

## **NIGERIA EDUCATION IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA**

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### **Abstract**

The world is experiencing and facing most dreaded virus called COVID 19 pandemic, which has held the economy at ransom not exempting the educational sector at all. This pandemic has brought recent changes and disruptions in the educational sector which serves as a catalyst for the development of any nation, this is because any development that quarantines man is no development, as man is epicentre of development. Thus education is the key to success in planning, growth and development. In Nigeria, the closure of schools; primary, secondary, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities by the Federal and State governments was an urgent need to curtail the situation which occurred nearly in all the states of the federation. The government kick- started actions on Covid 19 immediately the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the disease as pandemic, and schools were asked shut down including other activities. This lockdown has an impact in school calendars, thereby forcing interchanges of school time- tables, examination dates and other activities. Considering these, the study is to conduct and examine the effect of Covid 19 on educational sector in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Education, Pandemic, Covid 19, Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

The corona virus which is popularly known as COVID-19 has disrupted the global educational system as many countries around the world resulted in compulsory and physical closure of all educational institutions in an attempt to curtail the spread of the pandemic. According to the report by UNESCO (2020), the closure of educational institution has ripple effect on both the educators and students in primary, secondary, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities as academic sessions were disrupted after the corona virus was declared a general public health emergency. This has left many students and educators in a shock as some of these institutions were at the point of preparing for examinations, or beginning of a new semester amongst others. Universities around the world including Africa have resulted in looking for ways to cope and adapt to academic challenges as a result of this pandemic. COVID-19 has shaped a new normal for the educational sector across the globe from transforming the online learning platform, restructuring application processes, and a swift turn around in the education sector (Sharon & Wagdy 2020).

The present of COVID-19 is evident in the Nigerian educational sector as the academic session of schools was halted by the Federal Ministry of Education in order to reduce the spread of this virus in teaching and learning places. Although, this decision came as a surprise to many educational managers as many of these institutions were not prepared for the sudden disruption, others have seen it as a step in the right direction. The challenges then

remain; how this pandemic affects students and academic calendars, hence, will the use of alternative learning method. However, despite the immense benefits of the e-learning platforms available, not many Nigerian schools have embraced it.

On 27 February 2020, Nigeria confirmed the first case of corona virus in Lagos State, an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria had returned on 25 February from Milan, Italy through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, fell ill on 26 February and was transferred to Lagos State Bio-security Facilities for isolation and testing. As at 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 Nigeria had over 213,818 COVID-19 cases, over 2,974 fatalities and over 207,016 recovered with the active cases standing at 3,828 (NCDC 2021). In order to contain the spread of the virus in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education directed all educational institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home as cases of reported COVID-19 increased to all states in Nigeria. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sonny Echono, reported on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 that the directive was part of the country's overall strategy to curtail the spread of the virus. Nigeria joined the growing list of countries in Africa which have closed schools and tertiary institutions. Before the official announcement by the permanent secretary, most schools had already sent their students and pupils home (Wikipedia, 2020).

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 corona virus. Considering the state of Nigeria's education sector, pertinent questions arose: Do schools in Nigeria have the technology to cater for the over 46 million students affected? Do households have the facilities to engage their children in remote learning? Do teachers have the resources to deliver live lessons or record a massive open online course (MOOC) styled lessons? Unlike other countries, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education's school-closure came not with any clear-cut policy measures on how to mitigate learning disruptions for children or how to address the digital divide. It follows that education is not paramount to the Nigerian government at this time. The only well-documented response is the Nigerian Education in Emergency Working Group (NWiWwg) published on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021. Some of the effects that will be discussed here include Disruption of Academic Calendar, Teaching and Learning Gap, and Loss of Workforce in the Educational Institutions etc. The objective of the strategy is to mitigate the negative impact of academic disruption on students and teachers in Nigeria. While government efforts in the health and economic sectors must be commended, ignoring the education sector would be disastrous. As emphasized by UNESCO, temporary school closures come with high social and economic costs, with severe impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children on the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum 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 do not have access to computers and other devices outside school. In many 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 (UNESCO, 2020).

Temporary school closures mean educators, founders and policymakers are rethinking 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 (UNESCO, 2020). In Nigeria, state governments of Delta, Ogun, Lagos and Kaduna are adopting media channels such as radio programs to reach out to students in remote communities. The quality of such educational programs, however, is not within the scope of this article. This article is aim to discuss the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education in Nigeria and suggest some ways out.

