

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

Boma Rogers Allison, Ph.D
Dept. of Sociology,
Federal University Wukari, Taraba State

And

Sunny A. Dickay, Ph.D
Dept of Educational Foundation,
University of Port-Harcourt

Abstract

The closure of schools, colleges, and universities by the Federal and State government was an urgent need of the current situation which prevailed in most States in Nigeria. Nigerian Government started taking preventive decisions on COVID-19 just after WHO recognized it as a pandemic disease. However, the shutdown of schools and colleges in Nigeria, in which the Academic year was interrupted, has tremendous effect on the academic syllabus. Schools had to concentrate on scheduling their final exams before the lockdown commencement. The schools and institutions had to cancel or reschedule exam dates, and other school activities, so as to cortile the spread of the virus. Considering this, the study is based critically on the impact of COVID-19 on Educational system in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. This pandemic has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our educational systems.

Keywords: Education, impact, Covid-19, Pandemic.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, so do the risks we face. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national borders. It has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income or gender. But the same has not been true for its consequences, which have hit the most vulnerable hardest.

Education is no exception. Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learn, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down (Hopkins, 2010).

This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs.

The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 have interrupted conventional schooling with nationwide school closures in most OECD and partner countries, the majority lasting at least 10 weeks. While the educational community have made concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity during this period, children and students have had to rely more on their own resources to continue learning remotely through the Internet, television or radio. Teachers also had to adapt to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained. In particular, learners in the most marginalised groups, who don't have access to digital learning resources or lack the resilience and engagement to learn on their own, are at risk of falling behind (Okafor,2015).

The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and the virus has now spread to many countries and territories. Nnabuo (2007) says while a lot is still unknown about the virus that causes COVID-19, we do know that it is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing) Individuals can also be infected from touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). While COVID-19 continues to spread it is important that communities take action to prevent further transmission, reduce the impacts of the outbreak and support control measures.

According to Ijah (2020).the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis. Many countries have (rightly) decided to close schools, colleges and universities. The crisis crystallises the dilemma policymakers are facing between closing schools (reducing contact and saving lives) and keeping them open (allowing workers to work and maintaining the economy). The severe short-term disruption is felt by many families around the world: home schooling is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity, but also to children's social life and learning. Teaching is moving online, on an untested and unprecedented scale. Student assessments are also moving online, with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments have simply been cancelled. Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality (Ijah, 2020).

Impacts on education: Schools

Going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness, from an economic point of view the primary point of being in school is that it increases a child's ability. Even a relatively short time in school does this; even a relatively short period of missed school will have consequences for skill growth. But can we estimate how much the COVID-19 interruption will affect learning? Not very precisely, as we are in a new world; but we can use other studies to get an order of magnitude.(Carr,2020).

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Educational System in Nigeria

Two pieces of evidence are useful. Carlson, Dahl, Ockert, and Rooth (2015) consider 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 current 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').

A different way into this question comes from Lavy (2015), who estimates the impact on learning of differences in instructional time across countries. Perhaps surprisingly, there are very substantial differences between countries in hours of teaching. For example, Lavy shows that total weekly hours of instruction in mathematics, language and science is 55% higher in Denmark than in Austria. These differences matter, causing significant differences in test score outcomes: one more hour per week over the school year in the main subjects increases test scores by around 6% of a standard deviation. In our case, the loss of perhaps 3-4 hours per week teaching in maths for 12 weeks may be similar in magnitude to the loss of an hour per week for 30 weeks. So, rather bizarrely and surely coincidentally, we end up with an estimated loss of around 6% of a standard deviation again. Leaving the close similarity aside, these studies possibly suggest a likely effect no greater than 10% of a standard deviation but definitely above zero.

Impacts on education: Families

Perhaps to the disappointment of some, children have not generally been sent home to play. The idea is that they continue their education at home, in the hope of not missing out too much. (Iriobe, 2005).

Families are central to education and are widely agreed to provide major inputs into a child's learning, as described by Bjorklund and Salvanes (2011). The current global-scale expansion in home schooling might at first thought be seen quite positively, as likely to be effective. But typically, this role is seen as a complement to the input from school. Parents supplement a child's maths learning by practising counting or highlighting simple maths problems in everyday life; or they illuminate history lessons with trips to important monuments or museums. Being the prime driver of learning, even in conjunction with online materials, is a different question; and while many parents round the world do successfully school their children at home, this seems unlikely to generalise over the whole population.

