

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE ILLS OF NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, the Federal Ministry of Health announced the confirmation of a Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in Lagos, Nigeria. This was the first case to be reported in Nigeria since the beginning of the outbreak of the virus in China. The disease is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Following, the confirmation of the index case and first death, the whole country was thrown into pandemonium. In a bid to curtail the spread of the virus, the Federal Government announced a total lockdown of the country for the initial period of fourteen (14) days which is believed to be the incubation period of the virus. What is the implication of the Covid-19 pandemic on our education system? What are the ills of the education sector before the outbreak? What are the effects of covid-19 pandemic on Nigerian students? Methodologically, the paper adopts the historical analysis approach while data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The paper concludes that long term neglect of the education sector has overwhelmingly affected the system as a result of the shutdown occasioned by the corona virus pandemic.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Education system, History, Pandemic, Lockdown.

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian education system has being in a total mess in the recent times owing to the neglect of the sector by successive governments. The budgetary allocation for education in the country every year is always adjudged one of the poorest which does not help to ensure the development of the system. For instance, the

budget for education from 2015 to 2020 is as follows; 2015: 392.2bn @ 7.74%, 2016: 369.6bn @ 6.10%, 2017: 550bn @ 7.03 %, 2018: 605.8 @ 7% 2019: 620.5bn @ 7.05%, and 2020: 691.07 @ 6.7%. (Vanguard, 2018, Premium times, 2019, Punch, 2020) Both the federal and state governments are always at loggerheads with academic institutions such as the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of education, secondary schools and research institutions which is the major causes of industrial actions in the education sector.

Due to the poor state of infrastructure in our educational institutions, there is mass exodus of Nigerians to foreign universities both in Africa, Asia and Europe where there is friendly learning environment. According to Uba Ifedigbo (2020), Nigerians who attend Nigerian universities are those who could not afford the fees for foreign studies. They are here because they have no option. The Nigerian school environment is harsh, unconducive and unfriendly for learning because of decayed infrastructure occasioned by poor government funding of the education sector.

In this twenty first century, Nigerian higher institutions are still using white boards and marker to teach. In a class of about one hundred students, there is no projector, no public address system, no electricity and other e-learning facilities such as broadband Wireless Fidelity (WIFI) and networks for students to do online learning which is obtainable free of charge in other African and European institutions.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has exposed the ills of the Nigerian education system and government insensitivity towards education. There is no alternative to physical class learning as there is no facility for such. There is no government institution that was able to successfully conduct online teaching. To cap it all, after the ease of nationwide lockdown and the opening of economic activities, schools were still closed simply because the government do not have value for education as other countries resumed full academic activities. Again, government could not afford facilities that will enhance total observance of the covid-19 protocol in schools such as enough classrooms space for social distancing of students, enough teaching staff to enhance shifting of periods to accommodate all students for lessons and protective equipment and isolation centres for emergency. The aim of this paper is to analyse the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemics and how it has exposed the weakness of the Nigerian education system. Thus the paper will give a brief account of the history of pandemics to

which the coronavirus belongs. Analysis of the ills of the education system and its effects on the students will be made while conclusion and recommendation follows thereafter.

### **History of Pandemics**

The history of pandemics is as old as the society itself. Pandemics are caused by virus and viruses exist in the society. Hence pandemics outbreak has occurred occasionally in human society even as humans try their best to pre-empt its outbreak or control its outbreak when it eventually occurs. Thus different pandemics have plagued human society in the past just as the novel Coronavirus that has brought the entire human race to a standstill with no available cure as we speak. Here we are going to explore some of the notable pandemics that gave serious concern to the world.

### **The Bubonic Plague**

The reign of Justinian I, the emperor of the Byzantine Empire in the 6th century, was hampered by an outbreak of the Bubonic plague. Now known as the Plague of Justinian, this pandemic is thought to have killed between 30 million and 50 million people, perhaps equal to as much as half of the world's population at the time, (Wikipedia).

