

THE EFFECT OF THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conventionally, the Nigeria's education system is based on the 6-3-3-4 format whereby a year is used for pre- primary education, six years for primary, three years for junior secondary, another three years for senior secondary and a minimum of four years for tertiary institutions. Nigeria, amongst other countries was caught unaware by the appearance of this global pandemic which exposed the existing loophole in the educational sector of the country. The Federal Government resorted into temporarily shutting down all schools to control the spread of this Novel virus with an immediate unforeseeable end in sight. The new calendar now being elongated and the main pedagogy now adjusted to adapt to the new reality of impacting knowledge during the lockdown. Imperatively, a rapid response was displayed by the sector by introducing a e-learning system cutting across every cadre. This research work intends to bring to light the impact of this pandemic on the educational system in Nigeria. Several journals, papers and articles relating to this work were used for the purpose of this research work.

Keyword: E-Learning, Global Pandemic, Pedagogy, Novel Virus, Educational system

1.INTRODUCTION

The novel COVID-19 virus, which originated from the Wuhan province of China in December 2019, disrupted the educational system of the world, causing almost all educational institutions to close, ranging from nursery to tertiary institutions. As of mid-June 2020, approximately 1.101 billion learners had been forced to stay home, resulting from closure of the schools due to the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). The closure of schools in response to combating COVID-19 affected not just

students but teachers and families as well. It also affected the socio-economic wellbeing of the nation (Peterson, 2020). The Virus grinded the economic and educational sector of the whole world to a halt. The closure of educational institutions measure was enacted to reduce the transmission rate and safe lives, although there isn't any tentative data to reflect the effectiveness of this measures, except that it delays the time taken to reach peak mortality rates (UNESCO, 2020).

The Nigerian government through the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Education, ordered the closure of all educational institutions which includes tertiary, secondary and primary schools nationwide on the 26th of March 2020 (Olisah, 2020), as a non-pharmaceutical and preventive measure. This measure promoted self-isolation and social-distancing which is effective in mitigating the spread of the virus. (Timothy, 2020). Every student was advised to self-isolate, maintain social-distancing and keep human interaction to the barest minimum. The Ministry of education then threw its weight behind e-Learning and encouraged the educational sector to embrace it, since all schools were closed down across the country due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Clement, 2020). Keying into this, various states started their own e-Learning services via varying methods. Some started airing educational programs and teaching via radio service and local television. Others embraced the e-Learning portals the government made available for them, while some created their own e-Learning platform and deployed it. Telecom service providers also keyed into the e-Learning and started making technical adjustments to their systems to accommodate free access to these e-Learning platforms (Azeezat, 2020).

Efforts were made by the government and its stake holders to turn to using the e-Learning technology as an alternative to the routine class room pedagogy, which is mainly a classroom and teacher centred model. Their

efforts exposed lapses in the implementation of this new e-Learning initiative caused mainly by the underfinancing of the educational sector and less attention that was initially paid to the system. The move also exposed the glaring digital divide that exist between students from poor homes and students from rich homes, ranging from internet availability and affordability, to availability of consistent Electrical Power to charge mobile devices. It also exposed the technological illiteracy amidst the Nigerian students and teachers whereby they are ignorant of the processes in accessing the internet and some applications designed for this purpose. The system, though not new in the country and cannot be disputed to be very beneficial to the area of Science, technology and engineering, however has its own challenges it is facing in the country that hindered its growth.

Below are some of the existing reasons which caused a drawback or a non-functionality in the e-learning system within the country.

2.1. Unavailability and inconsistency in electricity power supply

Electricity supply is needed to be able to access e-Learning platforms, but it is widely epileptic in various locations across the country. This is a major setback to e-learning. Epileptic power supply has always been a major setback for technological advancement in this country (Ajadi, Salawu, & Adeoye, 2008), making it difficult for teachers and students alike to charge their communication devices. Most rural areas in Nigeria are not connected to the national grid. A lot of individuals in rural areas have to resort to buying fuel into their generators to enable them generate electricity or pay money at local charging centres to have their phones charged. This practice is capital intensive and demoralizing, thereby sabotaging the morale and zeal of both the teachers and students involved in the e-learning.

