

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD IN NIGERIA SECONDARY EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*The eruption of the coronavirus disease known with code, Covid-19 Pandemic affected every sphere of human life such as: businesses, carrier advancement, religious gathering, education and other social activities globally including Nigeria. This study examines covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and way forward in Nigerian secondary education. However, of all the sectors of governance, the educational sector was highly affected because of the ill preparation due to inadequate funding, despite the 24% UNESCO recommendation to the sector especially the primary and secondary school levels. The covid-19 pandemic outbreak hits badly on school programmes which made it impossible for students to attend classes, accessed school library materials and write examinations. These make it imperative to seek for measures to cushion the effect of the pandemic on secondary school programmes. Base on the findings, the researchers recommended among others that the Nigerian government should encourage the learners (students) to participate vehemently in distance learning through adopting multiple learning modalities such as television, radio and SMS-based mobile platform like zoom. Federal government should through the ministry of Education initiate innovative strategies that would help to enhance the effective use of electronic library in secondary schools for access to current information and studying materials.*

**Keywords:** Education, Secondary Education, Covid-19 Pandemic, Electronic Library

### **Introduction**

The eruption of the coronavirus disease known with code, Covid-19 Pandemic, affected every sphere of human life; ranging from businesses, carrier advancement, religious gathering, education, and other social activities globally including Nigeria. Education remains the veritable instrument for academic advancement, social mobilization, political survival and effective national development of any country. Education is the bedrock for capacity building and national development. More so, education can be regarded as the key that unlock the development of personal and national potentials that ensures viable sustainability of nations economic resources which invariably is to ensure overall societal goal. According to Ayolugbe, Ishiwuand Ugodinamba (2019) cited Offorma (2015) education is something more than schooling because people are schooled to be accepted in the society. In view of this, Nwangwu(2007) it makes recipient to function and be relevant not only to themselves but to their society irrespective of place, time and circumstances. Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN (2013) in her National Policy of Education affirmed that education is an instrument per-excellence. Similarly, the National Policy on Education (2013) stated the specific goals of education in Nigeria it includes promoting functional education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction. The same National policy on education stated that in order to realize these goals of education in Nigeria and gain from its contribution to the national economic growth and sustainability, government would take necessary measures to ensure that such education is learner-centered for maximum self- development and fulfillment at all level including secondary school.

Secondary education is the education given in an institution of learning to prepare students for higher education (FRN, 2013). According to Ogbonaya (2010) defined secondary education as the form of education which children receive automatically after they have received primary school education. It constitutes post primary education and sometimes serves as a link between primary and tertiary education. According to Ayolugbe, Ikuelogbon & Odo (2020) cited Ochorma (2011), secondary education is the foundation and the chief corner stone of all types of education. This implies that secondary education is the basic and

fundamental education the child received in preparation for higher education. The same National Policy on Education (2013) stated the aim of secondary education which is to prepare the individual for useful living with the society, inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement and achievement of excellence, raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the view and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under broad national goals and live good citizen. Therefore, such education supposed be given desired attention no matter the circumstances even with the outbreak of the coronavirus disease known as Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Coronavirus disease known with code, COVID-19 is an infection which is as a result of a novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Infection for example, the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) was known in 2002 and 2012 in that order were as a result of viruses analogous to SARS-CoV-2. Covid-19 was first discovered in Wuhan, China with general signs of dry cough, fever, tiredness, shortness of breath, headache and general body weakness owned to the incentive of supplementary pains in the body. According to African News (2020) therapeutic diagnosis and findings have revealed that people tainted with Covid-19 can be symptomatic or asymptomatic; the premature stages of the virus depending on each person immune system.

Nevertheless, SARS-CoV-2 has a higher range more than earlier information related to viruses and as a result the obscurity in the cure and management of COVID-19 (Zhong *et al.*, 2020). The spread of the coronavirus initially spared Nigeria, like many other African countries, with zero recorded case as of January 2020. This luck, however, did not last. By the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, Nigeria reported its first case; a Nigerian UK returnee. Nearly two months, 343 confirmed cases, 91 recoveries and 10 deaths Nigeria has a pressing cause for concern. The Federal Ministry of Education announced the temporary close-down of all schools in Nigeria, effective March 23<sup>rd</sup>, in a bid to contain the spread of the coronavirus. How long do we will need to close school? Unlike other countries, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education's school-closure directive did not come with any clear-cut policy measures on how to mitigate learning disruptions for children or how to address the digital divide. As emphasised by UNESCO,

temporary school closures come with high social and economic costs, with severe impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **Covid -19 Pandemic: Challenges in Nigerian secondary Education**

Research made us understand that there are prevalent challenges of Nigerian secondary education that emanated through covid-19 pandemic. Thelma and Adedeji (2020), streamline some of the covid-19 challenges on education as:

#### **Missed Learning for the Majority of Pre-pandemic in School-Students:**

According to Thelma (2020) cited UNESCO, that about 359 million primary and secondary school learners are currently out-of school as a result of the school closures. For primary schools, this number totals approximately 25.6 million students of which about 87 percent (23.5 million) are students enrolled in public schools. The numbers are just as stark for secondary school learners. This implies that roughly 10.3 million secondary school students who are out of school as a result of closures, proximately 81 percent (8.4 million) of them are public school students.