The dreaded Justinian plague (Bubonic) definitely happened, but researchers are still poring over the evidence as to just how bad it was, about 1,500 years ago. The traditional narrative of this pandemic has it that trade largely ceased and the Empire was weakened, allowing other civilizations to reconquer previously Byzantine lands in the Middle East, Northern Africa, and parts of Asia. Justinian was in the process of reuniting the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire when the plague hit, and that became the true end of that era. Ultimately, half of the world died, the Roman Empire was never united again, and the Dark Ages began.

### **Black Death (1347 - 1351)**

In the period between 1347 and 1351, bubonic plague spread throughout Europe, killing approximately 25 million people. European population levels took over 200 years to return to their level from before 1347. It likely killed greater numbers in Asia, especially China, where it is thought to have originated. One of the results of

the pandemic, known later as the Black Death, was the beginning of the decline of serfdom as so many people had died, that the survivors' standard of living actually increased. Workers had more work opportunities, and social mobility increased, while there was also a short-lived moratorium on warfare.

Culturally, the cataclysm prompted an increase in mysticism as so much suffering challenged the religious dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. Reactions to the plague also included an upsurge in bigotry and scapegoating, with more instances of heightened prejudice and even pogroms against minorities including Jews and Roma.

### **Smallpox (15th - 17th centuries)**

Europeans introduced a number of new diseases when they first arrived in the continents of the Americas in 1492. One of these was smallpox, a contagious disease that kills around 30% of those infected. During this period, smallpox claimed the lives of approximately 20 million people, close to 90% of the population, in the Americas. The pandemic helped Europeans colonize and develop the newly vacated areas, forever altering the histories of the Americas, their European conquerors, and the global economy.

The exploitation of the mineral wealth of the "New World" in the form of silver and gold from Latin America, for example, led to massive inflation within the far-flung Spanish Empire. The great economic thinker John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1930 that this "price revolution" was a crucial turning point in the formation of modern capitalism (Bose, 2020).

### **Cholera (1961 to present)**

The first cholera pandemic began in Jessore, India, and spread through most of the region and then to neighbouring areas. It was the first of seven (7) major cholera pandemics that have killed millions of people. A British physician named John Snow was said to have known some things about how to prevent it from spreading, and in 1854 stemmed the outbreak by isolating its source to a particular water pump in London's Soho neighbourhood.

The World Health Organization has called cholera "the forgotten pandemic" and said that its seventh outbreak, which began in 1961, continues to this day. (www.who.int). Cholera reportedly infects 1.3 million to 4 million people every year, with annual fatalities ranging from 21,000 to 143,000. As Cholera is caused by ingesting food or water contaminated with a certain bacteria, it overwhelmingly harms countries hampered by extreme wealth inequality and lack of social development. Cholera continues to change the world by hurting the parts of it that is least able to defend themselves, while richer countries barely worry about it.

**Spanish Flu, or H1N1 (1918 - 1919)** The Spanish Flu, also known as the "1918 influenza pandemic", was an outbreak of a H1N1 virus that infected around 500 million people, or a third of the world's population, in the early 21st century. The pandemic was responsible for killing over 50 million people globally. At the time of the outbreak, World War I was coming to an end and public health authorities had no or few official protocols in place for dealing with viral pandemics, which contributed to its large impact (CDC, 2020)

In the years to come, research into understanding how the pandemic happened and how it could have been prevented led to improvements in public health and helped lessen the impact of similar outbreaks of flu-like viruses afterward.

### **Hong Kong Flu, or H3N2 (1968 - 1970)**

Fifty years after the Spanish Flu, the world witnessed another influenza virus, H3N2, which spread around the globe. Estimates put the number of global fatalities at around one million people, about 100,000 of which were in the US. The 1968 pandemic was the third outbreak of influenza to occur in the 20th century, the other two being the Spanish Flu in 1918 and the Asian flu pandemic of 1957. It is believed that the virus responsible for the Asian flu evolved and re-emerged 10 years later into this so-called "Hong Kong flu," resulting in the H3N2 pandemic. The 21st century, though, has continued to witness influenza outbreaks. (WHO, 2020)

While not as deadly as the 1918 influenza outbreak, H3N2 was exceptionally contagious, with 500,000 people becoming infected within 2 weeks of the first reported case, in Hong Kong. The pandemic helped the global health community

understand the vital role of vaccinations in preventing future outbreaks (www.who.int)

### **HIV/AIDS (1981- present)**

The first known cases of HIV/AIDS were reported in 1981 but the disease continues to infect and kill people till today. Since 1981, 75 million people have had the HIV virus and approximately 32 million have died as a result (Dibie, 2013). As a sexually transmitted disease for which there is no cure, HIV/AIDS is a persistent epidemic that continues to impact millions of people every year. Despite the lack of a cure for AIDS, antiretroviral therapy medications can control HIV and slow its progress dramatically, allowing someone infected to live a long life.