### **Effect of Covid-19 pandemic on tertiary education in Nigeria**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) tracked the impact of the pandemic on education. As of August 30, 2021 they estimated that 87 percent of the world's students—that is 1.5 billion learners—were affected by school closures. The bulk of these students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, but there are also millions of students affected at the pre-primary and tertiary education levels. More than 180 countries shut school doors then, while some implemented localized school closures. In Nigeria the following were identified as the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on student's education:

#### **Reduction in International Education**

Many International Students studying in Nigeria travelled back to their countries due to the COVID-19. The Nigeria government announced the closed down of educational institutions to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Many Nigerian students schooling in abroad travelled back home due to closure of higher institutions across the world. International Education was affected negatively because of the outbreak of the deadly COVID-19. Many students studying abroad were discouraged to continue their studies and many planning to study abroad could not go and achieve their plans because some countries has placed travel banned. According to Mug (2020) conversely, the Chinese master plan to become the importer of International Students was in question. University Deans and recruiters were hard pressed to recommend without reservation, future exchange programs on Chinese campuses. In a survey of more than 2,000 students from Africa, Asia and Australia, conducted by QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) nearly three in ten said their plans had changed due to the virus. It is impossible to estimate what percentage of the students responding to this survey would have studied in China.

#### **Disruption of Academic Calendar**

The Academic calendars of schools in Nigeria were disrupted due to COVID-19. Jaime (2020) observed that the closure of all educational institutions from primary schools to the higher institutions affected the students' academic plans and program because many of the higher institutions has started their first semester exams when the pandemic broke out and subsequently led to the suspension of the examinations. According to Simon and Hans (2020) the global lockdown of education institutions caused a major (and likely unequal) interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative.

#### **Cancellation of Local and International Conferences**

Many conferences on different programs that were planned for the first and second quarter of 2020 were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. New discovery and new findings in the educational sectors for this period have been reduced because many higher institutions in Nigeria were not fully integrated (ICT) into teaching and learning program across the country. Subhasis Chaudhuri, director of IIT Bombay, in Maharashtra state, which is the Indian state worst affected by the virus, with dozens of confirmed cases, said in an official

statement: “All academic activities including research will remain suspended and only international students and students having medical and other emergencies will be allowed to remain in the hostel with special permission from the Dean and limited messing [catering] facilities would be provided to them.” (osseo.org/meeting-cancelled:)

### **Teaching and Learning Gap**

Teaching and learning in all Nigerian schools and across the world were put on hold because of the COVID-19 virus. Teaching and learning were put on hold in all the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. The implication was that many Nigerian students were not in schools for a period of more than one-month implying that they were idle. Simon and Hans (2020) who considered a situation in which young men in Sweden have differing number of days to prepare for important tests. These differences are conditionally random allowing the authors to estimate a causal effect of schooling on skills. The authors show that even just ten days of extra schooling significantly raises scores on tests of the use of knowledge (‘crystallized intelligence’) by 1% of a standard deviation. As an extremely rough measure of the impact of the then school closures, if we were to simply extrapolate those numbers, twelve weeks less schooling (i.e. 60 school days) implies a loss of 6% of a standard deviation, which is non-trivial. They do not find a significant impact on problem-solving skills (an example of ‘fluid intelligence’).

### **Loss of Workforce in the Educational Institutions**

In Nigeria, there have been reports of death of professors caused by corona virus in various universities worthy of note is Professor David Olaleye who was a key part of the Oyo state covid-19 task force and the head of the clinical virology laboratory where covid-19 tests are being conducted in the state, he died on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2021. Two other professors who reportedly died of the pandemic were Bankole Oke of the department of veterinary medicine with specialization in veterinary anatomy and Anthony Olugbobo of the department of animal science in the faculty of agricultural science all of the University of Ibadan (premium times, 2021). The University of Lagos also lost three professors to the deadly disease, the late professors Femi Odekunle, Oye Ibidapo Obe and Duro Ajeyalemi as confirmed to Premium Times Newspaper by the university’s Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of development services Folasade Ogunsola on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, 2021 (Premium times, 2021).

The educational sector on the global scale has lost some to the deadly disease. For example, Longtime University of Washington faculty member Stephen Schwartz died on Tuesday (March 17, 2020) from COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel corona virus, the Seattle Times reports. “We are deeply saddened that faculty member Professor Stephen Schwartz passed away due to a COVID-19 infection,” the University of Washington Department of Pathology tweeted (March 18, 2020) afternoon. Tributes were also being paid to world-renowned South African scientist Gita Ramjee, who died from COVID-19-related complications. MEMPHIS, Tenn. (WMC) - A University of Memphis Professor has died from the corona virus. NBC affiliate WTMJ says criminal justice instructor Lenard Wells died from complications of COVID-19, according to the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office.