#### **Loss of Access to Vital School Provided Services:**

Beyond the missed learning opportunities students in Nigeria are also losing access to the daily meals made available by the federally-funded school feeding programs. Nigeria has one of the largest school feeding programs in the world, with the world food programs. In the world, with the world food programme estimating that in 2019, Nigeria's homegrown schools feeding initiative provided access to daily meals over 9 million children in over 40,000 public schools. However, the benefits of school feeding programs extend beyond the immediate education benefits of the meals provided such as encouraging enrollment in schools and boosting learning. School-feeding programs yield larger socio-economic benefits for children, their families and society at large, two of which are especially pertinent to children of low socio-economic groups: boasting health and notation, and providing social protection and safety nets.

#### **Leaving More Students Behind:**

A longer-term impact of these school closures should be deepened educational inequality. While some international development partners (UNESCO, for example) have put together and provided access to ice-based resources to foster learning; uptake will depend legacy on the

level and quality of digital and internet access and language accessibility (as most programs are available in English or other non-native Nigerian languages).

**Health and Nutrition:** For some students, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, the daily meals provided at schools are their primary source of healthy and nutritious meals with schools close, over 9 million public school students are currently being deprived of this benefit. Beyond feeding, Nigeria's feeding program also offers health services, including deworming and immunization for students in public schools across its state. The closure would unfortunately also affect access to some basic health services for poorer children.

**Social Protection and Social Safety Nets:** Over 50 percent of students accessing free meals fall into first and second quintiles, representing the poorer 40 percent of the population, in a country where over 50 percent of the country live below the poverty line. More so, empirical research has revealed, people living below the poverty line usually spend between half and three-quarters of their income on food, representing a significant proportion of a poor household income. For each individual meal provides the value can represent up to 10 percent of a family's income; for families with more than one child in school, this small figure can represent significant savings for families. The school feeding program can provide safety nets by boosting income for households. The absence of these daily meals is likely causing posing potential challenges for households, especially at this time where there has been a shut-down/slowdown in economic activities across the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on education systems all over the world, with Nigeria not being an exception. This has resulted in a nationwide lockdown by Governments, which is greatly impacting not only school closures but also physical/social distancing and change from normal routines of people. It is estimated that 39,440,016 learners are influenced, among which 48% are females and 26% are learners at secondary school level. Under such circumstance, children and parents/caregivers are working hard to cope with the challenges of home schooling. In this view, UNESCO Abuja Office has transformed the School Meets the Learner Approach (SMLA) by uploading and sharing the lesson content through various channels at free of cost in order to build on and strengthen the strategies of the Ministry of Education to sustain

responsiveness and engagement of non-formal education learners at the secondary school level. This explains why e-library platform and other strategies can never be over emphasized in sustaining continuous access to education.

### **Covid- 19 Pandemic: The Way Forward in Nigeria Secondary Education.**

The African News (2020) highlighted some strategies that would aid in cushioning the effect covid-19 pandemic in various secondary schools in many countries. These include:

#### **Enhancing Preparedness While Keeping School Open**

This involves enforcing and supporting preventive actions in schools (Afghanistan); establishing protocols for schools' handling of illnesses and potential cases (Egypt, Russia, Belarus); using the education system's infrastructure and human resources to address the spread of infections in communities (Liberia and Sierra Leone); and limiting physical contact by reducing social and extra-curricular activities (Singapore, Russia).

#### **Using Remote Learning and Education Resources to Enhance Learning**

Many countries have turned to distance learning as means of bridging gap in school programmes (fully Online in China, Italy, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia; mobile phone or television in Vietnam, Mongolia). In addition to infrastructure and connectivity, teachers' and administrators' familiarity with the tools and processes are also key factors in providing distance learning. Similarly, in Bulgaria, more than 800,000 account have been created for all teachers and parents, publishers had been mobilized to open the digital textbooks and learning materials for grade 1-10, and two national TV channel would broadcast educational TV. As more countries close schools, more creativity would be needed. For instance, adapting existing platforms for use in smart phones and/or in concordance with telecom companies to eliminate the cost of accessing material from a ministry of education site would be part of the mitigation efforts. It would be possible to reach most children area left behind with targeted instructions via online medium.