The negative effects of HIV/AIDS on the global economy is still being studied, most especially in Africa, the continent which has the largest percentage of HIV/AIDS cases.

### **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), is an illness caused by one of the 7 coronaviruses that can infect humans. In 2003, an outbreak that originated in the Guangdong province of China became a global pandemic as it rapidly spread to a total of 26 countries, infecting just over 8,000 people and killing 774 of them. According to Nassos Stylianou (2014), the world's worst Ebola outbreak began with one boy's death". Transmission of SARS-CoV is primarily from person to person. It appears to have occurred mainly during the second week of illness, which corresponds to the peak of virus excretion in respiratory secretions and stool, and when cases with severe disease start to deteriorate clinically (WHO, 2020)

The consequences of the 2003 SARS pandemic were largely limited due to an intense public health response by global authorities, including quarantining affected areas and isolating infected individuals. Scientists studying the new 2019 coronavirus have found that its genetic makeup is 86.9% identical to the SARS virus, and officials are now comparing the two to see if governments can successfully replicate any of the containment procedures from 2003.

The SARS outbreak increased awareness about preventing viral disease transmission, particularly in Hong Kong, where public surfaces have been regularly sanitized and facemasks have become a common sight.

### **Ebola (2014-2016)**

The Ebola virus, named after a river close to the initial outbreak, was limited in its range compared to most modern pandemics but incredibly deadly. It began in a small village in Guinea in 2014 and spread to a handful of neighbouring countries in West Africa. The virus killed 11,325 of the 28,600 infected people, with most cases occurring in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Of the 8 Americans who contracted Ebola, one died, according to the Centre for Disease Control. The first case of EbolaVirus Disease in Nigeria was confirmed in Lagos on 23 July 2014 and spread to involve 20 laboratory-confirmed EVD cases. 8 of the confirmed cases of EVD in Nigeria eventually died (case fatality rate of 42.1%) and 12 were nursed back to good health (NCDC, 2017). In Nigeria, the rapid control of the EVD was facilitated by the rapid detection of the index case, the comprehensive contact tracing measures and the isolation and treatment of the secondary cases. On October 20, 2014 Nigeria was declared free of EVD by the World Health Organization

Ebola is estimated to have cost a total of \$4.3 billion, with inbound investments dramatically dropping in the three countries of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Like "the forgotten pandemics" of Cholera and Ebola most ravaged countries are least equipped to defend against it.

### **Coronavirus, or Covid-19 (2019 - present)**

The ongoing outbreak of novel coronavirus, which causes a disease known as Covid-19, has revealed vulnerabilities in the global community's response to outbreaks of viruses. As of March 18, 2020, worldwide cases had surpassed 200,000, with more than 8,000 deaths. The vast majority of cases are in China. On March 11, the World Health Organization characterized the outbreak as a pandemic. (WHO, 2020)

Estimates indicate that Coronavirus will spread largely throughout the world and could eventually infect 40% to 70% of the global population. A study by The

Australian National University estimates the coronavirus will cause millions of deaths and will register a hit to global GDP of \$2.4 trillion. (WHO, 2020).

The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended practicing social distancing and cancelling or postponing gatherings of more than 10 people, wearing of face masks, face shields, washing of hands and using hand sanitizers etc. Following this guideline, many countries, have ordered restaurants and bars to close dine-in service and offer take-out and delivery only while others ordered a total lockdown as a measure of preventing the spread of the virus.

