommendations were made based on the findings.

COVID-19 pandemic and school closure

The most social challenge of the global response to COVID-19 was the closure of schools to stem the spread of the pandemic. This action as observed deprived millions of education personnel their means of income and reduced their overall well-being as well as depriving students from all forms of learning. The economic shock associated with the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be significantly larger than the shock of the financial crisis of 2008/09. The spread of the pandemic as perceived had a high human cost with virtually many households struggling to cope as costs continued to grow. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant trade disruptions, drops in oil price, and the tightening of financial conditions in Nigeria and many other countries. These effects have already led to large increase in unemployment and underemployment and have continued to threaten the survival of many households, institutions and firms. In response to this, governments, agencies and institution began to put policies in place to slow the transmission and to improve the livelihood of the citizens.

As at March 25th, 2020, approximately 150 nations throughout the world had reported school closures. School closures are important because they serve as a strategy to establish social distance in order to slow the transmission of the disease and avoid an increase in cases that would put a load on health services. The effectiveness of the closures as a measure to halt the spread of the virus, especially in Africa, will be determined by the exact timing of the closures, the age structure of the population, and the length of the closure. Others predicted that school closures would result in an extended period of disrupted instruction, causing children to become disconnected from their studies, which would have the potential cost of reversing gains in learning results [13].

23.5 million Enrolled primary school students in Nigeria during the period under review are absent in school [10]. Also, they were of the opinion that not only will the closure of schools affect up to 46 million students across the country, but 4.2 million students in the North-East states of Borno, Adawama, and Yobe, which contain the most vulnerable populations of children in Nigeria, will be the most affected. The economic impact of COVID-19 in most nations can be felt through three scenarios: the labour productivity shock, which results in an average drop in labour productivity of 1.4 percent during the pandemic in 2020 due to loss of jobs. The second shock is the total factor productivity shock, which refers to a temporary halt in domestic activities due to disruptions in distribution and the inability to provide inputs and services because of worker quarantine. This resulted in a 1 percent reduction in global GDP total factor productivity growth. The trade shock is the final effect, which occurred through international trade interruptions and has increased the cost of conducting business by roughly 5% on average. This is enough to increase the cost of global economic growth by 1% [14].

The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted education and raised global health concerns, no country or race is immune to the virus, and the entire world appears to be swamped by the pandemic's rapid expansion and catastrophic impacts. The pandemic knows no bounds, and its impact is widespread and swift with restrictions on people's ability to migrate, trade, and interact. It also threw the entire world into a state of emergency, the reality of the situation was difficult to face, and Nigeria's school system remains one of the worst-affected by the pandemic [15]. As the country grapples with these issues, a key question arises: Is Nigeria's education system designed to adjust quickly to changing circumstances? Given the current state of affairs in the globe, a country's ability to ensure that learning continues will be primarily dependent on its ability to quickly harness existing technology, create suitable infrastructure, and mobilize stakeholders to establish alternative learning programmes.

According to UNESCO (2020), the pandemic has changed the contexts in which curricula are implemented, not only due to the use of platforms and the need to consider circumstances other than those for which the curriculum was originally designed, but also due to the fact that certain knowledge and competencies are more relevant in the current context. A variety of decisions must be made and resources must be made available, posing a challenge to school districts, educational institutions, and teachers. This is true of curricular changes and priority, as well as the contextualization required to guarantee that the contents are relevant to the present emergency situation, and is based on consensus among all stakeholders. These adaptations must also highlight the capabilities and values that have emerged as a result of the current circumstances, such as solidarity, self-directed learning, self-care, care for others, social-emotional skills, health, and resilience, among others. The social impacts of corona virus and the actions taken to reduce its spread are severe, such that the circumstances have resulted in a unique situation in which people had to change their routine lifestyles, their activity patterns, the way they work and how they travel which are three facets of daily life [16].

Strengthening the resilience of education systems, according to UNESCO (2020), enables countries to respond to current issues such as safely reopening schools and positions them to better cope with future crises. Governments might focus on fairness and inclusion, strengthen risk management capacities at all levels of the system, provide strong leadership and coordination, and improve dialogue and communication procedures in this respect. In addressing the issue of disruption in education learning in Nigeria, a range of technological tools and services have been designed that can allow remote teaching and learning. Radio platforms are being used to transmit lesson instructions to a big number of children at the same time more than ever before. The majority of education service providers have also modified their platforms to allow large-scale remote learning. Apart from English language and mathematics instructional websites have expanded their content, by offering other disciplines that primary and secondary school students are obliged to acquire during this time. Also, education technology tools were rebuilt to include elements that allow parents or guardians participate in their children's or wards' remote learning [17]. The global lockdown of educational institutions will result in severe (and likely uneven) interruptions in students' learning, disturbances in internal assessments, and the cancellation or replacement of public examinations for qualifications [18].

