

IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) PANDEMIC EMERGENCY LOCK DOWN ON SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN NIGERIA.

JANET MOTUNRAYO ESEYIN
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
University of Jos.

&

DR (MRS) OLUYOMI OYEDOYIN AKINTUNDE
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
University of Jos.

Abstract

This paper discussed COVID-19 emergency lock down and its educational and instructional implications on children's learning in Nigeria. Facts about COVID-19, such as meaning, symptoms, treatment and prevention were discussed. COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the education divide in Nigeria and also unmasked substantially inequality in the education sector. Therefore, the period of digital learning as a result of the emergency lock down, has caused children in rural and disadvantaged communities in Nigeria to be left behind. The paper recommended provision of solar radio and television by the government, for the period of emergency learning so that all children will be on the same page. Again schools should strictly observe all covid-19 guide lines and protocols provided by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) as schools re-open for academic activities.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, Emergency lock down, School children, Learning, Nigeria.

Introduction

Emergency period is a period of sudden, serious and dangerous event or situation which needs immediate action. It is a time people are overwhelmed by uncertainties like natural and artificial uncertainties. Emergency period is characterized by limitation of human rights and development of emergency personnel such as health and security personnel. It is a period when the government spends more and generates low income with little output; COVID 19 pandemic is an emergency situation in Nigeria which has caused total lock down on primary and secondary school children in Nigeria.

COVID- 19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis. It is a respiratory illness and largely spread via droplets in the air. These are typically expelled when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Cases of COVID-19 first emerged in late 2019, when a mysterious illness was reported in Wuhan, China (Boland, Kuhfeld, Tarasawa, Johnson, Ruzek, & Liu, 2020). The cause of the disease was confirmed as a new kind of corona virus, and the infection has since spread to many countries around the world which Nigeria is one and become a pandemic. The spread of the corona virus initially spared Nigeria, like many other African countries, with zero

recorded case as at January 2020. However, on the 28th of February 2020, Nigeria reported its first case through an Italian man visiting Nigeria.

Many countries including Nigeria decided to close all primary and secondary schools. The closure was felt by many families in Nigeria, as children's learning and social life were affected. During COVID 19 lock down, there were human rights restrictions for instance, the Federal Government announced total lock down of some states, banned interstate movements and introduced night curfew nationwide and movement of people were restricted. There were reported cases of abuse, rape, hunger and starvation. As soon as the government relaxed the lock down, many children registered and were engaged in skill acquisition programmes while some took to the street to hawk, for there was serious hunger in the land.

Furthermore, the crisis made policy makers to close schools in order to reduce contact and save lives instead of keeping schools open and allowing workers to work and maintain economy, thereby placing economy above lives. Parents were practicing home schooling with their children which has become a massive shock to parents' productivity and to children's learning and social life. Radio teaching and online teaching, with a lot of trial and errors and uncertainties became the order of the day. These interruptions may also have long term consequences on the affected children as many tests and examinations were cancelled.

What is Covid-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of corona virus "CO" stands for corona, "VI" for virus, and "D" for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as 2019 novel corona virus or 2019-NCOV. The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

Some of the symptoms of COVID -19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. Occasionally, the disease can be fatal. The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to the flu (influenza) or the common cold. This is why testing is required to confirm if someone has COVID -19 (Soland, Kuhfeld, et al., 2020).

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person or through touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their faces such as eyes, nose and mouth. The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it. Older people, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart diseases, appear to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms and being easily infected (UNICEF, 2020).

Currently there is no available vaccine for COVID-19. However, many of the symptoms can be treated and getting early care from a health care provider can make the disease less dangerous. The following measures should be taken to curb the spread of COVID-19:

- i. Staying at home when sick.
- ii. Washing hands often with soap and water for about 20 seconds.
- iii. Frequently cleaning of touched surfaces and objects.
- iv. Cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of tissue immediately. (NewsScientists, 2020)

Educational and Instructional Implications of Covid-19 on Children's Learning in Nigeria

Going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills especially social and cognitive skills. Social skills are important factor in school success (Dodge, Heroman, Colder, & Bickart, 2010). Social skills are defined as the abilities needed to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with others (Administration for children & families, 2015). Empirical research has found that the level of a child's social skills as they enter primary school influences their engagement in learning activities as a result, their academic performance (Ladd, Birch, & Bushs, 1999). As such, one of the primary goals is to foster social development (Epstein, 2014).

Schooling play a key role in socializing children because school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness. Berk (2009) listed the following social skills for children; emergence of self, self-concept, self-esteem, identity, thinking about other people, and social problem solving. However, these social skills are deprived of children during the lock down which are important for children's development.