In its early stages, the outbreak exposed vulnerabilities in the modern world's preparedness and ability to contain flu-like virus transmission, hinted at roughly a decade earlier during the outbreak of swine flu. But the damage to the world economy threaten the worst recession since the Great Depression or the "panics" of the 1800s, depending on the scale of government responses. As at the time of writing this paper, confirmed coronavirus cases in the world is 29,386,463 with 19,943,453 deaths. In Africa the total number of cases is 1,359,869 and the total number of deaths is 32,788 while the total number of confirmed cases in Nigeria stands at 56,388 and death is 1,083 (NCDC, 2020, who.int, 2020).

### **Index Case of Covid-19 in Nigeria**

On the 27th of February 2020, the Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) case in Lagos State, Nigeria. The index case was an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria but made a trip to Milan, Italy. On his return to Nigeria, on February 25<sup>th</sup>, based on some signs and symptoms he had, he was diagnosed and confirmed Covid-19 positive by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, which was a part of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. Following the confirmation, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Federal Ministry of Health and the Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) swiftly moved for contact tracing of the index case. According to the Minister of health, we have already started working to identify all the contacts of the patient, since he entered Nigeria (Osagie, 2020). He advised Nigerians to know that most people who become infected may experience only mild illness and recover easily, but it can be more severe in others, particularly the elderly and persons with other underlying chronic illnesses. All Nigerians should



take care of their health and maintain hand and respiratory hygiene to protect themselves and others, including their own families (Osagie, 2020).

Henceforth, the government of Nigeria, through the Federal Ministry of Health started strengthening measures to ensure an outbreak in Nigeria is controlled and contained as quickly as possible. The Multi-sectorial Coronavirus Preparedness Group led by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) immediately activated its national Emergency Operation Centres to respond to this case and implement firm control measures. Isolation centres were built, laboratory testing centres started to be equipped in readiness to contain the spread.

It should be noted that before the outbreak, that Nigeria has no standard laboratory that can boast of detecting any infection outbreak on its own without getting help from outside or treat infections of high profile such as the novel Coronavirus as a result of government neglect of the health sector while patronizing foreign hospitals such as ones in the U.K, U.S and India. The centre where Ebola disease were treated became a shadow of itself after Nigeria was declared an Ebola free country in 2014. *This shows how vulnerable and weak our public health infrastructure is,* (Health Commissioner, in Otu, 2017). The government of Nigeria in utter neglect of the health sector abandoned its responsibility of protecting the lives of its citizens by providing and upgrading its health facilities, rather the leaders seek medical tourism outside the shores of Nigeria leaving those who cannot afford foreign treatment to their own fate.

### **Covid-19 and Nationwide Lockdown**

Following the confirmation of the index case, the country was thrown into panic as to what to do to contain the virus and its spread. There were calls by Nigerians for the closure of our international boarder both sea and air as one of the most effective ways of containing the virus, but the Federal Government of Nigeria did not obey the clarion call. People were still travelling out of the country and coming in. The likes of late Abba Kyari, Atiku's son, and others who came back from foreign trips did not observe the fourteen days self-isolation as given by the Ministry of health. (Punch newspaper, 2020) Rather they were seen in the public attending meetings and other social gathering until they developed symptoms and were diagnosed. Eventually they were confirmed positive and that was when it dawned on the Federal Government that Coronavirus is not a joke. The last straw

that broke the Carmel's back was the death of Mr. Suleiman Achimugu, a former managing director of the Petroleum Products Marketing Company (PPMC), on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 as announced by the National Centre for Disease Control, (Echenim, 2020). This promptly made the Federal Government to announce a fourteen days lockdown in Lagos, Abuja and Ogun on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020. (Cnbc.com). Then on April, 22, the governors of the 36 states of the federation after a meeting regarding the increase in the numbers of cases resolved to declare a fourteen days nationwide lockdown with only essential service providers like food, petrol and medicals with a verifiable identity card to move about, (Muideen, 2020).

### **Covid-19 and Schools Shutdown**

The lockdown of activities in the country was initially the affairs of states as they determined when their states go on lockdown. This was after the Federal Government announced a fourteen days lockdown in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun following the reported cases in these cities. Afterwards the 36 states governors in collaboration with the Federal Government agreed on a nationwide lockdown and this invariably affected the education sector. Due to the latent nature of the Coronavirus, its mode of transmission and death rate, academic sessions was disrupted for students at all levels. The government and administrators of education had expected the shutdown to be brief, enough to contain the spread of the virus and return to normal life. Unfortunately, instead of the situation to abate, it kept surging to the consternation of all.

