



Corona Virus Pandemic and the Dilemma of Learning in Nigerian Secondary Schools: The Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is a novel pandemic that is wreaking havoc on the whole world and has led to the closure of schools by the Nigerian government as a way of preventing the spread of the disease.. If the closure of schools especially secondary schools continue for as long as the pandemic lasts and nothing is done to find alternative means of learning for children, the country will be doomed. This is because human capital development will be greatly affected and the concomitant effect will be low national development. The nation is in a dilemma but secondary education stakeholders must find a way to make children learn while remaining in their homes to prevent contracting of the disease. The paper suggests e-learning approaches such as distance education or on- line learning using laptops, mobile phones that support various applications such as ZOOM, WhatsApp, Google meetings, teaching via radio, television as well as tele-courses so that children can learn in spite of the closure of schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is a global pandemic whose outbreak has shaken the whole world to near helplessness. What started in Wuhan, China in December 2019, no doubt has virtually spread to every continent and countries of the globe (Davidson 2020). The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January, and a pandemic on 11 March. As a novel pandemic, this particular Corona disease is not like any other known disease before, and not like other form of corona and is spreading all over the world like wild fire. LUTHI (2020) cited the WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus who noted the group's deep concern about the

"alarming levels of spread" as well as "alarming levels of inaction" in addressing the corona virus. Even the "Super Powers" the less developed and developing countries alike are caught in the same web of the dreaded disease and are fighting tooth and nail to find solution that could end the highly infectious and deadly disease. The highly contagious disease can be contracted by contact of persons through hand shake; sneezing leading to emission of droplets from nose and mouth and other medium such as infected surfaces like door handle, car handle, keys, hand rails and others. The usual convivial pattern of African living is gradually being ignored or undermined to prevent contact with infected persons. Example, there is no more hand shaking, hugging, casual



visitation, mass gathering for burial and marriages and other sundry ceremonies so long as the disease is not yet eradicated.

No doubt, the whole world is in captivity of COVID-19, but nations are struggling to reduce, prevent and mitigate the continued spread of the pandemic new corona virus as no known drugs have been developed. In desperation to find cure to the dreaded disease, some nations are toeing the path of science by clinically testing drugs and abide by World Health Organization (WHO) standards. Other are resorting to unconventional means using traditional herbal cure. Example, Madagascar claimed she has herbal cure, some other traditional herbal doctors are also begging for clinical trial of their drugs. Whether results of clinical trials from orthodox and unorthodox ways will be favorable or not is left for time to tell.

The outbreak of the pandemic has brought about the disruption of education as a result of the lockdown of the economy. Education sector indeed is in dilemma as there is no more learning as schools are shut down for fear of school children contracting the disease. Schools, universities, and colleges have been closed either on a nationwide or local basis in 177 countries, affecting approximately 98.6 percent of the world's students' population (Bao, Qu, Zhang, & Hogan, 2020). Continuous shutdown of schools is tantamount to stagnation of life processes. The educational system must necessarily look for a way out of this quagmire.

SNAPSHOT AT THE NOVEL CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

Covid-19 outbreak started in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019 and by June 2020, has spread to all the continents of the world. The disease is caused by virus whose outbreak people say may have been upset by scientist in

the quest to solve human health challenges as well those countries proving to be super power. This view is shared by Law (2020) when he said that with continual competition in development of bio-logical warfare weapons, sudden outbreaks, either intentional or unintentional, will render certain countries less desirable to be inhabited, even for those who had been pre-vaccinated, believing that they might become immune-tolerant of the viral antigens. The novel Corona Virus disease is believed to be more deadly than other strains of Corona. According to Sun, He, Wang, Lai, Ji, Zhai, Li, Suchard, Tian, Zhou, Veit, and Su (2020), the basic reproductive number (R_0) of 2019-nCoV is higher than R_0 of severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome corona virus (MERS-CoV). Sun; He, Wang, et al (2020) further revealed that COVID-19 presents with asymptomatic infections, with potential to propagate and perpetuate this epidemic. As at now (time of writing this paper), there are accusations and counter accusation between America and China of the origin of the disease with America (Trump) and China (Xij Jinping) pointing accusing fingers at each other. While some attribute the disease outbreak to have originated from a natural course of viral evolution of the Hubei bats, some say it is a product of biological warfare weapon (Law 2020). Law (2020) expressed his views thus, "It was not until groups of American virologists and molecular geneticists succeeded in editing viral DNA/cDNA/RNA/m-RNA sequence in late-1990's that the equilibrium was broken" He also pointed out that 2019-nCoV could not be a product of nature, but rather a product of human genetic engineering. Whatever may be the cause, the disease is real and scary and is causing a devastating effect in every



sector of world economy, especially Nigeria where the impacts are very dangerous.

OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

The first index case of the disease in Nigeria as was reported by Ehanire, Minister of Health of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the 28th of February, was an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan. Since then, many other cases of people with the disease have also been identified, especially among Nigerians who returned from foreign trips. As at June 25th 2020 Nigeria has recorded 22,614 confirmed cases, 7822 discharged, and 549 deaths from testing 122,155 people (NCDC COVID-19 Update). The spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria has now assumed community transmission with Lagos state as the epicenter of the disease. With this rising cases of people with the disease in Nigeria, the hope of schools resuming is getting elusive, hence the need to find a way for the students to learn outside of the formal school setting.

THE CONCEPT OF DILEMMA OF LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

Dilemma is a situation of confusion where no one decision can be taken. Hornby (2010) defined dilemma as a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two different things you could do. The dilemma in learning is that there is a systemic failure as regards physical and fiscal shortages in the Nigerian education system. The outbreak of the COVID-19 has exposed the inability of the government and policy makers to take decision on the way forward to ensure that students learn at home as schools are closed. This dilemma is therefore owing to the poor state of institutions of learning in Nigeria. The Nigerian educational system has endemic problems arising from factors

internal and external to it. Some of the internal and external factors are as follows:

- 1 There is dearth of learning facilities in secondary schools especially information communication technology.
- 2 The low standard of living in Nigeria has exacerbated the inability of many parents/families to provide learning facilities for their children and wards in schools. It is no longer news that many Nigerians live on less than two dollars a day. About 152 million Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day, representing about 80 per cent of the country's estimated 190 million population (African Development Bank, 2018). This is very evident in the lockdown as many families could not stay at home for a week before crying out for palliatives.
- 3 The problem of inadequate power supply is endemic in Nigeria and has effect on the use of educational facilities like workshops, laboratory etc.
- 4 There is inadequacy of ICT technologists/ experts or manpower to handle ICT training for the numerous students as well as teachers scattered all over Nigeria. Even if such facilities are available, they usually rust away because of disuse.
- 5 There is no accurate data of learners especially at the secondary school level. Therefore planning becomes difficult for the teaming number of students.
- 6 Many secondary school students in Nigeria do not have android phones, tablets and laptops to facilitate e-learning. Majority of the students are rural dwellers that



may not be able to access learning through online platforms. These category of students will be left out

- 7 Some secondary school teachers even in this 21st century have no android phones and laptops. Some of the teachers do not even have email address and cannot send text messages or browse the internet. They out rightly resist the use of ICT tools.
- 8 Mode of learning in secondary school system is also an issue posing a dilemma in learning in Nigeria. The commonest mode of learning in formal education in Nigeria is the face to face contact in classroom setting. The lecture method is still being used as a result there is always teacher and students meeting point. The distance education programme in Nigeria (NOUN) also called National Open University in Nigeria is operated on a dual mode that is both on-line cum physical contact. So it can be said that Nigeria has not fully enshrined on-line or virtual learning in her educational system. In the same vein, National Open University in Nigeria (NOUN) is operated for tertiary institutions students and not secondary school students.

NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE MODE OF LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Education is a weapon for human capital development by way of skills and knowledge imparted to the recipient as he/she learns. Citizens of any nation can only contribute effectively towards the development of their country when they can read and write and apply the skills they

learnt in solving problems (Asiyai, 2018). Nations can only develop if education is provided for the citizenry as education is the key to development. This maybe the reason for yearly budgetary allocation to education by the government. The national policy on education (2014) stipulated the goals of secondary education thus:

1. Provide an increasing number of primary school pupils with opportunity for education of a higher quality, irrespective of sex or social religious, and ethnic background;
2. Diversification of the curriculum to include different talents, opportunities and roles possessed by or open to students after their secondary school course;
3. Equip students to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology;
4. Development and projection of Nigerian culture, arts and language and the world's cultural heritage;
5. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims, and live as good citizens;
6. Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
7. Inspire students with a zeal for the achievement of self-improvement both at school and in later life

Shutting down of secondary schools in Nigeria continuously may trigger stagnation in national development considering the goals of secondary education as enunciated in the NPE. Therefore, even if other sectors of the economy are to stand still, education