2.2. Access to internet enabled mobile devices

Students from well-to-do homes are able to afford gadgets such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops which can be used to access e-Learning materials. Mobile devices such as the ones mentioned above, which are fully able to access all the features of the e-

Learning platform are expensive, making it difficult for the average Nigerian students to acquire. This implies that students from poor households do not have such access, leaving them educationally idle during this COVID-19 lockdown. This in turn widened the learning disparity between students from a rich background and those from a poor background. (Obuekwe & Eze, 2017).

2.3. Access to cheap and reliable internet network

The cost of accessing the internet is still quiet high in Nigeria. This made it difficult for students to retrieve materials online. In other cases, the network either fluctuates, not available or is limited in access (Eze, Chinwedu-Eze, & Bello, 2018). This is a real challenge for students who live in rural areas where cellular networks are not available, talk less of internet connectivity. Under normal conditions using a cyber café would have been a final resort, but in the era of the lockdown, cyber cafés were no longer operational. This posed a serious problem to them and affected negatively their zeal to learning.

2.4. Underutilization of e-learning resources

Utilization of e-Learning is hinged on the students' and staff computer literacy and many do not have the needed access or competency required for computer operation that formed the basis of e-Learning (Olusegun, Gabriel, Sushil, & Zhang, 2006). The underutilization of e-Learning resources and devices for educational purposes stems from the almost non-existent computer culture among them. This factor impedes the integration of new technology in the educational sector (Omoni & Ifeanyichkwu, 2016).

3. SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS

3.1. Free electricity for all households

According to Channels Television news, around April 4 2020, the speaker of the House of Representative, Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila considered a bill that would allow Nigerians enjoy free electricity supply for two months without any charges. The distribution companies (DISCOs) were engaged and a list of requirements for this achievement to be made was also requested. After all said and done, this wasn't brought into fulfilment. At

a time where almost half of the hours of the day were spent at home, this was seen as the only solution to the inconsistency in power supply within the Country, especially for Nigerian students to foster their learning as every of the gadgets required for this e-learning system need electricity to be charged. Focusing of renewable energy wasn't feasible for an average Nigerian household, hence every household needed to be supplied with free electricity without any charges but this was just a mere mirage.

3.2. Periodic training of staff and students

As said earlier, this novel pandemic exposed the vast loophole in institutions. It is no longer new that some students and even lecturers aren't trained to use this e-learning systems and applications. As a solution to this, it is advised that a periodical training be done to every member of staff and all students across every cadre to further open their mind towards this system as the world now evolve technologically.(Eze et al., 2018).

3.3. Reduction in prices for data plans

Since every individual have to sort for himself/herself in terms of data procurement, it is advisable that the network providers strengthen their network and at the same time reduce the prices used in subscribing. This is due to the fact that much more students now go online hence much more data is required. Nigerian Students were left to choose between feeding and subscribing and they ended up choosing the former for sustenance of life. These network providers should reduce the prices for subscribing to a level which will be affordable for every individual.(Obiakor & Adeniran, 2020).

4. SUMMARY

Although the closure of school was in line with the fight against this Virus, the inability of the e-learning system to function as planned in the country made the students be on the receiving end. Not all students were involved with the e learning system hence so many negative things attracted their mind. Some of the ways by which students were affected are listed below.

There was an increase in the number of the Rape cases and Murder cases across the country during that period.

- There was a rise in the cases of Cybercrimes across every parts of the country.
- Most of the students who encountered difficulty in moving along with this e-learning system were found to be left lagging behind which made them not gain anything during the lockdown.
- There was a halt on some families and students that has benefited from the daily meals provided by school especially by the federal funded school feeding. They now had to cater for themselves all alone.
- Due to the closure of the schools, students were now seen roaming around for no reason. This also increased the cases of accident seen during this period.

5. CONCLUSION

This novel pandemic came at an unexpected time for the country. A time that wasn't envisaged. Its effect is now being felt across every system within the country. For the educational sector, it is glaring that the system is still far behind. Imperatively, the government must focus more on this system and also increase the funding and allocation attributed to it. Also, institutions should work on their ICT department, make the system friendly and accessible for every staff and students, organize trainings and programs and further encourage the use of this system even after the pandemic.

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