As the education sector was abruptly closed, schools at all levels were unable to conclude their sessions with both lectures and examination. Thus, the second term for primary and secondary schools were not concluded while higher institutions did not complete their first or second semester sessions as the case may be. Thus the education system remains the worst hit as we witness the reopening of other activities in batches with the education sector being far from the mind of the administrators as they were in total dilemma on what to do to ensure safe reopening of the entire education sector.

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.

There was no provision whatsoever on how to fill the gap that will emanate from the sudden closure and its attendant negative effects on the students, the teachers and the society at large. Even efforts made by the Parents, Teachers and Education stakeholders such as the All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools(ANCOPPS), Examination Bodies, Nigeria Union of Teachers, Vice Chancellors and State Commissioners of Education was frustrated by a declaration made by the Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu that schools in Nigeria will not reopen any time soon. (Adamu, 2020)

Thus, the inability of Nigeria to reopen their education sector is a clear attestation to the ills that the Nigerian education system has to grapple with in recent times as the government has no plan for education.

### **Schools Reopening and the Ills of the Nigerian Education System**

Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Nigerian education system has been in crisis as a result of the utter neglect of the system by successive administrations as well as corruption. First the budgetary allocation for the education sector has continued to dwindle. For instance, the budget for education from 2015 to 2020 is as follows; 2015:392.2bn @ 7.74%, 2016:369.6bn @ 6.10%, 2017:550bn @ 7.03 %, 2018: 605.8 @ 7% 2019: 620.5bn @ 7.05%, and 2020: 691.07 @ 6.7%. (Vanguard, 2018, Premium times, 2019, Punch, 2020). This is grossly inadequate if Nigeria is to achieve a robust education system that will measure with the World Education standard. This meagre budgetary allocation for education has led to consistent poor management and development of the education sector.

Recall that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) went on strike because of the poor condition of the Nigerian universities as well as the inability of the Federal government to honour its agreement with the Union since 2009. The union's industrial action coincided with the schools closure as a result of the Coronavirus. The current union's action began on Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 over what it described as the use of force to compel university lecturers to enrol in the Integrated Payroll Personnel Information System (IPPIS) (Adedigba, 2020). ASUU embarked on the strike over the non-payment of salaries of their members who failed to enrol into the federal government's IPPIS, a payroll software mandated for all public officials.

ASUU and other institutional unions like the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union, (COEASU), and the Polytechnic union, (ASUP) have advocated for increased funding of Nigeria's higher institutions for the greater good of the nation. This has resulted to incessant strike action of these unions against the federal government. The Federal government had always fooled the unions into signing agreements with them and allowing them to go back to work after which they will renege on the agreement.

One of such agreements was the ASUU-FG agreement of October 2009. The agreement was reached after two years of negotiation between the lecturers and a government team appointed by the then Education Minister, Obiageli Ezekwesili. The agreement reached at the negotiations included conditions of service for university lecturers, funding of universities, university autonomy and academic freedom, and issues that required legislation to implement (Ogala and Mohammed, 2013). From all indications, the contents of the agreement is for the benefit of the nation which the universities represent in that capacity. The funding of universities is the duty of the government. The lecturers are only agents through which the dreams would be achieved but it looks to the government as if the union is demanding something impossible or they are after their own pocket.

The educational institutions we have in Nigeria are the shadows of itself. No wonder the leaders send their children abroad for studies where they know that the education system is good. Thus according to Anowai (2020) as the Federal Government neglected the health sector across the nation that even at the Aso Villa Clinic, no better treatment can be received there by the occupants including the president himself that made him seek medical tourism abroad. The same way they left the education system to rot because none of their children are studying here in Nigeria.

The Federal and State governments neglected technical education which is a sure tool for national reconstruction and development (Agbodike, 2006) thus, the education system became a social assembly where people gather to learn nothing different from what has been learnt in the nineteenth century. The Nigerian education system is still using most of the versions of colonial education policy which do not promote technical and vocational development, (Etuk, 1984) rather the theoretical aspect of education which enables Nigeria to be dependent on foreign help for her technological needs.