(secondary) should not be allowed to stop. In this period of corona virus pandemic when the disease is ravaging nations, if educated people with skills and knowledge (scientists) are not on ground to render their expertise services, the number of deaths would have been worse than what it is now. Therefore while other sectors of the economy can be put on hold or slowed down for the time being until the pandemic is put to an end, the education sector should be supported by stakeholders through the provision of safety facilities and equipment for the mitigation of the pandemic corona virus disease to prevent its' further transmission while the school remain open. Already, Nigeria is known to have many children who are out of school. Sahara Reporters (2019) quoted the Nigerian Minister of Education who revealed that out-of-primary-school children stood at 10 million, while children out-of-secondary-school are six million. Sahara Reporters (2019) also has it that the Senate president of Nigeria, lamented the plight of the street children when he said "We can't continue to have them on our streets. It poses a serious security problem and we need to stop it. Maybe that will be through more budgetary allocations"

The increasing crime rate in Nigeria, indicated by youth restiveness, nefarious activities like Boko Haram terrorists, rape, suicide and child slavery could be worsened if secondary education is stalled. Nigeria is grappling with the problem of eradicating illiteracy. Vangaurd Adamu (2017) in Vanguard News Paper revealed that the country had about 65 to 75 million illiterates, describing the figure as unbecoming and high, considering the country's population. From the foregoing, it is expedient that suggestions be made for way forward to enable students to continue learning even if schools are shut down.

THE WAY OUT OF THE DILEMMA

As earlier discussed, education system in Nigeria is in dilemma. Arising from those factors, it has become necessary for education stakeholders to find alternative means of learning in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper suggests eclectic approaches to be used in providing education for Nigerian students at the secondary school level. The fact remains that with the dilemma of learning in Nigeria schools, there cannot be one recommendation as household income will surely determine access to any particular mode of learning. For example, students from affluent homes can afford the use of internet as they can buy data and equally have android phones. Such students from affluent homes can therefore use varieties of on-line mode to learn. Students from low economic status parentage and rural dwellers who cannot provide facilities for on-line learning can learn through different modes.

The following approaches could be employed to ensure that students can still learn while staying safe at home to prevent contracting COVID-19:

Distance learning (DL)

This is a type of learning that students engage in from a non-school environment. In Distance Learning, materials are uploaded/posted to learner through internet connection or on-line and there is no face-to-face or physical contact between students and their instructors. According to Dhull and Sakshi (2017), on-line learning encompasses the use of technologies including the worldwide web, audio and video conferencing email, chat, new groups and texts, delivered to learners through the use of computer networks. Distance education is also known as e-learning or virtual learning.



There are various types of DL means such as Massive open online courses (MOOCs), You TUBE, ZOOM, WhatsApp, face book, email, Google meeting and so many others. There are also web sites that people go for learning. Apps can be downloaded for various learning situations as well. Some Institutions of learning also have various learning platform for their students to log in and learn lessons uploaded by lecturers as well as download lessons with or without interfacing with the teacher teaching. Distance learning is mostly on-line and by implication; one must have an android phone as well as be able to buy data to be able to connect to the internet. Dhull and Sakshi (2017) gave the following as advantages of on-line learning -accessibility, personalized learning, promotes research, equal opportunity to all. Another very good advantage of on-line learning is that since the platforms enable synchronous activities like Chatting, voicing, video or web conferencing to take place, students would feel as being in a classroom setting. ZOOM for instance is one of the leading video conferencing software apps in the market. It allows you to virtually interact with co-workers or employers when in-person meetings aren't possible, (Tillman and Willings, 2020). In the case of learning in secondary schools, students can interact with subject teacher on-line using ZOOM. ZOOM learning can be accessible to student who have email and face book account. Tillman and Willings (2020) also described Google Meet and Google Chat as apps form communications services that enable text, voice, or video chats, either one-on-one or in a group.

However some of the draw backs of on-line learning are : data must be available for internet services and that involves fund which most average Nigerians may not be able to afford due to

poor standard of living; poor power supply would make it impossible to charge phones, laptops, computers and other gadgets that use electricity as source of power; poor knowledge of operating phones and not being ICT compliant by many students in most secondary schools in Nigeria as many schools do not have ICT facilities. In the same vein, android phones are expensive as a result, many parents may not be able to buy for their wards especially for those living under a dollar per day. According to Stern (n.d), a good online learning requires internet skills, familiarity with web browsers and an email programme, web-based interactions such as email, discussion boards and chat rooms; proficiency with typing and word processing; and experience in successful Internet searches using a variety of search engines.