Furthermore, from an economic point of view the primary point of being in school is that it increases a child's cognitive ability. Even a relatively short time in school does this and relatively short period of missed school will have consequences for cognitive skill development. Carrisson, Dahi, Ockert and Rooth (2015) asserted that ten days of extra schooling significantly raises scores on tests score outcomes of use knowledge above non participants, as such loss of hours per week in schooling experience of children has negative consequences, implying that children's ability to write, read, recall and use language appropriately may be affected when they miss school.

The current global scale expansion in home school especially through internet is quite a positive development and it is likely to be effective. Typically this role is seen as a complement to the input from school. To be a prime driver of learning, even in conjunction with online materials, is a different question because it can be overwhelming for parents since they are not trained for this purpose therefore while some parents do successfully school their children at home, many may not be able to do so.

Home schooling may produce some inspirational moments, some angry moments, some fun moments and some frustrated moments but may not likely replace the learning lost from school, because there will likely be substantial disparities between families in the extent to which they can help their children learn. The differences will be in the area of the amount of time available to devote to teaching, non-cognitive skills of parents, resources and also the amount of knowledge since it will be hard for parents to help the child learn something they do not understand themselves.

The closure of schools not only interrupts the teaching which has to do with social and cognitive skill development in school for children, the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed. Internal assessments were cancelled, but these scores were supposed to supply information about the child's progress to parents and teachers. The loss of this information can have harmful long term consequences

for the child. The lock down of schools did not only affect internal assessments of schools. In Nigeria, all qualifying exams such as JSS3, SSS3, WAEC, NECO exams, and NABTEB and others have been put on hold till further notice.

As COVID-19 pandemic runs its course, Nigeria government implemented measures that limited the number of people congregating in public places. Such measures have disrupted the normal functioning of schools, and the duration of the measures has been extensive. Stakeholders in public and private educational institutions have put in place alternative methods for students and teachers to continue with their lessons when attending school is not possible and are working on methods that will make schools fit for working in a safe environment. In Nigeria, state governments such as Lagos, Ogun and Plateau states adopted local media channels such as radio programmes to reach out to children in the communities.

The World Education Global Practice presented a first set of online educational resources to support the continuity for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic with education leaders around the world. In Nigeria, children in rural and disadvantaged communities were left behind as they were not equipped to adopt or transit to new methods of learning. The only well documented response is the Nigerian Education in Emergency Working Group Strategy published in April 7th 2020. The objective of the strategy was to mitigate the negative impact of school closures on students and teachers in the North-East Nigeria. (Education Cannot Wait, 2020).

Children on the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum may experience less disruption to their learning because their private school are well equipped with ICT infrastructure and they can afford remote learning resources at home. The majority that will be left suffering are the children 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-existing internet connectivity and unreliable power supply. Inevitably; this digital divide will exacerbate the learning disparity among school children. For instance in China, 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 (World Literacy Foundation, 2020).

In Nigeria prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the struggle to ensure that children stay in school and have access to proper education was on going. Disruption of the school year has negative impact on learning of many school children. A long period of disengagement from school can result in a further increase of dropout rate, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the global out of school population (UNICEF, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally but children in rural and disadvantaged communities in Nigeria are left behind as they lack fund and learning materials needed to adapt or transit to the new methods of learning. On March 19th, 2020 the Federal Ministry of Education approved school closures as response to the pandemic. As such, many school children were forced to stay at home without formal learning. However the Ministry of Education in some states (specifically, Lagos and Plateau States), released a schedule of radio and television lessons for students in public schools. School children in the urban area could easily connect and follow

the radio learning programmes. Not so in rural areas. Problems of unstable electricity supply, inability to purchase batteries to power the radio (in the absence of power supply), inability to engage in individual study and adjustment problem of switching from face to face learning to audio learning are some challenges trailing the new development.

Conclusion

The mission of all education system is to overcome the learning crisis that already exists and respond to the pandemic that is ravaging the educational system presently. The challenge therefore is to reduce as much as possible the negative impact the pandemic will have on learning and build on this experience to get back on a path of faster improvement in learning. As education system cope with this crisis, there is a need to recover stronger, with a renewed sense of responsibility and with a better understanding and sense of urgency of the need to close the gap.

Also experts are learning more about how COVID-19 affects people every day. As schools reopen, students, teachers/staff should adhere strictly to all the measures provided by (NCDC). Government should be more intentional in upgrading the medium of learning in all public schools, by bridging the gap between children in rural and urban communities for digital learning, and making education accessible to all via radio and television, to help reduce the current challenge of learning at home.

