



COVID-19 Pandemic and the Dwindling Educational System.... (Muhammad & Ashiru, 2022)

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Dwindling Educational System in Nigeria: Challenges and Possible Solutions

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Abstract

This study examined COVID-19 Pandemic and the dwindling educational system in Nigeria; its challenges and possible solutions to the problems. The paper further highlight the concepts of COVID-19, education and quality education. COVID-19 Pandemic has affected both primary, secondary and tertiary students in Nigeria. About 35.9 million primaries and secondary schools' learners were out of schools as a result of the closures. The paper reveals that "the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on education is likely to fall mostly heavily on girls and on children in poor and vulnerable households. This has the potentials to widen already stark disparities in learning outcome among children. Paper stated that, teachers and learners lack the practically impossible to embark on distance learning. Transition learning from classroom and at home may need a period of preparation in making available learning technologies. It also assessed that, in January, 2020, about 60% of Nigerians are not connected to the internet, 169.2 million people to 83% of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections, 50% of households have experience food insecurity due to lockdown which was the essence of destabilized children's education in Nigeria. The researchers recommended that; International bodies on such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Foundations on education should kindly assist primary and secondary schools with ICT, Computers and E-learning to boost the ICT skills to the learners, Government should bridge the educational gaps that were occurred during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, encouraging of girls' child education and children of poor and vulnerable household.

Keywords: COVID-19, Educational System, Challenges and Solutions

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is by far the largest disruption witnessed by education systems nationwide in the 21st century. Even prior to the advent of the pandemic, low- and middle-income parents were already grappling with pockets of low enrolment and poor quality of instruction. In 2019, over 40 million children were out of school (UNESCO, 2019), and those attending school have not reached minimum competencies in literacy and numeracy after many years of schooling (World Bank, 2018). This study is aimed to assess the short term challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on quality of Education in Nigeria and possible solution to the problems. At the peak of the first wave in mid-April 2020, school closures affected 94% of all learners nationwide. Beyond



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students, this shock has affected teachers, families and school systems alike. If not addressed expressly, the crisis will have long-lasting and detrimental consequences for educational attainment, transition. School closures, although crucial to combat the proliferation of the virus, can further dampen already low learning levels and increase dropout rates. Distance learning strategies result in a shift of the learning burden on families, making students' learning outcomes a function of domestic environments and parental support. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to benefit from a supportive home environment. COVID-

Concept of COVID-19

COVID-19 Stand for 'CO' Stands for Corona, 'VI' for Virus, and 'D' for Disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel Corona Virus' or '2019-nCov.' The COVID-19 Virus is a new Virus linked to the same family of Viruses as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the same types of common cold (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 Diseases is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV) which was firstly identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its' first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic 2009 (CDC, 2019). It is a communicable disease. The symptoms of the disease are; fever, dry cough, tiredness, aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, difficult in breath, loss of speech, chest pain or pressure (WHO, 2021).

Concept of Education

The word education came from the Latin words; "educere" and "educare". While Educere can be interpreted as "to draw out" or "to lead out". The Educare on other hand means "to nourish", "to bring up" or "to raise". Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and beliefs, moral characters, behaviours discipline and positively change of behaviour as a result of experience. Onuk (2013) sees Education as the process of cultural transmission of the people from one generation to the next. Osokoya (2015) opines that Education is the culture which each generation purposely give to those who are to be its successors in order to qualify them for at least keeping, and if possible for raising the level of improvement which has been attained. Education is the theory by applying which a child can be converted in to civilized nationalist. Samuels (2012) views Education as the transmission of accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society from one generation to the next. Education can be seen as the process of receiving and giving systematic instructions, knowledge and positive behaviour at a school or university. Akinpelu (2014) defined Education as enabling agency by which the Africans could restore their self-confidence, and make those who doubted the humanity of Africans begin to revise. But, Education can be seen as a taking knowledge and experience in order to improve ones' social, interpersonal environmental, physical, emotional and technical skills so that one will be able to live on his own peacefully having gratitude towards good peaceful life.