Assessments

According to Barry (2012), the closure of schools, colleges and universities not only interrupts the teaching for students around the world; the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed or cancelled.

Internal assessments are perhaps thought to be less important and many have been simply cancelled. But their point is to give information about the child's progress for families and teachers. The loss of this information delays the recognition of both high potential and learning difficulties and can have harmful long-term consequences for the child. Andersen and Nielsen (2019) look at the consequence of a major IT crash in the testing system in Denmark. As a result of this, some children could not take the test. The authors find that participating in the test increased the score in a reading test two years later by 9% of a standard deviation, with similar effects in mathematics. These effects are largest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Graduates

The careers of this year's university graduates may be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They have experienced major teaching interruptions in the final part of their studies, they are experiencing major interruptions in their assessments, and finally they are likely to graduate at the beginning of a major global recession. Evidence suggests that poor market conditions at labour market entry cause workers to accept lower paid jobs, and that this has permanent effects for the careers of some. Oreopoulos et al. (2012) show that graduates from programmes with high predicted earnings can compensate for their poor starting point through both within- and across-firm earnings gains, but graduates from other programmes have been found to experience permanent earnings losses from graduating in a recession. The coronavirus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total global closure of institutions of learning. Countries across the world are returning to the drawing board to develop strategies to rescue their education sector which is being damaged by the deadly virus. Virtually all institutions of learning have been ordered to be temporarily shut as part of plans to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to statistics from UNICEF, approximately one point seven, two, five billion learners are currently affected by school closures in response to the pandemic. Statistics further reveal that one hundred and eighty-six countries are currently implementing nationwide closures, impacting about ninety-eight percent of the world's student population. (Ross, 2002).

In the United Kingdom, the British Council Exams, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the 2020 foreign series exams have been postponed. The Cambridge Assessment International Education scheduled for May/June will not hold this year. Cambridge resorted to collaborate with candidates to engage them on evidence-based decisions on grades in each subject they applied for. As it is in the United Kingdom, so it is in Africa. (Carr, 2020).

The West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) have been suspended across Anglophone West African countries due to the threat of the

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Educational System in Nigeria

corona virus. In East Africa, Tanzania and other countries in the region have postponed all national exams earlier scheduled to begin on the 4th of May 2020. The South Africa Department of Basic Education also postponed indefinitely examinations earlier scheduled for the 26th of March this year. (2008). In Nigeria, the Federal government announced the indefinite postponement of the 2020 West African Examination Council and the National Examinations Council (NECO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Jalade, 2020). The situation is depressing. The statistics are scary and the consequences are severe. The numbers are unprecedented and the implications are enormous. Never before have so many children and youths been out of school at the same time. The consequences are better imagined. The World Bank says that even before the current closure of schools, the world was already experiencing a global learning crisis, as many students, who, even while the school system was in full swing, were not learning the fundamental skills needed for life.

For Adams (2011), the closure of schools further compounded the situation with remarkable impacts on students, teachers, families and far-reaching economic and social consequences. In many countries, poor children rely on the school feeding system for their only meal for the day. But with schools now forced to close, millions of children are missing out on these meals. Many social vices are associated with youths not actively engaged in schooling. Children and youths who are not in school are more susceptible to social vices such as alcoholism, substance abuse and other forms of criminal activities. Early marriage and child labour are also some of the consequences of school closures.

In an attempt to positively engage the children and also ensure that they are not left behind in their learning journey, many countries including Nigeria have adopted online teaching and learning, using radio, television and internet solutions to support access to education. In order to provide another window for learning, UNESCO through its COVID-19 Education response, floated a platform tagged Learning Never Stops, to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children and youths during this period of sudden disruption in the school system. (Rogers, 2009).

Recently, the Ministry of Education in Nigeria uploaded on its website electronic learning resources and education chat rooms for the thirty-six states in the country and the Federal Capital Territory, for continuing education and individualized learning for children at home. Laudable as these initiatives appear, they cannot be compared to classroom based instructions and the benefit to the very poor children who rely on schools not only for education, but also for food, healthcare and safety. Moreover, these efforts may not achieve the set objectives, given the limited access of poor children to television, electricity, internet and other equipment needed to take advantage of the e-learning platforms. (Macline, 2003).