Worldometers.info (2020) also reported that COVID-19 was responsible for the death of over 74,431 persons across the world. This people are from different professions including the teaching profession. According to the Department of Education and the South African Democratic Teachers' Union have sent their condolences to the family of a teacher who died

of COVID-19 complications. The Loudoun County Health Department also reported the first death of a hospitalized patient who tested positive for COVID-19. The patient, a woman in her 70s, died of respiratory failure Wednesday night as a result of COVID-19. She was a former first grade teacher who was working as a reading tutor at two Ashburn elementary schools. In April 3, 2020, the New York City, a beloved Brooklyn elementary school teacher has died from complications of COVID-19. The higher institutions across the World have lost many teachers, lecturers and great researchers to COVID-19 pandemic. This loses will affect the growth and development of the educational sector especially the higher institutions.

### **Cut in Budget of higher Education**

Cseaafrica (2020) submitted that the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at N 8.24 Trillion, an increase of about 20% from 2019 figure. The revenue assumptions are premised on increased global oil demand and stable market with oil price benchmark and oil output respectively at \$57 per barrel and 2.18 Million Barrels Per Day. The emergence of COVID-19 and its increasing incidence in Nigeria has called for drastic review and changes in the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections. Compared to events that led to recession in 2016, the current state of the global economy poses more difficulties ahead as the oil price is currently below US\$70 with projections that it will dip further going by the price war among key players in the industry. Unfortunately, the nation has grossly underachieved in setting aside sufficient buffers for rainy days such as it faces in the past. In addressing these daunting economic challenges, the consideration to revise the 2020 budget downward was inevitable. Allocation to education in 2022 budget as proposed by the executive and submitted to the national assembly for consideration is 771.5 billion including UBEC allocation out of a total budget size of 13.58 trillion; it means the education sector got 5.68 percent allocation. However, if TETFund (intervention funds for the tertiary institutions) allocation of 323.3 billion were included then the total budget to education sector would be 1.09 trillion which represent 8.9 percent allocation as against 15 to 20 percent UNESCO benchmark for education in Nigeria for 2022 (premium times, 2021)

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has faulted a proposal by the Federal Government to slash 50.76 billion from the 111.78 billion budgeted for Universal Basic Education Commission. The academic union also stated that the same proposal being planned for the healthcare would be an ill wind that would further destroy the sector. To them, a serious and progressive government will not allocate funds for any rehabilitation of government buildings or purchase of buses at the expense of critical sectors like Health and Education. ASUU, therefore, warned President Muhammadu Buhari against cutting down the budget of Health and Education sectors in any proposed budget in Nigeria. The implication of revising the budget downward will directly affect the education budget of the country which experts have described as inadequate. Many infrastructural facilities and school expansion program planned for the year would be removed from the budget due to the budget cut down ([Vanguardngr.com/2020/04/](http://Vanguardngr.com/2020/04/)).

Damtew (2020) observed that Africa's growth performance, which stood at 3.4% in 2019, was expected to climb to 3.9% in 2020. Alas, this may now remain a dream as the global economic depression is likely to devastate its economy and also its institutions, including higher education. The effect on higher education may likely be most felt on two grounds: firstly, a precipitous decline in government subventions to higher education due to weak revenue and income; and secondly, a comparable drop in commitments from development

partners, largely to research, upon which African higher education has been unduly and disproportionately dependent. There is the impending danger that higher education may once again be side-lined as a luxury that African countries can least afford when it should continue to garner support on a priority basis to help overcome challenges like COVID-19 – and many other human-made problems and natural disasters.

### **Conclusion**

The covid-19 pandemic has helped the dwindling educational institutions orchestrated with incessant strikes to a major interruption in teaching and learning of the students. The government and major stake holders took a decision immediately covid-19 seems to be unprotected among the core developed countries and the possibility of wide spread to all parts of the world, device a measure to control the pandemic in Nigeria, thereby introduced national lockdown to curtail it. The massive spread of the virus caused a disruption in academic programmes, such as suspensions of examination, cancellation of local as well as international conferences because of the no person to person contacts, this resulted to gap in learning among scholars, and it affected on-point face to face teaching and learning of the students. Covid-19 has exposed the inadequacies of educational system in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

1. The government should increase the funding of tertiary education in the budgetary allocations to allow them manage all the damages caused by the covid-19 pandemic and school lock down.
2. The government should immediately embark on the integration of all institutions of learning into online education.
3. The Nigeria government should direct all the higher institutions to extend physical teaching and research activities to the online network, conduct teaching seminars online, jointly solve new problems that may arise in the teaching process.
4. The government should redirect the stakeholders to look into the curriculum of advanced countries like USA and UK that managed the educational system well despite the pandemic and school lockdown.
5. Stakeholders and community leaders should partner with government in tackling the problems bedevilling the education sector to save it from total collapse.

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