

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR FUTURE RE-ALIGNMENT

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Abstract

There is no doubt to the fact that education is an instrument of National Development. It is the tool that provides individuals and nations with the solutions to problems and challenges. In recent years, the Nigeria education system was hit by Covid-19 pandemic which is a severe acute respiratory syndrome disease. The pandemic has led to the closure of educational institutions for a long time. The closure could indeed be attributed to a number of negative consequences. This paper has therefore identified and discussed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria and the need for future re-alignment. Relevant concepts discussed include: impromptu disruption and extension of academic calendar, crash academic programmes, poor learning outcome, cancellation of educational conferences and workshops, creation of a vacuum in the teaching-learning process, loss of workforce in education, budget deficit in education, psychological effect on students and the wild curriculum content coverage. Finally, conclusion was drawn and recommendations were provided.

Keywords: Impact, Covid-19, Pandemic, Education, Re-alignment

Introduction

The importance of education to the growth and development of individuals, societies and nations can never be overstated. Education is presumed to be the yardstick for measuring success of individuals and nations. Education adds value and strengthens creative initiatives of people. It also serves as the mechanism for progressive change and ideals for building and sustaining desired outcome. Education is therefore the process and medium through which the acquisition of positive values, attitudes, skills and knowledge reshapes and transform individuals to not only be useful to themselves, but to the entire society (Zakari, Kabir & Okam, 2019). It is an established truism with a sound, justifiable, reliable and verifiable evidence all over the world that creating and sustaining policies and national goals can only be meaningfully realized through adequate and effective utilization of the processes of education. It is evidently clear that, the strength of any nation in terms of social awareness, political and economic transformation, technological advancement and leadership, largely depends on the quality of education being provided. To add it up, individual and societal developments are dependent on the level of educational attainment of a nation. Education in this regard is the fulcrum upon which the development of individuals and nations revolves around.

Moreover, failure of an individual or nation to record success, growth and development can simply be attributed to low standard and quality of education being provided. Hardly can there be any meaningful development without appropriate and functional education system being put in place. Mamman (2016) lamented that no element of national life is more worthy of attention, support and concern than education; for no element has greater impact on the career, personal growth and happiness of individuals and nations than education. On the same vein, there is no element that is of greater importance at improving the knowledge and leadership style of individuals upon which the vitality of democracy, strength and national economy depends on than education.

The crux of the matter is that, education is the best tool that prepares individuals and nations to anticipate events and challenges and plan well ahead. Over the years, the world has witnessed series of events and challenges, some with progressive and some with devastating consequences. Covid-19 pandemic is one of these challenges with catastrophic consequences. In recognition of the importance of education to individuals and national development, coupled with the fragile nature of the Nigeria education system as well as the present state of decay and dilapidated infrastructure, the sector is being impeded by Covid-19 pandemic. On this note, this paper discussed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria.

Covid-19 as a Global Pandemic

The term Covid-19 was coined from 'CO' for corona, 'VI' for virus and '19' for 2019. Covid-19 which is popularly known as corona virus is a severe acute respiratory syndrome disease with symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, breathing difficulty, vomiting and diarrhea (Huang, 2020). The virus is highly contagious, transmittable, infectious and deadly. The first case of the disease was detected on 17th November, 2019 and was later confirmed in December, 2019 in Wuhan, China (Ren, 2020). Within a short period of time, the disease spread across the globe. Barely three months after its first emergence, were several cases of the disease confirmed from one hundred and fourteen (114) countries of the world. As at this short span, a total of one hundred and eighteen thousand (118,000) confirmed cases with four thousand two hundred and ninety one (4,291) recorded death (Bavel, 2020). In Nigeria, the first case of Covid-19 was reported on 27th February, 2020. The virus was tested and confirmed on an Italian tourist in Lagos (NCDC, 2020).

As at February 19th 2020, two hundred and twenty two (222) countries reported a total number of four hundred and twenty two million, four hundred and eighty eight thousand and eighty six (422,448,086) confirmed cases of Covid-19. Five million, eight hundred and ninety four thousand, two hundred and thirty seven (5, 894, 237) death from Covid-19 were also recorded worldwide. United States of America recorded the highest number of Covid-19 cases and deaths with eighty four million, twenty four thousand, five hundred and thirty one (84, 024, 531) confirmed cases; and nine hundred and fifty eight thousand, three hundred (958, 300) recorded death. Nigeria reported two hundred and fifty four thousand, two hundred and twenty one (254,221) confirmed cases with three thousand, one hundred and forty two (3,142) recorded death from Covid-19.