However, there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel. According to UNESCO (2015) 71 countries have already announced when schools will reopen. Out of these, 12 have reopened schools, 52 have set the dates for reopening during this academic year and seven plan to reopen next session. Although, the majority of the

countries, totaling 128, including Nigeria, have not announced any date but, countries must prioritize the reopening of schools as soon as it is safe to do so, so that we will not see a complete reversal of the gains achieved in the education sector over the decades. The longer children stay out of school, the less likely they are to ever return.(Asodike,2009).

Covid-19 has exposed the education divide in Nigeria. Ways to handle it.

- Children in rural and underserved communities in Nigeria are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to new methods of learning.
- Governmental reforms in the national curriculum would help bridge the gap in inequality, as would PPPs.

According to a 2019 Executive Summary on Poverty and Inequality by the National Bureau of Statistics, 40.1% of the population in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the largest producer of oil in Africa, is classified as poor. That is, on average, four out of 10 Nigerians has per capital expenditure below \$400.A UNICEF report states that 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6 to 11-year-olds regularly attend primary school. Some states in the north east and north west of the country have more than half of the girls not enrolled in schools as marginalisation ensures that girls are deprived of basic education. A struggle was going on prior to COVID-19 to ensure young children stay in school and have access to proper education, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the total global out-of-school population.(Allen,2005).

The COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally but kids in rural and underserved communities in Lagos State, Nigeria, are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to the new methods of learning. On 19 March 2020, the Federal Ministry of Education approved school closures as a response to the pandemic. States in the federation contextualized this, with the Lagos State Ministry of Education releasing a schedule of radio and TV lessons for students in public schools(Adeyinka,2002)..

Priorities should include the introduction of courses such as coding and robotics.

According to Uzor (2012), families that earn below \$1 per day and faced harsh economic realities due to the four-week lockdown in the state, the purchase of radios or TV might be a trade-off that they cannot afford. A suggestion to this problem was the provision of portable solar radios to help bridge the digital divide.The pandemic has unmasked substantial inequities in the education sector. Private and non-governmental sectors are tirelessly working to salvage this situation. Projects such as Digiterate and Teach for Nigeria hope to ensure proper tools for education are available to all in Lagos. However, one major issue that may stem from this inequality is that these kids who currently cannot keep up with their peers because of inaccessibility to digital tools may never catch up and will continue to feel the effect of this gap long after the pandemic is

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Educational System in Nigeria

over. This may result in a severely diminishing pool of young adults who have not garnered the necessary skills to stay ahead in the future. With Nigeria already behind in preparing its young people for the workplace of the future, the effects of the pandemic further exacerbate this issue (.Uzor,2012).

Solutions

Ikechi (2008). Says that the global lockdown of education institutions is going to cause 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.

What can be done to mitigate these negative impacts? Schools need resources to rebuild the loss in learning, once they open again. How these resources are used, and how to target the children who were especially hard hit, is an open question. Given the evidence of the importance of assessments for learning, schools should also consider postponing rather than skipping internal assessments. For new graduates, policies should support their entry to the labour market to avoid longer unemployment periods.(Abdul,2005).

Conclusion

In countries such as Nigeria, education should be viewed as a high government priority. Help in increasing awareness of the pressing need for the country's children to be educated, especially those from low-income families, will benefit the country's economy in years to come. Aid provided in this direction can be viewed as an investment in human capital; the more educated a country is, the more productive. Of all sustainable missions surely the most pressing is to improve lives, and there's no better way to do so than proper and sound education for all.(Darape,2020).

Recommendation

1. There are measures that must be taken to help bridge the divide when the urgent needs of the pandemic subside. They centre largely around Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and government aid. PPPs can do much to improve the quality of, and increase access to, education for poor children in underserved communities.
2. More schools in such areas, especially Lagos, would go some way to start shifting the teacher/student ratio which has hit alarming lows of 1:83 at points during the past decade. The result of new schools opening would be a reduced burden on teachers, currently ill-equipped to handle the ever-burgeoning class sizes.
3. Voucher schools may also aid in rapidly improving the education system in Lagos as suggested by a World Bank Report addressing the need for more information on the private education sector there, given that private schools are the lead education provider in the state. Voucher schools are schools chosen by students and to which the

government provides funding; they may be government or non-government providers or both, depending on the system.

