

THE EFFECT OF THE WUHAN CORONAVIRUS ON NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Oluwatobi Blessing OGHUVBU

Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Education
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
bfamuti@gmail.com

Ejiroghene Augustine OGHUVBU

Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
augustine4best@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Wuhan Coronavirus pandemic, began in September 2019 in the capital city of Hubei Province in the Republic of China, and has since spread to other parts of the world, affecting the entire world's population. The virus has largely spread from one person to another since then. It has also led more than 171 countries around the world to close their educational institutions for the most part of the year 2020. Since more than 1.5 billion students from all over the world have been affected by school closures, the effect of COVID-19 on educational system is in bizarre and unimaginable in the history of mankind. This study therefore, investigates the effect of the novel Wuhan coronavirus on the Nigerian educational system. The study however, argued that the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria impacted negatively on the growth and development of educational system which was already in a state of comatose. Qualitative method was adopted in gathering data for the study. This includes the use of books, conference papers, academic journal and book chapters. Findings from the study pinpoints that the outbreak of coronavirus has a negative impact on the educational system in Nigeria leading to closure of schools and students been unable to write examinations due to lack of ICT facilities. As a result the study recommends that there is also a need for the government and policymakers to mitigate the effects of school closures by providing the required infrastructure for e-learning, such as laptops and mobile data packages, as well as subsidizing citizens' telecommunication and electricity bills.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Educational System, Schools, Pandemic, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Nigerian coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is part of a worldwide coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused by extreme acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SAR COV-2) (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). Coronaviruses, which can be spread to humans, are widespread in animals such as cattle, camels, and bats. According to some scientists, the modern coronavirus strain appeared in bats or pangolins (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). The first human transmission occurred in Wuhan, China, in September 2019 in the capital city of Hubei Province, and has since spread to other areas of the world, affecting the entire world's population and industries (Kim, 2020). The virus has largely spread by person-to-person interaction since then. Near contact with already infected people is the most effective way for this infection to spread. When people with COVID-19 cough or exhale, tiny droplets containing the virus are expelled (Oluka, Ezech & Okotie, 2020: 513). These droplets may penetrate the mouth or nose of someone who is not infected with the virus, allowing infection to spread. Since the infection is more infectious while a person's symptoms are at their worse, it is possible for anyone without symptoms to transmit it (Kim, 2020).

The Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria announced the first case of COVID-19 on February 27, 2020. This was the case of an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned to Lagos, on February 25, 2020 from Milan, Italy. Since then, both in Nigeria and across the world, the number of reported cases of infection has continued to rise. The United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, China, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Japan, and Iran are among the 13 countries who are worse hit by the deadly virus. COVID-19 is declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organisation 2020; Davidson, 2020; Vara, 2020).

A pandemic is an epidemic that has spread over a wide geographic area (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Humanity has battled numerous environmental health scourges that threatened to wash away humanity from the face of the planet over the years. It's important to understand how coronavirus differs from the plagues and epidemics that have plagued mankind throughout history, COVID19 is unique in that it has had a major impact on everyone's education around the world (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). COVID 19 is the first virus in human history to pose a serious threat to human survival. While plagues were mentioned in the Bible Old Testament book of Exodus before the Spanish flu of 1918, they were mentioned when King Pharaoh refused to set the Israelites free and allow them to leave Egypt. The Spanish pandemic, on the other hand, was a virus with lethal effects that is still remembered in human culture (Kpae, 2020). Other pandemics are the Black Death 1346-1353, Asian Flu 1957-1958 and the Ebola epidemic in West African countries that occurred 2013-2016 (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020:27).

The Federal Ministry of Education, through the Permanent Secretary, ordered the immediate closing of tertiary institutions, high schools, and primary schools throughout the country on March 19th as part of steps to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria (Kpae, 2020). Furthermore, interstate travel was limited, market places were closed, religious groups of more than ten people were prohibited, and social events such as parties, weddings, and club meetings were discontinued (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020:27). Both private and governments schools had to shut down in other to adhered to covid-19 protocols. This paper therefore, investigates the effect of the Wuhan coronavirus on Nigerian educational system.