Lagos was the hardest hit state with ninety eight thousand seven hundred and twenty four (98, 724) confirmed cases and seven hundred and sixty nine (769) recorded death. The first case of Covid-19 in Katsina state was detected in Daura on 4th April, 2020. As at 19th February, 2022, the state reported two thousand, four hundred and eleven (2,411) confirmed cases and thirty seven (37) recorded death. Kogi state remained the least affected with only five (5) confirmed cases and two (2) recorded death from Covid-19 (NCDC, 2022).

On March 11th 2020, the world health organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic. As a result of this declaration, suggestions were given to the committee of nations to take some measures to counter the spread of the disease. Among the measures are social distancing, wearing of face mask, regular hand washing, lockdown of major cities and towns, border closure, restrictions of human and vehicular movements, national and international travel restrictions on land, sea and air, self- isolation, closure of markets, financial institutions, religious places of worship and of educational institutions (Joseph, 2021).

Covid-19 pandemic has affected Nigeria in a number of ways. It has affected the socio-economic wellbeing of the people. A number of people have fallen below poverty line as a result of restrictions of the day to day businesses. Several events, ceremonies and sporting activities were halted talk less of social gatherings. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic was mostly felt in the education sector than any other sector(s). It is believed that significant number of us knows why? Simply put, the pandemic leads to the closure of all educational institutions in the country and indeed across the globe in an effort to stem the tide of the pandemic. Joseph (2021) reported that the closure of educational institutions in Nigeria has affected over forty (40) million children of which 91% are at primary and secondary schools level.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Education in Nigeria

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria can never be overemphasized. This is obvious looking at the set-backs caused by the closure of the educational institutions in the country. Agnes (2020), Alawiye and Aramide (2020), Bara'u and Adejo (2020) and Joseph (2021) have identified the following as impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria:

- Impromptu disruption and extension of academic calendar.
- Crash academic programmes
- Poor learning outcome
- Cancellation of educational conferences and workshops
- Creation of a vacuum in the teaching-learning process
- Loss of workforce in education
- Budget deficit in education
- Psychological effect on students
- Wild curriculum content coverage

Impromptu Disruption and Extension of Academic Calendar

With the directives of closure of all educational institutions by the federal ministry of education as the strategy to curtail the spread of the virus in Nigeria on 19th March, 2020, the academic calendar at different levels of education was disrupted. Ogunode (2020) observed that, the closure of all educational institutions had a negative impact on students' academic plans and programmes. Ranging from primary to secondary and higher institutions, academic programmes and activities such as continuous assessments end of term and semester examinations were halted impromptu. The disruption caused an unequal interruption on students learning, internal assessments and public examinations at the senior secondary school level. It is well known that all academic activities and programmes for a particular term, semester or session were already planned from start to finish. Covid-19 pandemic destabilizes such plans which call for an increase or extension in the calendar with additional weeks, months or year in order to make up for the months spent during Covid-19 lockdown. As a result of this extension, a programme that is supposed to finish in two or three weeks will now have to wait until further notice. Those students who are due to graduate this year may have to wait for months or till another/next year. This for sure disrupts the mindsets of teachers, students, parents, government and all stakeholders in education.

Crash Academic Programmes

Since the academic calendar was impromptu disrupted and extended without appropriate plan in place, and schools were closed for quite a long time, there is every tendency that academic activities will be done in haste when schools reopen. The essence of the rush will be to meet up with the earlier scheduled activities so as to cover up for the term, semester or session. In this regard, teachers, students and the government will be working helter skelter with serious motives of either covering the syllabus, scheme of work or passing an examination. Therefore, the right things might not be done in situations of this nature.

Poor Learning Outcome

As a result of the haphazard curriculum coverage by teachers resulting from the crash programmes, hasty attempts were made to cover the curriculum content without being mindful of the quality delivery. Students on their part are not serious and committed to their studies. Rather, they were only focused on passing examination by all means necessary. This could lead to developing various strategies of examination malpractice which in the final analysis will not yield positive outcome. In the end, the education system will eventually produce graduates with a mere certificate without quality. All these when observed critically reflect the true nature of the Nigeria education system in pre and post Covid-19 pandemic era.