4. Government aid is needed in terms of investing in educational tools of the future alongside a total revamp of the educational sector. Reforms in the national curriculum post-pandemic would be an effective way to bridge the gap in inequality. Priorities should include the introduction of courses such as coding and robotics which can usher students into the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and prepare them for jobs of the future.

References

- Abdul, R.A. (2005) *COVID-19 educational disruption and response*. Institute of response.
- Adams, R.O. (2011). *The role of parents in refocusing child education in Nigeria*. In P. Egbule, J. E. Tabotnadip and D. A. Abaho (Eds.), *Refocusing education in Nigeria in the 21st century* (pp 348-357). Lagos: West and Solomon Publishing Ltd.
- Adeyinka, K.S. (2002) *Basic issues in sociology*. Ibadan: K.T. Publication.
- Allen, C. (2005). *The history of Education: The possibility of Survival*. Change: Transformations in Education, pp. 46-59.
- Andersen, S C, and H S Nielsen (2019), "Learning from Performance Information", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.
- Asodike, N. (2009) *Education in conflict and crisis: How can technology make a difference? A landscape review*. Bonn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
- Barry, S. (2012) *Covid-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest*. UNESCO.
- Bjorklund, A and K Salvanes (2011), "Education and Family Background: Mechanisms and Policies", in E Hanushek, S Machin and L Woessmann (eds), *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Vol. 3.
- Carlson, M, G B Dahl, B Öckert and D Rooth (2015), "The Effect of Schooling on Cognitive Skills", *Review of Economics and Statistics* 97(3): 533–547

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Impact on Educational System in Nigeria

- Carr, J. (2020) *Evidence on efforts to mitigate the negative educational impact of past disease outbreaks. K4D Helpdesk Report 793. Reading, UK: Education Development Trust*
- Darape, k. (2020) *Managing education systems during COVID-19: An open letter to a minister of education. Center For Global Development (blog).*
- Hopkins, S. (2010). *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to Schools.* Hamilton: Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
- Ijah, J. (2020) *Learning through television in low income contexts: Mitigating the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19). The EdTech Hub*
- Ikechi, A. B. (2008). *Education in mother tongue, Ibadan: University Press Ltd*
- Iriobe, H (2005). *Human rights education in diverse, developing nations: A case in point – South Africa. Issues of Democracy, 7(March). Retrieved January 12, 2003, from <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/0302/ijde/pitts1.htm>*
- Jalade, N. (2020) *Lack of Internet access in southeast Asia poses challenges for students to study online amid COVID-19 pandemic. The Conversation.*
- Lavy, V (2015), “Do Differences in Schools' Instruction Time Explain International Achievement Gaps? Evidence from Developed and Developing Countries”, *Economic Journal* 125.
- Macline, H. B. (2008). *Creating a culture of healing in schools and communities: An integrative approach to prevention and amelioration of violence-induced conditions, Journal of Community Psychology.*
- Nnabuo, K., (2007). *Process Education: Past, Present, and Future. International Journal of Process Education, 35-41.*
- Okafor. M.J. (2015). *Regional Report on Out of School Children - The Middle East and North Africa out of School Initiatives..*
- Oreopoulos, P, T von Wachter, and A Heisz (2012), “The Short- and Long-Term Career Effects of Graduating in a Recession”, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4(1): 1-29.
- Rogers, G.K (2009) *Adverse consequences of school closures.*

Boma Rogers Allison, Ph.D and Sunny A. Dickay, Ph.D

Ross, A.A. (2002) *Combating violence in Nigeria: issues, prospects and problems*. In Ajayi, K, (ed) *Intruduction to peace and conflict studies: the Nigeria perspective*. General Studies Unit, University of Ado- Ekiti. Ikeja: Solar Flaes.

UNESCO (2015). *Education for all 2000-2015: Achievement and challenges; EFA Global monitoring report 2015*, pp. 75-103, UNESCO. Paris.

Uzor,D.C.. (2012).*The Meaning of Education*.PRELAC Journal, 1-14