The Nature of the Problem: The Coronavirus

Following the global closure of businesses, social activities, places of worship, and schools due to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), national governments provided a variety of palliatives to alleviate the suffering of the masses, most notably revolutionizing digital and online education in their respective countries (Oluka, et al., 2020:514). Sadly, several rural areas in Nigeria have struggled to achieve the established objectives and the essential of involving Nigerian students in order to bridge the gaps created by the virus's breakout and subsequent closures of schools, colleges, and institutions across the country (Ogunode, 2020: 89). In particular, the closure of schools since March 2020 in an attempt to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic has been criticized in certain sectors and has resulted in a slew of unresolved national concerns. Some people contend that the ongoing closure of Nigerian schools in the face of the virus has exacerbated the difficulties in our education sector, which has been hampered by bad leadership, corruption, insufficient money, and a lack of infrastructural development (Ogunode, 2020: 90).

Taibat (2020) argued that the “Federal government's challenges in the face of the viral epidemic in the country include lack of a clear policy framework, how to control the virus's spread, and how to alleviate learning disruptions before implementing total lockdown and school closures.” Consequently, he noted that the issue with the adoption of digital and online education or learning as a palliative is that ensuring students at all levels in the country receive their classes while on lockdown is fraught

with embarrassment due to students' inability to access these new methods of learning, particularly those living in rural and underserved communities (Duraku, & Hoxha, 2020). In some rural and urban areas, the lack of power or the ostensibly regular outage of power has created barriers for students, sabotaging the efforts of governments and school owners to effectively adhere to internationally accepted standards and adopted methods of impacting knowledge on students in this global pandemic era (Amorighoye, 2020).

In a related development, Amorighoye (2020) argued that “families earning less than \$1 per day and those who are subjected to harsh economic realities as a result of the Federal government's lockdown, and those who cannot afford radios and portable solar radios; television (TV) sets; internet data subscriptions; their wards were subjected to a never-ending predicament and were denied the opportunity to profit from the computerized learning system that was widely used by national governments to teach kids throughout the pandemic period.” As a result, Nigerian students have suffered the most, just like some of their African peers, a circumstance that has further reduced the pool of school children across the country from benefiting from this chosen tendency to continue their studies throughout the period of the pandemic (Duraku, & Hoxha, 2020). Some have yet gain the necessary abilities to be competitive in the future. Reiterating UNESCO's view on the effects of COVID-19 and the resulting school closures, Taibat (2020) “argued that the temporary closure of schools comes with a very high socio-economic cost with a very severe impact on the schoolchildren, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds.”

Children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are, without a doubt, less affected by the government's adopted digital and e-learning techniques, which are imposed on public school administrators and private school owners because their schools are well-equipped with ICT infrastructure and can possibly afford these in contrast to their poor and disadvantaged classmates, who do not have access to computers and other gadgets outside their classrooms and live in neighborhoods without internet connection (Taibat, 2020; Naiametrics, 2020). Aiyedun (2020) asserted that the “federal government's actions to restrict the virus's spread in the country, initially in Lagos, Kano, and the Federal Capital Territory, included the closure of primary schools and university institutions.” The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Abuja), and later other states of the Federation, have wreaked havoc on the academic calendar and impacted the academic syllabus for the second year (Kpae, 2020). From this viewpoint, it has become imperative to argue that all of the aforementioned factors, including corruption, low education funding, and low infrastructure sector development, and insincerity on the part of government agencies in charge of the spread and treatment of COVID-19, mostly on the part of National Centre for Disease Control, (NCDC) (Taibat, 2020). In the face of the outbreak of the virus, and the subsequent lockdown of all aspects of human activities ranging from sporting activities, entertainment, transportation, and education, the federal and state governments were unprepared to meet the expectations of the masses, particularly in the provision of palliatives and social services (Amorighoye, 2020). This study therefore, will examine the effects of the closure of educational system in Nigeria due to Covid-19.