It is this technical education that is needed in Nigeria and the government are aware of it but is not responsive to it because their children are not studying in Nigeria. Again, the Nigeria system with its attendant mediocrity as against meritocracy that made an Economist to work in the Ministry of culture and tourism while an Igbo graduate works in the ministry of power and energy. The rate at which round peg is been put in a square hole is quite alarming in our country. The value of education is no longer taken serious since a man with O' level result can head a Ministry or parastatal where a Professor works. It is only in Nigeria that workers in the Ministry of Power and energy uses generator to receive bill payment in their office because there is no electricity. It is only in Nigeria that a whole university depends on generator for it electricity needs.

The university is a place of research and development, and the university lecturers are willing to go the extra miles in making Nigerian university a place to be. But the Nigerian government with its corrupt politicians prefers robust parliamentary salary and seating allowances amounting to millions than fund education for the benefit of all.

This infrastructural decay in Nigerian education sector is what has led to the delay of schools resumption in the wake of the lifting of nationwide lockdown occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. The government is aware that facilities in the schools are not enough to guarantee safety of the students in the classes. Talking about the virtual learning method, as obtainable in other countries, Nigeria cannot boast of twelve hours steady electricity supply, for those who are opportuned to have electricity in their domain. Some towns in Nigeria has not being with electricity for decades while exorbitant estimated bills has made some people cut off their line from the electric poll. This is quite telling on every aspect of our national life. Manufacturers are complaining about electricity and other small businesses using electricity resort to using generator which is expensive and risky too.

Although, the Academic Staff Union of Universities(ASUU) were on strike before the outbreak and subsequent lockdown, there was need for online teaching for primary, secondary and higher institutions, but there was no facility to promote that. There is generally epileptic power supply in Nigeria to the extent that one cannot be able to charge his computer system, no available network for the students to lay their hands and the one available is costly and unsteady, poor and

inefficient. The radio on-air teaching method adopted by some state governments had major setbacks as majority of the students do not have access to radio sets. Even those that have radio, the problem of replacing the batteries surfaces as there is no light to charge it with electricity or money to buy cell batteries. The online WhatsApp tutorial was inconsequential as many students could not logon because of lack of data and those that have data cannot boast of steady network as it fluctuates at will.

Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) like Teach for Nigeria, are partnering with government agencies to facilitate implementation and adoption. For example, in Ogun state, Teach for Nigeria is working with the government to deliver classes on TV and have deployed online capacity building workshops for teachers on programming using Scratch. In as much as this is a very good initiative, can the Teach for Nigeria, provide electricity to power these televisions? The answer is no. it is still the duty of government at all levels to provide electricity to the citizenry and power is vital in education. The truth is that our government have failed us. At least our leaders starting from the governors to the president travel to countries like the U.K and the U.S and see how their education systems works. Why won't they replicate such here or is it all that impossible to do here?

It follows that education is not paramount to the Nigerian government at this time. The only well-documented response is the Nigeria Education in Emergency Working Group Strategy (NEEWGS) published on April 7<sup>th</sup> 2020. The objective of the strategy is to mitigate the negative impact of school closures on students and teachers in North-East Nigeria. (Taibat, 2020). The school system was closed nationwide but the education in emergency working group was created for only the north-east states. As if that was not enough there was the home grown school feeding for children in the north while the entire system is on lockdown. How then do they identify those to be fed? And why should the home feeding be only for the north? This is exactly where Nigeria problem lies. They only take care of insignificant things while neglecting the vitals which is for greater good.

Although the government responded swiftly in the health and economic sectors, it should have done same in the education sector. Ignoring the education sector would be disastrous. As emphasised by UNESCO, temporary school closures come with high social and economic costs, with severe impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds (UNESCO, 2020). This is exactly what is happening

now. As at August 31 2020, the country's education system is completely shutdown with no hope of resumption soon. In the words of the Minister of Education, Malam Adamu Adamu, the school system remains closed and that the schools will not reopen any time soon (Adamu, 2020). This was after series of meetings by education stakeholders and the education ministry headed by the Minister of State for Education, Mr Emeka Nwajiuba had articulated strategies the for safe re-opening of schools in the country starting with exit classes.