Cancellation of Educational Conferences and Workshops

Several educational conferences and workshops, teacher development and capacity building programmes that were planned for 2020 had been postponed or even cancelled as a result of Covid-19. The relevance of these programmes and events to the development of teachers and teaching profession can never be over quantified. The damage caused by these cancellations goes far beyond imagination. As a number of academic researches were halted as a result of the pandemic, very few or no new findings were reported within this period that will help improve the teaching-learning process.

Creation of a Vacuum in the Teaching-Learning Process

Teaching in all institutions of learning in Nigeria has been put to a hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The implication of this is that many students in Nigeria will not be in school for months and therefore they remain idle. Despite the effort of some state governments to fill in the vacuum through online, radio and television classes, a gap still exists as not all students have access to such media and of the fact that, nothing can replace the efficacy of physical teacher-student interaction in the instructional process. To put it in a clearer form, it will be very difficult if not impossible for someone to gauge and or evaluate students' comprehension of a lesson on radio.

Loss of Workforce in Education

One of the biggest challenges of education system in Nigeria is lack of manpower. Manpower in relation to education entails both teaching and non-teaching staff. It is worthy to note that; teacher is the most important single factor in any educational setting. Teacher is at the hub of any education system. He/she determines the quality of education and translates the policies and programmes enshrined in the curriculum in to action (Ukeje, 2016). Without adequate number of inspiring, well informed teachers who are fully prepared to meet the daunting challenges and responsibilities in our schools, we cannot have good education; and without good education, we cannot hope for long to meet successfully, the challenges of an ever changing world.

Despite the relevance of teachers in the attainment of qualitative education, their numbers continue to fall short and consequently cannot handle the teaching-learning activities effectively. Covid-19 has made the manpower problem in education even worse. Many teachers and resource persons have died and are still dying because of the pandemic. These losses will for sure affect the growth and development of the education sector in Nigeria.

Budget Deficit in Education

Inadequate funding is the most critical challenge that has threatened and continues to threaten educational system in Nigeria. With the already existing underfunding of education in Nigeria, the Covid-19 pandemic has made the matter worse. Many schools and institutions of learning in Nigeria cannot afford to build more convenient and Covid-19 friendly classrooms and lecture halls, hostels, laboratories, libraries, workshops and conferences. With the decline in revenue and income and the sudden drop of commitment from development partners, the government was forced to cut its budget on education. The cut in budget has a negative impact on the smooth running of the educational affairs in Nigeria.

Psychological Effect on Students

Psychological effect is caused by the environment and or biological factors such as anxiety, grief, depression and family problems. Covid-19 pandemic has significantly resulted to various psychological consequences on students not only in Nigeria but across the globe. The uncertainty and low predictability of the disease threatens not only students' physical health, but also their mental health in terms of emotions and cognition (Alawiye & Aramide, 2020). The pandemic has brought not only the risk of death from the infection, but also unbearable psychological pressure, anxiety and trauma on students. Students faced isolation, anxiety about a deadly virus and uncertainty about their future. The enormity of living in isolation, changes in the affairs of daily routines, closure of schools, financial hardship and grief over the loss of loved ones have the potential to affect the mental

health of students. Furthermore, as a result of physical distancing measures implemented in response to Covid-19 pandemic (Alawiye & Aramide, 2020) opined that, students have experienced reduced motivation toward studies, increased pressure to learn independently, abandonment of daily routines as well as a potential high rate of drop out.

A study conducted by Yongminds (2020) on impact of corona virus on young people with mental needs, it was revealed that 83% of the respondents agreed that the pandemic worsened the pre-existing mental health conditions, mainly due to school closure, loss of routines and restricted social connections. In essence, this implies that, these factors that contribute to students' distress during the pandemic remains much to be learned about the psychological impact facing students and what can be done to reduce these negative effects. In addition, as a result of school closure, instruction has been uneven as some students have the capacity to participate fully in online learning while many others have faced obstacles such as access to internet which in essence hindered their academic progress. This could also lead to serious lifelong effects on their cognitive ability and intellectual opportunity among others.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed an exacerbated inequality that holds back many students in Nigeria. In addition to the unnecessary disruption to their learning, a mental health crisis is now emerging from the shadows of Covid-19. Many students have lost access to services that were offered by schools. All of these concerns are enough to trigger an immense sense of loss for students (Coa, 2020). Hence, the psychological impact of Covid-19 on students is and will be the greatest challenge facing the education system in Nigeria today.