Coronavirus and School Closure in Nigeria

Many countries have decided to close schools, colleges, and universities (for the right reasons). The crisis encapsulates the dilemma that policymakers face in deciding whether to close schools (to reduce contact and save lives) or to keep schools open (allowing workers to work and maintaining the economy). This was a very tough decision for most countries (Thelma & Adedeji, 2020). Many families throughout the world are experiencing a significant short-term disruption: home schooling is a tremendous shock to parents' productivity, as well as to children's social lives and learning (Adelakun, 2020). On an unproven and unprecedented scale, education is migrating online. Many evaluations have

been canceled outright. Importantly, these disruptions will not just be a short-term concern, but they will also have long-term effects for the impacted cohorts, increasing inequality. The Federal Ministry of Education's school-closure policy differs from that of Western countries. In a dynamic culture, the directive did not develop policy measures on how to reduce learning disruptions for children or how to handle digital means of learning, which may be an alternative to physical teaching learning processes (Adelakun, 2020; Thelma & Adedeji, 2020).

It can thus be argued that, among several ways in which the academic calendar in the country has been truncated over the years, is through strike actions by the Academic Staff Union of Nigeria University (ASUU), the Nigerian Union of Teachers; armed conflict and attacks from insurgent groups in some parts of the country (The Guardian, 2020). The breakout of the COVID-19 epidemic and accompanying school closures have unquestionably exacerbated the challenges associated with Nigeria's education system (Thelma & Adedeji, 2020). Targeted assaults, injury to teachers, students, collateral damage, and military usage of school buildings have all been documented in the literature (UNICEF, 2020). The fear of sending children to school and dread of instructors visiting school because they are threatened with targeted assaults; overall insecurity limiting freedom of movement; the greatest issues facing the nation's education calendar have been forced population displacement, notably in the north eastern section of the country (Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016). The shutdown of schools due to the outbreak of COVID-19 has exacerbated Nigerians' problems not just in the north-eastern section of the country, but has also disrupted education throughout the country. Scholars and observers who have studied the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Nigeria claim that the virus's breakout has interrupted the 2020 academic calendar, denying Nigerian students access to school and lowering the quality of the country's learning experience (The Guardian, 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

Parents and instructors are still concerned about their children's safety and their own health, despite the fact that schools have reopened for the exit courses only (primary six, junior and senior secondary school pupils appearing for external examinations). Some parents are apprehensive about returning their children to school. The topic of how prepared the necessary authorities and school owners are to secure the safety of children and staff returning to school is also crucial. This has created a new difficulty for the country's school resumption. According to Oladunjoye & Omaemu (2013), quoted in Isokpan & Durojaye (2016:10) attendance at school is determined by the child's preparedness, and parental encouragement, as well as the distance to school and, most significantly, the child's safety.

According to Amorighoye (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic has "revolutionized digital and online education not only in Nigeria but throughout the world; however, children in rural areas of Nigeria have been left behind because they are ill-equipped to adapt to these new methods of learning following the pandemic's approved closure of schools." This appears to be one of the biggest concerns resulting from the pandemic's onset and subsequent closure of businesses and schools across the country (Amorighoye 2020). It has also produced inequity since children who cannot afford the luxury connected with digital or e-learning are struggling to keep up with their peers who are exposed to and privileged to such facilities, expanding the gap between these groups of pupils in the country. According to Yinka & Adebayo (2020), the "pandemic's impact is merely one of several consequences of the country's educational imbalance. This has been complicated by the sophistication that has resulted from government directives to school principals and owners to adopt digital learning platforms, video lessons, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and radio and television broadcasts, all of which are not easily accessible or affordable to some members of society."

Without a question, the pandemic's spread has had a negative impact on many facets of our lives, with schoolchildren from low-income households facing the brunt of the impact (Amorighoye 2020). Wondwosen & Damtew (2020) "discovered several overseas students trapped in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, where it all started, and then to other areas of Africa, notably those from Nigeria,

Senegal, and South Africa, as well as Algeria and its North African neighbor, seemed to be the most affected.” This one-of-a-kind response to the virus's spread will undoubtedly have a severe influence on the international students who were forced to return home due to the closure of schools, colleges, and institutions throughout the world. This has also pushed back and interrupted the academic calendars and graduation dates of students throughout the world (Wondwosen & Damtew, 2020). Lagoko (2020) has proposed that the “lockdown be extended further, with no schools reopening until January 2021. He believes that reopening schools will considerably raise the chance of the virus infecting children and pupils at school, as well as the possibility of the virus spreading inside families.” He outlined the potential consequences of keeping schools closed for an extended period due to the pandemic, which include an increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies, a drop in school enrolment among young women in rural areas, families being unable to send their children back to school due to a loss of livelihood means, learning losses, and limited online learning resources- as evidenced by the Ebola outbreak (Lagoko, 2020).