Response to teaching and learning in schools during COVID-19 lockdown

According to COVID-19 Global Impact Survey, all institutions of learning in Nigeria shut their campuses in the wake of the outbreak of the disease as a precautionary measure. About 80% of secondary schools were not prepared to move their teaching online and had to suspend teaching in the aftermath of the Pandemic. In the same manner, most of secondary schools at state level including Oyo State have no communication infrastructures in place to reach their students. Although, there were frantic efforts to devise means of exploring online teaching to continue with the interrupted academic sessions but truth is that states secondary education were not prepared and had little or no online teaching and learning infrastructure.

Online teaching refers to the use of technology to renew, simplify and improve processes, tasks and products [19]. Going further, online teaching in secondary education is concerned with the essential process of change that involves existing forms of propagating knowledge and acquiring expertise, understanding of roles and institutional structures, and cooperation in and around secondary education system [20]. Nigeria as country in this period of academic shutdown made several plans and pronouncements for online learning. For instance, the Minister for Education directed that all academic institutions in the country to resume online teaching during a teleconference with stakeholders in the education sector, sometimes in March, 2020-September, only a handful of government owned secondary schools (public secondary schools) have broached the subject of resumption [21]. Teaching has not resumed in majority of the public secondary schools and no concrete steps were made to put the modalities that will facilitate teaching and learning into place [22].

Commenting further, on the directive of the Ministry of Education that Institutions of learning in the country should commence online teaching, an editorial in the Guardian Newspaper described it as "hypocritical". An opinion submitted that the regulatory agency knows for sure that the minimum ICT infrastructure and basic tools are not available in most secondary education institutions in the country [23]. Tools like interactive digital whiteboards, smart phones, laptop computers and notebooks are not common sights. If such are found, they most likely belong to children of wealthy individuals and are not owned by these institutions. The opinion also touched on the functionality aspect that borders on stable and affordable Internet connectivity, security measures such as filters and site blockers and constant electricity. It is an open secret that electricity is a privilege and not a right in the

country. There is also the serious challenge of internet connection in the nations' secondary education system which is crucial to the success of the initiative. Looking at most of the primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, hardly can you find schools with V-SAT or Internet mast which could aid teaching and learning during the school lockdown [24]. It was therefore obvious that online teaching could not work during the COVID-19 pandemic academic lockdown in Nigeria, except for few television and radio teaching which were also affected by poor electricity and poverty in many homes in the country.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic as observed in Nigeria created interruptions and confusions in all levels of educational system which is yet to be addressed. The consequences occasioned by academic lockdown in schools in the many Nigerian states as witnessed were most students were not engaged in learning for a long period (one term), yet were promoted to the next class, this by no means will affect their fragile education foundation. The decay of academic infrastructures affected teaching and learning such that most teachers do not have online teaching skills and this affected the education system to a great extent, more so, as a result of the long period of academic lockdown some of the students' social behavior were affected such that some students at secondary school level engaged in fraudulent ways of making money (interned/spiritual scam).

Amid these, is an opportunity to use the momentum created by the COVID-19 education disruption experience to re-position the educational system in Nigeria, not only to meet the present challenges, but embrace the opportunities in this unexpected education change to reposition secondary education in the state to withstand any shock that may arise in the nearest future. Governments, who are the major owners of these public secondary schools, should take the lead in redrafting the education policies to fully embrace online education platform. Finally, the Government all levels should pay special attention to create equal opportunities, especially for disadvantaged students. If these are done, the public secondary schools will be composed to face any education shocks in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on public secondary schools as observed the following recommendations were made;

- The federal, state and local government in collaboration teachers, parents, old students, examination bodies, philanthropist and of course, the students' representatives should come together to find out workable and prompt responses to revert the ugly education infrastructure decay that affected teaching and learning during the lockdown.

- There should be capacity building and regular training of public schools' teachers in modern teaching technology to strengthen teachers teaching skills to enhance students' learning in online teaching environments. This will involve developing existing practices and leadership involvement within staff development programmes. It should be noted that increased use of ICT teaching method will support students' learning as well as improve students and teacher's knowledge in the face of education disruption.

- There should be reorientation of students on societal values and norms to enable them become functional members of the society.

- There is the need to re-think education in the areas of information and communication technology, as it is gradually revolutionizing learning and teaching at all levels. Students in primary and secondary schools should therefore be introduced to IT-enhanced learning approaches such as blended learning, computer-assisted learning, and technologies as this will help overcome access and poor learning during emergency situations in the future and ensure that distance barriers do not hinder education and academic sessions will not be threatened. As such, it is necessary that primary and secondary schools be provided with 28 online infrastructures, learning resources, learning tools. If the learners and the teachers are well skilled and equipped with ICT gadgets, learning can occur irrespective of time and distance.

- School funding is necessary and will be of utmost significance in respect of e-learning under emergency. As schools reopen, efforts are needed to reduce the gaps between urban and rural schools in learning and the provision of e-learning resources for enhanced learning. This can be ensured by providing learning materials and resources online and providing internet facilities to rural areas for learners from low economic backgrounds.

- The government should also ensure the school academic calendar is modified to make up for the number of days and months many students were at home as a result of the break out of Covid-19 pandemic. This will ensure all the important courses or topics that will have been done during that period is not skip or ignored.

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