Recommendations

The outbreak of corona virus 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 including Nigeria. Maintaining safe school operations for learning and reopening after a closure require the following considerations:

1. The internal lockdown of education institutions may cause major interruption in children's learning; disruptions in internal assessments and the postponement of public assessments. To mitigate these negative impacts, schools need resources to rebuild the loss in learning once they open again.
2. The children who were hard hit should be the target. Given the evidence of the importance of assessments for learning, schools should consider weeks of revision and then the assessment can commence both for internal and external examination.
3. The protection of children and educational facilities is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID- 19 in school settings after resumption by providing water and soap for washing hands, face masks and hand sanitizer for protection. Care must be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus.
4. Education settings should continue to be welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive environment for all for effective learning, for COVID-19 does not differentiate between ethnicities, disability status, age or gender.
5. Administrators, teachers and staff, parents, caregivers and community members, as well as children themselves should be engaged in promoting facts about COVID-19 as this will help diminish students' fears and anxieties around the disease and support their ability to cope with any secondary impacts in their lives and pay full attention to learning.

6. Education should encourage students to become advocates for disease prevention and control at home, in school, and in their communities by talking to others about how to prevent the spread of the virus. Students, teachers, and staff should follow basic principles at school to stop the spread of COVID – 19 and make school environment conducive for learning. These principles include the following. According to WHO, (2020):
 - a. Sick students, teachers and other staff should not come to school;
 - b. Schools should enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap and use of hand sanitizer;
 - c. Schools should provide water, sanitizer and waste management facilities.
 - d. Schools should promote social distancing by adhering to the following principles:
 - i. Concealing assemblies, sports, games and other events that create crowded conditions.
 - ii. Create space for children's desks to be at least one meter apart.
 - iii. Teach and model creating space and avoid unnecessary touch.
7. Schools should develop flexible attendance and sick leave policies that encourage students and staff to stay home when sick or when caring for sick family members. Implement school absenteeism monitoring systems to track students and staff absence and compare against usual absenteeism patterns in the school. Alert local health authorities about large increase in students and staff absenteeism and support continued access to learning according to (UNICEF, 2020) include:
 - (a) Use of online/e-learning strategies;
 - (b) Assigning reading and exercises for home study;
 - (c) Radio broadcasts and television broadcasts of academic content;
 - (d) Assigning teachers to conduct remote daily or weekly follow up with students.
 - (e) Review and develop accelerated education strategies.
8. Encourage children to discuss their questions and concerns by talking to teachers, while teachers provide information in an honest and age appropriate manner.
9. To solve the problem of inequality and further mitigate the negative impacts of COVID 19 on learning. The government should provide solar- powered educational devices, pre-loaded with offline academic resources, to children in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. The Nigeria Education in Emergency Working Group Strategy (NEEWGS) could also be scaled up to include other regions in the country. With Nigeria already behind in preparing its young people for the work place of the future, the effect of the pandemic further escalate the issue. To bridge the divide, when the pandemic subsides, there are measures that should be taken which centred largely on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).
10. PPPs can do much to improve the quality of and increase access to, education for poor children in disadvantaged communities. More schools in such areas would go a long way to start shifting the teacher/student ratio which has hit alarming rate, especially in public schools.
11. Government aid is needed in terms of investing in educational tools to develop the educational sector. Reforms in the national curriculum post-pandemic would be an effective way to bridge the gap in inequality. In countries such as Nigeria, education should be viewed as high government priority, by increasing awareness of the pressing need for children to be educated, especially those from low income families,

as they will in future benefit the nation's economy. For any aid provided in this direction by the government can be viewed as an investment in human capital. The more educated a country is the more productive, and of all sustainable missions, the most pressing to improve lives is proper and sound education for all.

References

- Berk, L. E. (2009). *Child development* (8thed.). Boston: Allyn& Bacon.p.65
- Carrisson, M., Dahi, G. B., Ockert, B., &Rooth, D. (2015).The effect of schooling on cognitive skills.*Review of Economics and Statistics* 97(3), 533-547.
- Dodge, D. T., Heroman, C., & Colker, L. J. (2010). *The creative curriculum for preschool: Interest areas*. Teaching Strategies. *Journal of Psychology* 1(2),54-65
- Education Cannot Wait (ECW) (2020). COVID-19 and education in emergencies. Retrieved from <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/covid-19/nrt>
- Epstein, A. S. (2014). The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children learning (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.p.12
- Kelland, K. (2020). School closures will have little impact on COVID-19 control, review finds. In T. Heritage (Ed.).*Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles](#)*.
- NewScientists(2020).COVID-19.*Newsletter*. Retrieved from <https://www.newscientist.com/term/covid-19/>
- Office of Head Start. (2015). Head Start early learning outcomes framework: Ages birth to five.*The psychologist*4(2),23-32
- Pellegrino, J. W., & Hilton, M. L. (eds.) (2012). Education for life and work: Developing transferred knowledge and skills in the twenty-first century. Washington DC: National Academies.p.78
- Soland, J., Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020).The Impact of COVID-19 on student achievement and what it may mean for educators. *Brown Center Chalkboard. KIU journal of Humanities* 8(3),67 -73
- World Health Organization.(2020). Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools. *Bussiness Times*.3rdJune 2020 p.102