According to Ettang (2020) “just one out of every four Nigerians have access to the internet, yet three out of four have mobile phones. In the e-learning "new normal," he also said that the expense of data subscriptions and electronic equipment to employ for efficient learning is a concern for Nigerians.” Some people who have internet-connected gadgets do not know or grasp the functions of such gadgets, let alone how to utilize them (Ettang, 2020). According to UNESCO (2020) predictions, student dropout rates may rise as a result of the obstacles that will accompany the return to school once the epidemic has passed. Similarly, the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that after the epidemic and closure of schools throughout the world, more than 91 percent of pupils, including younger infants, around the world, with roughly 1.6 billion children and adolescents are unable to attend physical schools, resulting in the introduction of distance learning programs and open education applications and platforms for schools and teachers to use to reach out to learners or students in both remote and urban areas, all of which have far-reaching economic and societal consequences not only for students and teachers, but also for parents (Karp & McGowan, 2020). As appealing as these platforms are as a means of reclaiming lost time during the epidemic, kids from underserved low-income communities are left out, and are now unable to access these privileges, rendering the exercise futile across the country.

The Effects of the Wuhan Coronavirus on Educational System in Nigeria

The effects of bird flu, monkey pox, Lassa fever, Ebola disease in Nigeria cannot be compared to the consequences of coronavirus on Nigeria’s educational system. According to UNESCO (2020) over 35.9 million primary and secondary school students are now out of school due to school closures. In elementary schools, there are roughly 25.6 million pupils, with around 87 percent (23.5 million) attending public schools (Adelakun, 2020:92). There is no guarantee that all students who left school during the pandemic lockdown will return; some may have changed their minds about going to school, seeing it as a waste of time, some may have died, some may have changed schools, and some may have joined bad groups, diverting their attention away from school (Adelakun, 2020:92). This is where parents' and guidance's efforts should come in to ensure that learners' needs are met even while they are at home. Unfortunately, given certain parents' literacy levels in Nigeria, learning within the house is also restricted; not every parent is equipped to manage the pedagogic component of parenthood, and other responsibilities of parents must also be addressed (Ettang, 2020). The impact of this may not be immediately apparent; but, if no interventions are made, a kid in this category's future is bound to suffer a substantial academic setback, because the majority of pupils will not be able to relocate until the prohibition on movement is lifted and schools are reopened (Kpae, 2020:1775).

According to the UN, the crisis has exacerbated pre-existing education disparities by limiting opportunities for many of the world's most vulnerable children, youth, and adults, particularly those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, people with disabilities, and those forcibly displaced people, to continue their education. Learning losses also threaten to go beyond this generation, wiping out decades of achievement, particularly in support of girls' and young women's educational access and retention. Due to the pandemic's economic effect alone, 23.8 million extra children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not be able to attend school this year (United Nations, 2020; Kpae, 2020:1775). In a low-income country like Nigeria, government-run public schools, with the exception of a few private institutions, are unable to provide online education to its pupils. Nigeria has been struggling to keep its students in school prior to the epidemic due to a high incidence of school dropout. Nigeria accounts for over 20% of the world's out-of-school children. Because of the epidemic and the widening wealth inequality in the country, this figure is expected to rise (Oluka, et al., 2020: 518). According to UNICEF (2020) survey estimates that "10.5 million Nigerian children aged 5 to 14 are out of school. Only 61 percent of children aged 6 to 11 go to primary school on a regular basis." Due to cultural prejudices against women's education, more than half of young girls in several states in the north east and North West of the country are not enrolled in school (Amorighoye, 2020).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), "the closure of schools, colleges, and training centers has had a negative impact on more than 70% of youths who study or combine study with work." In a separate assessment on the effects of Covid-19 on jobs, education, rights, and mental health, 65 percent of youngsters said they had learned less since the beginning of the epidemic as a result of the lockdown's movement from classroom to online and distant learning. Youths from low-income nations have the most difficulties, as they have less access to the internet, lack technology, and often lack room at home (Amorighoye, 2020; ILO, 2020). The ILO (2020) research also emphasized the significant digital inequalities across regions, stating that whereas 65 percent of adolescents in high-income nations were taught via video lectures, just 18 percent of adolescents in low-income nations were allowed to participate in online classes. According to Hussain (2020) "Covid-19 had a huge influence on Nigerian educational system since the government lacked the technology to deal with the pandemic's that affected 46 million children." Hussain (2020) pointed out that, "unlike other advanced nations, the Nigerian government lacked clear policy measures to address learning disruptions for children or how to mitigate the digital divide." As a result, children from better socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have their learning disrupted since they attend private schools with well-equipped ICT infrastructure, and their parents can buy remote learning materials at home (Amorighoye, 2020).