#### **Improved Education Finance**

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 short fall. Yet, more funding is required to keep learning going or scaled up education support programmes as part of the government palliative measures. For the government, reducing costs would require reprioritizing its plans in light of this new reality; the most urgent need at the moment would be improving teaches motivation, learners preparedness and galvanizing domestic digital and media enterprises. This needs to be complemented with innovative sourcing of learning infrastructure during this period. For instance, reaching children through existing school and home appliances and gadgets would be more cost-effective. Greater involvement of domestic philanthropists and digital entrepreneurs can reduce the financial burden of sustaining learning through the crisis.

### **Tapping into Global Resources**

The World Bank, UALESCO and other development partners have already have rolled out a number of education resources that developing countries can readily deploy. TheEdtech industry in general is as providing free online platform to engage directly with students and to assist school administrators and governments to identify technological solutions that support remote learning. On a large scale, the countries should explore international loans and grants facilities for education as part of mitigation and recovery plans in cushioning the effect of covid-19 pandemic. Modalities require a central planner, as well coordination between all three tiers of government, and the private sector (media platform owners). This is where the role of ministry of education will crucially extend beyond traditional policy making and regulations. The commissioners of education could help in the deployment and use of these tools within states, while the federal government coordinates the state efforts by plugging capacity and finance gaps. The government could draw on the experience of Sierra Leone where the Ebola crisis led to school closures for about 9 months. To reach the most vulnerable and excluded children, the government of Sierra Leone harnessed radios and televisions to deliver lessons. Whatever strategy the government chooses to incorporate, they must ensure that it is cost effective and easy to use (children and their parents/guardians have some knowledge of it before hand or can easily learn to use them).

### **Empowering Parents and Reaching the Most Venerable**

In order to ensure proper intake of the available resources, the government will also need to ensure that parents are equipped to create a conducive learning and support children in this mode of learning. At this time, parents would be required to act as intermediaries between the school management/government and the children in learning delivery. In some instances, parents would need to take on the role of a teacher in home schooling their children, although relying on guidance from school. Additionally, most of the learning mediums would be shared amongst household members and their responsibility would fall on the parents to determine and allocate usage among family members. Likewise, in keeping the flow of education support programmes, the educational needs of the hard to-reach families could also be met, lessons and home work can go together with physical deliveries of additional education support, while each family develops their homegrown strategy to cover the materials. For instance, Angola, Uganda and Zambia have already embedded this approach in their covid-19 response strategy. The key requirement would be of the conscious and active involvement of school administrations in the various government interventions. Therefore, the same can be brought into Nigeria education sector for continuous educational access.

### **Establishment of Electronic Library in all Secondary Schools**

Electronic library can play a significant role among learners in stemming the rising crises of covid-19 where social distancing must be observed and nobody knows when it will end. So the advantage of e-library would provide students with uninterrupted access to study materials at any time. Students in school can make use of the innovative tools in ICT to access information that would be helpful in their studies. The advent of e-library creates new opportunities for libraries and librarians to become gateways to global information network which promote new innovative strategies for learning. The current pandemic is an eye opening to ministry of education, school administrators and stakeholders to reposition their mind on the efficacy of E-Library which ultimately help in redesigning services and information products that would enhance learners' ability in research and further studies.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. The Nigerian government should encourage the learners (students) to participate vehemently in distance learning through adopting multiple learning modalities such as television, radio and SMS-based mobile platform like zoom.
2. Nigerian government also need to ensure that parents/guardians are well equipped to create conducive learning environment, and support children in this new mode of learning.
3. The ministry of education should crucially extend beyond traditional policy making and creating ample avenue for new policy menu that would fame the covid-19 pandemic.
4. The funding from the government is required to keep learning going, or scaled-up education support programmes as part of the government's palliative measures in schools.
5. The federal government should through the ministry of education initiate innovative strategies that would help to established electronic library platform in secondary schools for *access to current information and studying materials*.

## Conclusion

The coronavirus disease known with code, covid-19 pandemic has affected every sphere of life and may forever change how we have always lived in our day to day learning scenarios. However, it appears that the covid-19 pandemic may remain as long as human being leaves. Globally, governments, school administrators, educational stake holders are seeking for punitive measures that would help to take teaching and learning to the next level which invariable is to cushion the effect of the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, this study examined covid -19 pandemic: Challenges and way forward in Nigerian secondary education.

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