Wide Curriculum Content Coverage

Effectiveness in quality curriculum delivery in schools is directly proportional to emotional stability of teachers, students, parents and the government. In a situation where the mind is in fear, stability and concentration are affected. Covid-19 has threatened the lives of students and teachers upon which the decision for the closure of schools was based. The closure creates a room for students to engage in so many negative behaviours at a time when full academic activities were on hold (Bara'u & Adejo, 2020). Wild curriculum refers to the unplanned experiences whether positive or negative which students learn without the guidance of a teacher or school in the absence of planned curriculum. Wild curriculum can also said to be all the unplanned and unevaluated experiences the students encounter in the course of studies outside the school in reaction to socio-economic, political, spiritual and psychological pressure that usurp the function of the school during teachers strike actions, students riots and political stalemates. It can also be as a result of natural disasters such as flood, fire outbreak and pandemic like Covid-19.

As schools closure prolongs, students began to develop phobia and keep wondering about their future. They at this end therefore tend to appear in the wrong environment, at a wrong time with the wrong people. This situation provides a perfect environment and atmosphere for Wild curriculum to manifest.

Among these environments are: barbing salons, eateries, market squares, movie centers' and parks. These are the places where mostly negative Wild curriculum contents are made desirable. Note that, this Wild curriculum content distracts students' attention on the real academic issues.

Conclusion

Efforts to stem the spread of Covid-19 pandemic through preventive measures such as social distancing and self-isolation have prompted the closure of all educational institutions of learning in Nigeria. This closure has a negative impact on students learning, resulting not just in delay of progress, but actual loss of mastery, knowledge and psychological trauma. In addition, schools closure impact not only students and teachers but also have a far reaching social and economic consequences in the country. The impact of the schools closure

has become too much to bear for the fragile Nigerian education system. ‘‘A word is enough for the wise’’. Effort should be put in place to anticipate future occurrence of similar incidence and plan well ahead. To do this, there is the need for curriculum experts and educational statutory agencies such as the Nigerian educational research and development council (NERDC), national teachers institute (NTI), national universities commission (NUC), and the national commission for colleges of education (NCCE) to come up with an innovation in the curriculum that will address and realign the future occurrence of all unforeseen events of this nature and magnitude.

Recommendations

In line with what has been discussed and the conclusion drawn in this paper, the following suggestions could be the possible ways out of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria. These suggestions when properly planned and implemented will help address any similar challenge in future. Hence:

- ✓ Before taking any decision on an issue that has bearing with education, educational experts should be consulted and their professional recommendations should be considered and adhered to. This will help reduce academic disruption and casualties.
- ✓ Instead of adopting a crash programme which will lead to poor learning outcomes, it would have been better to utilize long vocations to make up the lost time. This will help to stabilize not only the academic calendar but also provides an avenue to cover the syllabus as enshrined in the curriculum.
- ✓ Government, institutions of learning and related development partners should liaise with internet service providers to come up with more and robust educational platforms that will supplement what has been lost as a result of the cancellation of conferences and workshops.
- ✓ Government should establish an enabling environment for staff in the educational sector and improve their condition of service and revitalize the basic infrastructure.
- ✓ There should be a continuous plan for recruitment of relevant manpower in education to replace the lost ones either as a result of pandemic or retirement.
- ✓ Government should place high premium on education by meeting up with the 26% recommended educational spending as prescribed by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).
- ✓ Educational institutions should create awareness to students about the signs of anxiety, depression and emotions. This awareness could help to lower the psychological impact of Covid19 and any other pandemic of such nature and magnitude. Government on its part should keep up with giving specific up-to-date and accurate health information about the pandemic and ways to address it.
- ✓ When students are at home for any reason, be it normal or abnormal vacation, parents should encourage them to engage in skills acquisition like tailoring, arts and crafts, barbing, hair dressing, catering, interior and exterior decorations and carpentry, among many others. This could help address the effect of a negative Wild curriculum on the students.
- ✓ Finally, government, parents, philanthropists and other relevant stakeholders in education should ensure a continuous teaching and learning process even when students are at home as a result of a pandemic like ‘Covid’ or long vocations. This could be done through online instruction, radio and television stations among others.

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