While Singh (2015), views Education as "Knowledge to understand the difference between right and wrong things". Education is frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but



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learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings aid an experience that has formative effectives effect on the way one thinks, feels or acts may be considered. Education is not the learning of facts and skills only but, the training of mind to think.

Quality Education

Is an education that focus on learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes and which create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction (Bernard, 2016). Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Adams, 2013). Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today. UNESCO (2016) Quality Education as “Pedagogically and developmentally sound and educates the student in becoming as active productive member of society”. Therefore Quality Education must fully assumes its central role in helping people to be more just, peaceful, tolerance, unity and national consciousness. Quality education includes: Learners; who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities. Environments: that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources. Facilities; Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life. Knowledge: in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, and peace. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities. Outcomes: that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive attitudes in participation of people in the society. Consequently, UNESCO (2020) Quality Education is one that focus on the whole child the social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, societal norms and values, status or geographical location. It prepare a child for life not just for testing.

Table 1: Individual Level of School Attendance amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

Year	School Attendance (%)	Description of School Attendance
2019 Jan/Feb	29.2%	School Attending
2019 Jan/Feb	10.4%	Not School Attending
2020 Jan/Feb	50.3%	Not School Attending
2020 Oct	10.1%	School Attending
2020 Oct	7.2%	Other Reason
2020 Oct	18.5%	School Closed
2020 Oct	3.5%	Awaiting of Admission

Note: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2020.



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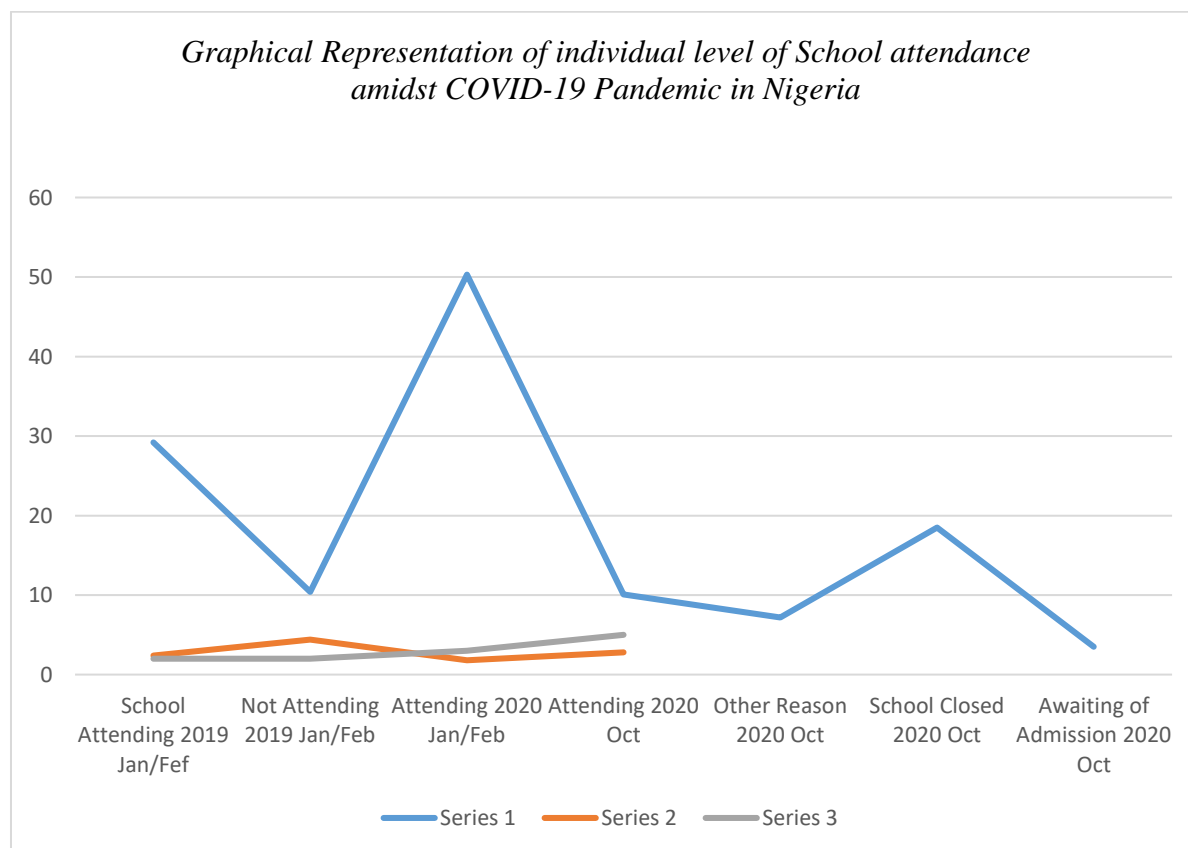