The majority of kids, on the other hand, come from vulnerable and disadvantaged households and do not have access to computers or other devices outside school. In many situations, these children come from underprivileged urban families or reside in areas with limited or non-existent internet access and inconsistent power supply (Hussain, 2020). Inevitably, the digital gap will aggravate learning discrepancies among young children as well as the country's socioeconomic division between the wealthy and the poor (Kpae, 2020). There were also finance effects of covid-19 on parents. During the lockdown, some parents were obliged to buy laptops, Android phones, television cables, and other ICT devices for their children in order to keep up with the new concept of online classrooms at various levels meant to allow professors to communicate with their students. Most developing private schools in Nigeria could not afford to pay their staffs during the lockdown because students were not in school, and some had not paid school levies prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, resulting in school proprietors not having access to inflow of income to care for their employees. Even though there is a standing rule in Nigeria that stipulates no work, no pay, governments at all levels continued to pay

personnel in schools and ministries of education despite the fact that they were not working for their wages during the lockdown (Adelakun, 2020; Kpae, 2020; Oluka, et al., 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study indicate that continuing school closures have put fundamental education in the country in jeopardy, further complicating an already inadequate, confused, and unhelpful learning environment, particularly in public institutions. Furthermore, the virus's outbreak has diverted government's attention away from other pressing national issues such as public infrastructure development, government-owned schools, and the fight against insurgency, to the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. By implication, the limited resources available as a result of the global economic downturn and the sharp drop in the price of crude oil on the international market, which is the country's main source of revenue, have been diverted to the fight against the virus, leaving other sectors of the economy, including education, underfunded. This has also made it difficult for the government to offer adequate relief to public schools in order to build on the Federal government's e-learning initiative.

The physical state of a school has a direct impact on teacher morale and effectiveness, as well as the learning environment in general. Inadequate educational facilities in Nigeria represent a danger to the right to education in normal circumstances, and they are significantly worse now that COVID-19 has spread. Nigerian schools are typically under-equipped and unsuitable for learning, and a lack of financing and school closures has put basic education in jeopardy. Insufficient finance and ill-equipped facilities in public and some private schools have made it exceedingly difficult for Nigerian students at all levels to access basic education in the nation, despite the mandate to school heads and proprietors to introduce digital or e-learning to pupils. From the following effects of covid-19 on educational system in Nigeria, the study recommends the following:

1. Indigent families who would be battling to survive due to the epidemic should be provided with palliatives by the government.
2. The government should recognize the importance of constructing good schools and equipping them with current digital facilities that can support online education by providing digital gadgets and internet connections.
3. Both educators and students need to be instructed on how to utilize and handle online educational technologies. Educators must devote time and effort to planning and delivering classes that are innovative, dynamic, relevant, student-centered, and group-based.
4. Government assistance is required in terms of investing in future educational instruments as well as a complete overhaul of the educational system, since post-pandemic curriculum revisions would be an effective method to close the gap in inequality.
5. At every level of education, the government and educational stakeholders must maintain consistency in the curriculum and plan of work utilized by teachers from school to school. As an online teaching program, it is the responsibility of educational inspectors to guarantee that instructors and schools comply completely with the established curriculum and scheme of work.

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