

Prospects and Challenges of Covid-19 Lockdown on Nigerian Education

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) has greatly affected the academic performance and mode of operation of many educational institutions across the globe. In an attempt to curb the spread of this dangerous disease, schools were closed, physical lecture attendance was temporarily suspended and students' learning activities interrupted. The impacts of such action affect not only teachers and students but also the educational system itself. It is psychologically proven that going to school and having a physical contact with teachers, mingling with friends and engaging in a group discussion did not only improve student's academic performance, but also make him mentally and psychologically balanced. Now that the Covid-19 has created a barrier to achieving that, what can we do to proffer a lasting solution to this problem? What are the prospects and challenges of lockdown on education in Nigeria? What are the academic and operational challenges that must be addressed to avoid producing half-baked or intellectually barren students? Is locking down the nation the only solution to the problem? These questions and others are the crux of this paper. The researchers adopt qualitative method in obtaining, analyzing and presenting data in this paper.

Key Words: Covid-19, Lockdown, Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease is a large family of viruses known to cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to acute respiratory tract infection. The severity of the infection may be visible as pneumonia, acute respiratory syndrome, and even death. Until the outbreak of SARS, this group of viruses was greatly overlooked. On January 7, 2020, the causative agent was identified as a new coronavirus (2019-nCoV), and the disease was later named Covid-19 by the World Health Organization.

The virus spread extensively in the Wuhan region of China and has gained entry to hundreds of countries and territories across the globe. In an attempt to curb the spread of this dangerous disease, schools were closed, physical lecture attendance was temporarily suspended and students' learning activities interrupted. The impacts of such action affect not only teachers and students but also the educational system itself. It is psychologically proven that going to school and having a physical contact with teachers, mingling with friends and engaging in a group discussion did not only improve students' academic performance, but also make them mentally and psychologically balanced. This, however, put both parents and students in a dilemma, which left them with only two options: either to quickly improvise means of educating their children at home or keep them redundant and prevent them from accessing qualitative and sound education. To this end, this paper aspires to address the havoc caused by the school lockdown as a result of Corona Virus Disease or Covid-19 and its adverse effect on education in Nigeria. The paper starts by defining the key terms of the paper, examines challenges of such lockdown on education and then recommends a way forward.

Definition of Key Terms

According to Advanced Learners Dictionary, the word "prospect" is the possibility that something will happen or an idea of what might or will happen in the future. And the word "challenge" refers to a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability and skill. Moreover, the word "lockdown" means an official order to control the movement of people or vehicles because of a dangerous situation. While the term "education" refers to a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills.

However, according to National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses. The aims and objectives of tertiary education as outlined by (FNG, 2004), is first, contributing to national development through high level relevant manpower training. Second, developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of the individual and society. Third, developing the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment. Fourth, acquiring both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. Fifth, promoting and encouraging scholarship and community service. Sixth, forging and cementing national unity. Seventh, promoting national and international understanding and interaction.

The Prospect of Resurgence of Corona Virus

The world narrowly survived when a global effort contained the SARS coronavirus in 2003, after it jumped from bats to humans in China and then spread to 26 countries. We nearly had another close call when MERS, another bat coronavirus, spilled over into people in 2012. Hui, et al. (2020) confirmed that a year later, Chinese scientists found SARS-like viruses in bats that could infect human cells. And in 2016, the World Health Organization put coronaviruses among the top eight known viral threats requiring more research.

Marra, et al (2003), asserted that after 2003, a burst of research was triggered by these viruses but was later discarded as a result of lack of funding. This was partly because, when SARS disappeared, there was no obvious market waiting for drugs or vaccines to treat it. Only big drug companies have the money and expertise to get drugs or vaccines through human trials, and without a market, investors decided to withdraw their money and invest in something else. Another key factor that contributed to the withdrawal of investors in this field was their belief that that SARS coronavirus was a one-time pandemic that has gone and may not come back again.

Still, SARS did inspire some global measures. Even though MERS was rapidly identified in 2012, as implied by Anthony, et al. (2017), but this is because the European Union had started funding labs to sequence mystery respiratory viruses. In 2007, a revamped version of the International Health

Regulations, a treaty designed to reduce the spread of diseases internationally, required advanced economies to help developing ones improve their capabilities for detecting and controlling disease. Another problem is getting people other than doctors and scientists on board. After SARS, China set up a network to spot mystery clusters of respiratory disease. It spotted covid-19 in Wuhan, whereupon local officials stifled efforts to raise the alarm.

Landry, et al. (2020) argued that public health experts have warned of the resurgence of coronavirus for years. And that the virus will become stronger and resistant to the drugs taken back in 2003. This view was also maintained by Parry (2020), when he stressed that we need to do better by engaging in active research in this area to help minimize or at least control the pandemic when it occurs as the next new disease might be worse than SARS and MERS.