Figure 1: Field Survey, (2021)

In order to track individual-level dynamics of attendance, the charts below examine attendance for a sample of Pupils and Students that were school-aged in January/February 2019 and October 2020 (roughly 7-18 years old in October 2020). Of this sample, about 50% were attending school both in January/February 2019 and in October 2020, while around 29% reported attending school only in January/February 2019 but not in October 2020. Of those who were attending school in January/February 2019 but not in October 2020, around 63% (19% of the whole sample) reported that closure of schools was the main reason for their non-attendance and 25% (7% of the whole sample) reported that the main reason was that, they were awaiting admission.

Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Dwindling Educational System in Nigeria

Educational system in Nigeria has been disrupted and faced great challenges amidst COVID-19 pandemic, among the challenges are;

1. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Learners in Nigeria:

The impact of school closures on students, learning loss hinges on multiple factors, including access to remote learning, students' attitudes towards self-directed instruction, quality of remote instruction and home support. They thus missed a stimulating and enriching environment, learning opportunities, social interaction and in some cases adequate nutrition. This is likely to compromise their longer-term healthy development, especially those children from poor and disadvantaged



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families Children of a younger age are more likely to find self-directed learning difficult. The nationwide school closures have disrupted learning and access to vital school-provided services for a record number of students in Nigeria. According to UNESCO, almost 40 million learners have been affected by the nationwide school closures in Nigeria, of which over 91 percent are primary and secondary school learners. In a short time, COVID-19 has disrupted the landscape of learning in Nigeria by limiting how students can access learning across the country. Missed learning for the majority of pre-pandemic in-school-students: According to UNESCO, about 35.9 million primary and secondary school learners are currently out-of-school as a result of the school closures. Moreover, for older students, the inability to attend lectures and access study material can generate frustration, and cancelled assessments can also take a toll on students' extrinsic motivation. In addition to "how much" students learn, a major concern is "how many" students remain engaged with remote learning (OECD, 2020). Without the structuring school routine, and frequent contact and support from teachers and peers, students on the path of dropout can get further detached. Disruptions in schooling may also affect school progression, particularly for students on the verge of transitioning into a higher level or into the job market.

2. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teachers:

The pandemic has affected teachers as much as students. Nationwide, school closures affected at least 700,000 thousand primary and secondary school teachers (TTF, 2020). Due to the suddenness of changes in teaching and instruction, teachers were often tasked with implementing distance learning without sufficient training, resources and guidance (UNESCO, 2019). In contexts where technology-enabled distance learning was possible, quality hinged on the skills of teachers in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and Internet access. Teachers who covered ICT in their pre-service education and professional development are more likely to integrate technology into their teaching practice (OECD, 2020). Moreover, pandemic-induced interruptions to pre-service teacher training will likely aggravate teacher shortages, putting universalization of primary and secondary education at risk.

3. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Parents in Nigeria:

The pandemic-induced negative economic impact on households can further compromise student school engagement, especially in low-income settings. In June, 2020 30% of households reported that they experienced food insecurity due to lockdown of covid-19 pandemic (NBS, 2020). The effect of an economic recession on children's educational outcomes can vary. On the one hand, education outcomes can deteriorate if households' reduced income leads to lower investments in children's education. On the other, education outcomes can improve if lower wage rates, for both caregivers and children, reduce the opportunity costs for children to attend school, and foamy families have seen their savings diminish. The pandemic has severely thwarted the flow of remittances, further weakening the ability of families to pay for children's education (World Bank, 2018). On the one hand, this limits their capacity to cover the direct costs of schooling (such as school fees, uniforms, textbooks). On the other, it increases the opportunity cost for children to stay in school (instead of helping with domestic tasks, family business or engaging in paid employment).

4. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Educational Institutions in Nigeria:

As the curve of COVID-19 incidence flattened among the population, many governors in Nigeria began to loosen restrictions in an effort to stabilize their educations, including through the



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reopening of schools, while others have been more cautious and maintained closures, fearing of pandemic. As of mid-July 2020, many learners are still affected. Some states in Nigeria have opened schools and colleges, only to close them again after a resurgence of the virus. The logistical challenges related to ensuring distance educational continuity during prolonged closures are substantial. Protracted closures threaten the implementation of the academic calendar and of examinations. Similarly, the education disruption has had, and will continue to have, substantial effects beyond education. Closures of educational institutions hamper the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to nutritious food, affect the ability of many parents to work, and increase risks of violence and insurgencies in Nigeria. Examples; end SARS crises, Indigenous people of Biafra (IBOP) Crises, banditry, Kidnapping among others.

In the higher education sub-sector, online learning has generally taken place through recorded lectures and online plat forms, some universities have postponed learning and teaching until further notice, due to the lack of information technology (IT) infrastructure for both students and teachers.

5. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Educational Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria:

From the onset of the pandemic, teachers were immediately tasked with implementing distance learning modalities, often without sufficient guidance, training, or resources. In many contexts, teacher professional development has moved online or been disseminated via telephone and video applications, but marginalized teachers may have missed out on such support. Web-based class meetings and messaging applications have become useful tools and new ways of communicating with their learners and the education community teachers over the nation were largely unprepared to support continuity of learning and adapt to new teaching methodologies.

According to UNESCO 2020 Global Overview Report published in January 2020, about 60 % of Nigerians are not connected to the internet. The statistics for mobile phones, which could also be used as a learning medium, are more hopeful. According to the report, around 169.2 million people to 83 % of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections. However, of these, 50 % to around 84.5 million people, reside in urban areas. For the population with access, the proportion would be skewed towards high socio-economic households and urban households; an overwhelming majority of whom are private school students who already have a learning advantage over their public school peers. For children from poorer backgrounds who tend to have less access to internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and reside in rural areas where local languages take dominance over English, ICT-learning uptake will be limited.

6. Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on Financing of Educational Programmes in Nigeria:

The fiscal space to fund education has further shrunk with the shock on government revenue and economic downturn arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many items in the 2020 Education Sector appropriation bill, will not be implemented due to the drastic financial shortfall. Yet, more funding is required to keep learning going or scaled- up education support programmes as part of the government's palliative measures. For the government, reducing costs will require re-prioritizing its plans in light of this new reality. The most urgent needs at the moment will be improving teachers' motivation, learners' preparedness and galvanizing domestic digital and media enterprises (USAID, 2020). This needs to be complemented with innovative sourcing of learning infrastructure during this period. For example, reaching children through existing school and home appliances and gadgets will be more cost-effective. Greater involvement of domestic



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philanthropists and digital entrepreneurs can reduce the financial burden of sustaining learning through the crisis.

Solutions to the Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Dwindling Educational System in Nigeria:

1. Technological Solutions:

Adaptive learning technology, can ensure personalized learning with minimal teacher involvement, and have the potential to deliver better learning experiences at low-costs. Yet, the pace of adoption of these technologies has been slow and uneven in Nigeria. The post-crisis period is an opportunity to invest in technology in both the private and public-school systems. To achieve this system in nationwide, it will be important to encourage public-private educational partnerships. Various stakeholders, including the government, internet service providers, phone providers, educational professionals, among others, would need to collaborate to drive the required innovation. Conscious effort is also required to bridge the digital divide, by ensuring that the cost of technology adoption is low. Overall, introducing innovative technology into classrooms could help in improving learning outcomes across the board.