2 Tele-courses: This is education delivery where by content is delivered via radio or television broadcast, Dictionary.com, LLC (2020) describes tele-course as a course of study presented on television, as for local home viewers receiving credit at a community college.

3 Mobile Learning: It is also called m-learning which is used through mobile phones, laptop or tablet. This can make learning to get to remotest place so long as there is network connectivity. Digital audio players (iPods, MP3 players) can also be used as means of m-learning. Students can get access to texts, videos or audios through mobile learning. It is an asynchronous way of learning as there is less interaction between the learner and the teacher.

4 There is also the option of viewing television. This can take place when households have televisions in their homes. Lessons can be recorded and televised for students to view at a particular set time. This method can reach a large number of students who are not able to undertake



on-line learning. With television viewing, students in remote places can be reached as well. However, lack of electricity, not being able to download lessons as well as not being synchronous and asynchronous are some of the drawbacks of this approach of learning.

All the approaches mentioned above are online or e-learning with the exception of television viewing. The essence of the all these options is to prevent contacts with infected persons. According to Jeff (2007), on-line learning avoid risk of not being required to attend and travel to face-to-face classes. Akporehe (2013) had harped on virtual education as a panacea to access to higher education which is also applicable to secondary school learning in the midst of the pandemic. The task of government is to harness the knowledge of all the experts in the area of ICT and plan how different modes of on-line learning can be made available to secondary school students in the country.

It will interest you to know that there is no fear of the use of on-line teaching/learning for secondary school students. Farah and Yanda (2015) found that there was no significant difference among the students in their extent of usage of social networking due to age difference. Their finding further indicates that across the entire age bracket, a total of 215 (57%) out of 377 respondents agreed that they are active users of social networking. 83 (22%) of the respondents were undecided while 79 (21%) respondents disagreed to be active users. This indicates that the use of social networking does exist among students.

Although challenges of getting funds to set up ICT centres will arise, but there are ways to solve this. Fund for COVID-19 was launched in Nigeria. A portion of this fund can be devoted to

education. The money will then be used to purchase android phone for every secondary school student to access e-learning platform that will be to set up to meet various classes of secondary education. With the varieties of e-learning platforms and other approaches, every student can be reached as they get access to prepared lessons and other learning materials. Learning at home is a preventive way of stopping the spread of the virus which will eventually die as there will be no one to one transmissions of Corona Virus Pandemic.

With respect to getting data to access internet services, secondary students should be availed conditional cash transfer to buy data so as to access up loaded lectures and other on-line teaching resources. This cash transfer is also to be applied for those learning through television teaching to buy fuel and subscribe for television services. In order to ensure that all children are learning, the headmasters and class teachers can be called upon to compile the named of children and furnish government with the demographic data of their children on-line to appropriate quarters. This can be done through the use of school registers. This will enable government to have data of the total number of learners in the country in order to plan for their learning. National Orientation Agency of Nigeria can work out modalities of disseminating information to parents and students on all developments going on in the education sector by broadcast in various local languages. By adopting these measures, learning would continue in spite of the on-going novel Corona virus pandemic that led to the closure of schools.

CONCLUSION

The paper took a cursory look at COVID 19 pandemic with particular



reference to its origin and how it broke out in Nigeria. The paper established that the disease is virulent judging from WHO proclamation and how it led to the lockdown that Nigeria and indeed almost the whole world embarked upon. The writers stressed that the lockdown has affected the educational sector with special emphasis on secondary education and have caused a halt in learning. The paper dwelt on alternative way of providing education for secondary school level students in Nigeria in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was pointed out that the Nigerian Educational system is faced with dilemma in learning as a result of many factors such as dearth of ICT facilities, lack of ICT experts and others. Being as it may, there must be a way out of this morass that the pandemic is posing on education and development of human capital. The paper advocate that since face to face contact in classroom is no longer possible , the only sure way of ensuring that learning continues in spite of the lock down is through on- line learning , telecourses, M-learning and viewing television.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing, the paper suggests that computer study should be introduced in secondary schools in Nigeria and it should be made a core subject in school curriculum at any level. The government should provide Information Communication Technology facilities in schools as well as train manpower for ICT in Nigeria. On- line or e-learning should be embraced by all stakeholder in education and the students should be equipped with training tailored towards it. The government should embark on conditional cash transfer to parents so as to provide ICT compliant learning resource like android phones, buying data and other gadgets,

flash that make on-line learning possible in school.

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