Challenges of Covid-19 Lockdown on Education

According to United Nations (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's students' population. Similarly, this disruption has had, and will continue to have, substantial effects beyond education. Closure of educational institutions hampers the provision of essential services to children and communities. Financing of education could also face major challenges, exacerbating massive pre-Covid-19 education funding gaps. Thelma, and Adedeji, (2020), asserted that 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 (2020), 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. The impacts of such school closure as quoted by Fardin, (2020), are devastating and likely to have long-term academic, social and economic consequences. The crisis has exacerbated already-widespread educational inequalities due to factors relating to gender, disability, immigration, mother tongue, learning difficulties or other sources of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Some of the clear challenges posed by the schools' lockdown in Nigeria according to Alaba, and Emmanuel,(2020), are:

Impact on students: it is undeniably known that school closure will have long-term significant consequences on skill acquisition and growth of students. It is quite clear that schools develop not only academic performance of students but their psychological and moral skills as well. Alaba and Emmanuel (2020), analyzed that when schools are closed, the inculcation of such skill and knowledge are interrupted and put to a standstill. The greatest challenge this can cause is the inability of the students to bridge the gap between their past and their present. In addition to that, their minds and intellect will now be idle, and in worst cases imbibe the spirit of idleness.

Impact on teachers: the morale of many teachers was down and the chance to transfer and inculcate knowledge to students was greatly minimize. Liguori and Winkler (2020), emphasized that many teachers, particularly those working in private sectors, were not paid during the time of school lockdown. This made some of them economically unbalanced, thereby affecting their ability to conduct researches and engage in academic activities. The consequence of that is subjecting teachers to uncertainty, fear, anxiety and, to some extent, depression.

Impact on education system: Covid-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenge on the already fragile education system of Nigeria. It has succeeded in highlighting some of the cracks in the system and its chameleon-like attitude in adapting to the new reality on ground. As the nation begins to grapple with these challenges, a key question arises: Is the Nigerian education system designed to adapt rapidly to the changing world? Gazza (2017) elaborated that nation's ability to ensure continuation of learning will depend largely on their ability to swiftly harness available technology, provide adequate infrastructure, and mobilize stakeholders to prepare alternative learning programmes.

Impact on society: Alaba and Emmanuel (2020), observed that school closure carries a high social and economic impacts on the society. Some people earn their daily income by selling sachet water, snacks, pencil and pen to students. Moreover, universities, polytechnics, colleges of education or other higher institutions operate as mini-cities and majority of people living around them generate their income by engaging themselves in different business activities that include operating personal hostels, restaurant,

cafes, shops, transport services, selling of food items etc. This view was supported by Fardin (2020), where he stressed that towns that depend on college students to support their living are greatly affected and suffered a lot of economic damage due to school closure and absence of students on campus.

Way Forward

In order to reclaim the academic loses incurred during the school lockdown as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, prevent further disruptions in our academic calendar and be fully ready for education in emergency situations, our education system must be redesigned and refurbished to adopt to the changing world of the 21st century. This could be achieved through the followings:

Online Education: Online education refers to electronically supported learning that relies on the Internet for teacher-student interaction and the distribution of class materials. To make this fact clearer, Affouneh et al (2020), divided online teaching and learning environment into two forms. Firstly, the synchronous learning environment: The teaching in this environment is structured in a way that students attend live lectures and have real-time interactions between educators and learners. This platform can provide a lot of opportunities for social interaction. Secondly, asynchronous learning environments: these are not properly structured as learning content and not available in the form of live lectures or classes, but in form of recorded materials and ready-made lectures. However, Tian and Huber (2019), interjected that in some parts of the world, particularly rural areas, it will be very difficult to adopt online teaching as an alternative. This is because of the lack of technical know-how on the part of the teachers and students, poor electricity and power supply in addition to the costly data may constitute an obstacle to many students, particularly those that are from poor families. But still the online education remains the best option available so far. The entire online education can be divided into three main categories: Firstly, Full Online Education: this form of education is fully online, and degrees are earned from the comfort of your own home with no required visits to your college or university campus. Secondly, Hybrid Education: this form of education allows students to pursue a combination of online and on-campus courses. Thirdly, Online Courses: these are courses that may be part of a degree programme or taken on their own in order to master a certain subject or learn a specific skill.

Distance learning: Many countries are shifting to distance learning approaches, whether through distributing physical packets of materials for students or through using technology to facilitate online learning. However, Naser (2020), is of the opinion that the disadvantage of this form of education is that this approach can be very solitary and didactic, because students are asked to just sit and quietly watch videos, read documents online, or click through presentations.

HITCH learning: it is an e-learning tool that has been customized for the Nigerian curriculum and has the potential to transform teaching and learning, and make classroom learning a dynamic experience at home. This view was supported Gazza (2017), where he argued that it is an excellent opportunity to ensure children continue to learn both during and beyond the pandemic. The learning package ensures students can access online fit-for-purpose resources, organized by their levels and grades. It also equips teachers to be collaborators and facilitators of learning rather than just remote instructors.

II. CONCLUSION

The emergence of Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) has greatly affected the academic performance and mode of operation of many educational institutions across the globe. The pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population. In Nigeria, almost 40 million learners have been affected by the nationwide school closures. In a short time, COVID-19 has disrupted the landscape of learning in Nigeria by limiting how students can access learning across the country. These challenges have negatively affected students, teachers and the society. To address this matter, the online teaching, distance learning and Hitech tools must be imbibed to enable the students recuperate and reclaim the lost academic calendar and prevent further disruptions for the smooth running of the academic activities in our schools.

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