2. Protect Educational Financing and Coordinate it for Positive Impact:

COVID-19 Pandemic has pushed the nation into the deepest national recession in living memory which will have lasting effects on economies and public finances. National authorities and the international community need to protect education financing through the following avenues: strengthen domestic revenue mobilization, preserve the share of expenditure for education as a top priority and address inefficiencies in education spending; strengthen international coordination to address the debt crisis; and protect official development assistance for education (OECD, 2020).

3. Build Resilient Educational Systems for Equitable and Sustainable Development:

Strengthening the resilience of education systems enables government to respond to the immediate challenges of safely reopening schools and positions them to better cope with future crises (World Bank, 2020). In this regard, governments could consider the following: focus on equity and inclusion; reinforce capacities for risk management, at all levels of the system; ensure strong leadership and coordination; and enhance consultation and communication mechanisms.

4. Reimagine Teachers And Accelerate Change In Teaching And Learning Process

The following entry points could be to the fore of our efforts: focus on addressing learning losses and preventing dropouts, particularly of marginalized groups; offer skills for employability programmes; support the teaching profession and teachers' readiness; expand the definition of the right to education to include connectivity; remove barriers to connectivity; strengthen data and monitoring of learning; strengthen the articulation and flexibility across levels and types of education and training (UNESCO, 2019).

5. Reimagine Education and Accelerate Positive Change in Teaching and Learning Process

In the face of nationwide closures of educational institutions and the halting of non-formal training, there has been remarkable innovation in responses to support learning and teaching. But responses have also highlighted major divides, beginning with the digital one. Learning losses due to prolonged school closures mean that many educational outcomes are at risk. For a number of reasons, we cannot return to the world as it was before. we “build back resilient”, we need to made



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in a short time to respond to the shocks to education systems remind us that changes previously considered difficult or impossible to implement are possible after all (UNESCO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2020). We must seize the opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of design has.

6. Fully Funding of Educational Sector in Nigeria

Financing of Educational Institutions is the heart of educational crisis in many countries of the world. In Nigeria there is need of government intervention to invest huge amount of money to solve education problems in Nigeria. It is the process of investing in the development of labour (human resources), infrastructural development such as: building of classes, laboratories, libraries, workshop classes and welfare packages of teachers. Levine (2012) opines that education can be appropriately funded in the context of the market demand and supply framework. Alternatively, education is also a public good. The policy and strategy of government need to focus on providing the incentives and the enabling environment. While Nwachukwu (2014) opines that, regular financial support for Nigerians' education should come from international bodies as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, and UNEFA and other financial assistance bilateral agreement between Nigeria and other countries.

Conclusion

COVID-19 Pandemic has affected both primary, secondary and tertiary students in Nigeria. UNESCO (2019) reported that about 35.9 million primaries and secondary schools' learners were out of schools as a result of the closures. The paper reveals that "the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on education is likely to fall mostly heavily on girls and on children in poor and vulnerable households" (World Bank, 2020). This has the potentials to widen already stark disparities in learning outcome among children.

UNESCO (2020) stated that, teachers and learners lack the practically impossible to embark on distance learning. Transition learning from classroom and at home may need a period of preparation in making available learning technologies. UNESCO Global Report (2020) assessed that, in January, 2020, about 60% of Nigerians are not connected to the internet, 169.2 million people to 83% of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections, 50% of households have experience food insecurity due to lockdown which was the essence of destabilized children's education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. International bodies on such as UNESCO, UNICEF and Foundations on education should kindly assist primary and secondary schools with ICT, Computers and E-learning to boost the ICT skills to the learners.
2. Government should bridge the educational gap that were occurred during COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
3. Encouraging of girls' child education and children of poor and vulnerable household in Nigeria.
4. Intensify effort of embarking of teachers and students on ICT knowledge and skills.
5. Welfare package should be given to the poor learners' parents and household due to food insecurity resulted from lockdown which destabilized learners' education in Nigeria.



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