According to their calculation, they targeted that schools would reopen for students in their final years to enable them conclude their exam while serving as an acid test for others to follow. But their initiative and effort was clamped down by the pronouncement of the Minister of education who in his words noted that it is better for the students to miss one academic year that get infected with coronavirus.

In fact, his statement attracted a lot of condemnations as it was viewed as an act of neglect on the future of the Nigerian students who becomes the leaders of tomorrow. This is a clear indication of the ills of the Nigerian education system. While provisions for the reopening of other activities like markets, churches, mosques, airports, and road transports were being made, the education system was neglected, probably because of the less importance attached to the sector. Perhaps it is not a money yielding venture as other sectors. But they forgot that any economy with enormous material resources but lack human resources cannot foster development and education remains the major producer of human resources.

Children on the higher end of the socio-economic ladder may experience less disruption to their learning because their private schools are well-equipped with ICT infrastructure and they can afford remote learning resources at home. The majority that would be left struggling are the students from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, who made up the greater majority of public schools in the country, and who do not have access to computers and other devices both within and outside the school. In most cases, these children live in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and unreliable power supply. Inevitably, this digital divide will exacerbate the learning disparities among these children.

But can we estimate how much the Covid-19 pandemic has affected education? Are the estimated 46 million students forced to stay at home in Nigeria still learning? With the uncertainty regarding how long the shutdown will last, there have been several interventions to ensure that students are still learning. But these interventions are underutilized. In line with global trends, highbrow private schools in the country have adopted a virtual learning model. However, a significant number of students in the Nigerian educational system are found in public schools. Again, most of these public schools are situated in remote areas where there is no electricity, network and other devices that could enhance learning, hence the effects of schools shutdown on the Nigerian student is touching.

Moreover, what happens to this category of learners? How do they cope in situations such as this? Also, some state governments have introduced television and radio learning but one can observe that almost 70% of states in the country have done nothing to meet the learning needs of these students. Thus, we see education taking the back seat.

Furthermore, in a country like Nigeria with an epileptic power situation, another reality hits. Do all homes have access to electricity to view television programs and how many homes have access to a television? This is vital as approximately 40% of our population is living in extreme poverty, according to the latest report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2018). Whilst we accept that radio and television can help in reaching a wide audience, the question is, how many subjects can be effectively taught over the radio? How many hours can be allocated to a subject and how many teachers will be available for the program? In responding to this, we need to remember the learning styles of students, the time it takes to understand what is being transmitted, and their different learning environments. How about slow learners and how about visually impaired people? In this situation learning peculiarities are not considered thereby impeding the educational rights of the students.

Again, what infrastructure can be put in place to cater for all students in the system irrespective of location? As an offshoot of the above, another reality still remains that the rate of internet penetration is not evenly spread and it is not every student that is ICT compliant. Thus the problems to be encountered are numerous.



## **Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Nigerian Students and Nigeria**

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the subsequent closure of schools have had tremendous effects on Nigerian students in particular and Nigeria at large. An adage has it that when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. In this case, both the elephants and the grass are suffering. First, there has never been an all-inclusive and abrupt holidays for students at all levels in Nigeria since the eighties that lasted more than three months especially for those in the primary and secondary schools and except for industrial action by higher institution's unions like the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP).

As a result of this abrupt and sudden closure of schools, most of the boarding school students returned home because of the latent nature of the covid-19 pandemic, thus exposing them, mostly the girls to both their male counterpart and men who entices them with gifts, money and other goodies in order to have their way with them. This has invariably affected most students as evidences on ground in most of the secondary schools shows that most of the girls have become pregnant for unknown men in their streets and neighbourhood. As a result they may not return to school when the school eventually reopens.

Speaking on the implications of the schools closure occasioned by the pandemic, Amadi (2020) noted that most of the students who ventures into business or casual works may not be willing to go back to school because of the money that comes to them either daily, weekly or monthly. Even those who may willingly come back, may not show serious interest in their studies as they will occupy their minds on how to go back to continue with their business. He also noted that most of those who serve as pump attendants at filling stations and those who sell nose mask and face shields are students.

Again, some students may no longer be submissive to their teachers and parents because of the exposure to money and other fringe benefits. They boast that they can survive even if they stop school. Therefore they should be allowed to live their lives as it pleases them. On the other hand, the implication of the closure of schools on the country is that the country will have more people who are money conscious, academically unviable, morally bankrupt and criminally minded because they

have all believed that “school is scam” and that if they wait to finish school that they may not be able to make the money they are making presently. Thus the country become a fertile ground for producing trouble makers than problem solvers as capture by the Anambra State Anthem, (Anambra State Anthem, 2014)

## **Conclusion**

Covid-19 pandemic like its predecessors must eventually disappear but its effects worldwide will remain indelible. Apart from the number of deaths recorded, its physical, psychological and moral effects on the populace must not be forgotten in a hurry. No wonder bill gates asserted that “no one who lives through Pandemic will ever forget it” ([www.gatesnotes.com/Health/Pandemic-Innovation](http://www.gatesnotes.com/Health/Pandemic-Innovation)) For instance an illness that separates mother from son or son from mother is rather strange. In this regard if a mother contracts the virus, invariably all the members of the family is at risk. Who then takes care of them? Thus in the education system, the teacher is separated with student and vice versa. Therefore the worldwide lockdown of educational establishments is going to ignite major break in students' education; disruptions in internal assessments; and the annulment of public evaluations for credentials or their auxiliary by a substandard substitute. What then can be done to improve these damaging effects? Schools need resources to reconstruct the damage in education, once they open again. But how these resources are used, and how to target the children who were particularly hard hit, is a question. Schools should also consider postponing rather than skipping internal assessments, given the signal of the importance of assessments for learning. This is true in view of the fact that the resources for the reconstruction of the education system may be mismanaged with no tangible result achieved while children who are supposed to be captured in this reconstruction continues to suffer.

Temporary school closures is supposed to give educators, funders and policymakers the opportunity to thinker the way education is delivered and accessed by students. In China, for instance, governments are providing computers to students from low-income households and offering mobile data packages and telecommunication subsidies. In France, efforts are being made to lend devices to students who do not have access to computers. Similarly, Portugal is partnering with postal services to deliver working sheets to students who do not have access to the internet at home.

In Nigeria, state governments are adopting local media channels such as radio programmes to reach out to students in remote communities. The quality of such educational programmes, its coverage and number of end users remains significantly low and the number of subjects covered by such teaching method is still a source of concern to stakeholders. Thus the stakeholders in education should advocate adequate funding of schools to improve the infrastructures and ensure learning did not discontinue.

The government could further mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on education by providing solar-powered educational devices, pre-loaded with offline academic resources, to students in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, such as the tablets and laptops and providing free networks to schools and homes, steady electricity and ensure maintenance culture is imbibed to put those infrastructures provided in good order and ensure its longevity is guaranteed. This calls for accountability on the part of the education administrators to ensure government effort is not in vain.

The Nigeria Education in Emergency Working Group Strategy (NEEIWGS) could also be scaled-up to include other regions in the country. Of course, these policy measures would require significant financial investment, but such investment is worthwhile for the progress of the economy in the long-term. This is to ensure that learning continues during this pandemic. Any investment made in education will continue to benefit the nation at all times as education is the bedrock of every country's development.

We therefore admonish government at all levels to be proactive in their governance and ensure the provision of basic amenities for the citizens at all times and not to wait at emergency periods before carrying out their responsibilities. Hospital should be well equipped and school highly functional. Functional schools are capable of producing all the equipment needed in the hospital without waiting for America or China or the United Kingdom to provide for us.

Finally, we conclude with Bill Gates assertion on Covid-19 when he said; "the disease is both a symptom and cause of inequity. Today, it is Covid-19; tomorrow, it could be another pandemic, but in all, they are all fuelling the inequity gap". Therefore we encourage the government to learn from the inequity caused by this pandemic, as it is inefficiency of the government that prolonged the containment

of the pandemic outbreak to this unprecedented heights. As we learn to live in the new normal post covid-19 era, let the government give adequate attention to the education sector in order to avert a repeat of what is happening in this present 2020 education system.

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