



# ADDRESSING TEACHING AND LEARNING CHALLENGES AMIDST THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIGERIA PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

*The disruption of teaching and learning, and the subsequent closure of educational institutions in most countries of the world amidst the Covid-19 pandemic is worrisome. This has especially brought to the fore the inadequacies in the Nigerian educational systems and structures, especially in primary schools. This paper focused on the need for urgent adoption and application of e-learning in the Nigeria primary schools. First, the paper critically scrutinized the emergence and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the educational systems. Second, the paper discussed the essence of e-learning along with the ten recommendations for teachers' and learners' engagement in e-learning as prescribed by UNESCO (2020). The paper further discussed the Challenges confronting effective teaching and learning in primary schools amidst the pandemic. Finally, to better the teaching and learning status in Nigeria primary schools, the paper implied amongst others; that government and education stakeholders should as a matter of urgency; fund the development and training of teachers and learners in computer and ICT knowledge, equip primary schools with ICT facilities and sponsor television and radio e-learning classes for pupils' home learning.*

**Key Word:** Covid-19 Pandemic; Teaching and Learning Challenges; E-learning; Primary Schools.

## Introduction

The heart of the educational system rests on the efficiency and efficacy of the teaching and learning facilities in play. For fruitful and quality education attainment, the essence and impact of the teaching-learning transactions in the school and classroom situation are paramount. The teacher should be able by all means to deliver his teaching mandates and responsibilities without fear, anxiety or any other challenge. The learner also should learn progressively, freely, and easily. The mission of all education systems of the world is similar; as it to ameliorate or eradicate the challenges hampering the effective teaching and learning processes. However, at present, there is an urgent need to address the teaching and learning crisis that has been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has negatively impacted the regular teaching and learning schedules of the educational systems of the most parts of the globe, causing a major setback in providing quality teaching and learning and necessitating digital learning (Lindzon, 2020; Karp & McGowan, 2020). UNESCO (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the worlds' educational systems, leading to the closures of schools in order to contain the spread of the virus.

The occurrence of infectious diseases in the time past has incited an extensive closing down of schools around the world (Simon, 2020). For instance, the United States governments from 1918 to 1919, proscribed social gatherings with the aim of curbing the number of deaths resulting from the influenza pandemic (Barnum, 2020) and the same in 2004-2008 (Wheeler, Erhart, & Jehn, 2010). In Asia, at the time of the Asian flu of 1957-58, schools were shut down to prevent death (Chin, Foley, Doto, Gravelle & Weston 1960). In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported the outbreak of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China on December 29th, 2019 and was said to have spread from the seafood market in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, and on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020; schools in China were shut down (Zhu, Zhang, Wang, Li, Yang & Song, 2020; Li, Guan, Wu, Wang, Zhou & Tong, 2020). In the Nigerian context, the effect of the pandemic on the educational system is frightening (Sahu, 2020). Schools were shut down as directed by the federal ministry of education on March

23rd.

In view of the negative effects the pandemic would have on learning and education in general, UNESCO (2020) pleaded with countries and governments to provide and encourage comprehensive and inclusive distance learning modules for continuous learning. This compulsorily confined teaching and learning processes to home or e-learning mode. These learning modes are somewhat ineffective as the learner is faced with a lot of distractions in and around the home (Aina, 2020). More so, effective learning is best achieved in the presence of the teacher (Bateman & Waters, 2013; Lantolf, 2008). The e-learning mode which entails a virtual classroom via the use of the internet and technological devices such as phones, computers, and tablets, may not be applicable to learners in developing nations (including Nigeria) as there is little or no technical know-how regarding its use; not to mention the challenges posed by poverty, high cost of these internet and technological gadgets, high cost of data for internet services and unstable electricity supply.

The Covid-19 pandemic, in no small measure, has adversely affected primary education, especially in the area of literacy ability (Bao, Qu, Zhang, Hogan & Tiffany, 2020) as well as effective learning among learners. Effective learning is achieved with learners' interactions and contact with instructional aids and themselves, and learn better when supervised and guided (McLeod, 2019; Aguisiobo, 1998; Okendu, 2012). As reported by Copple and Bredekamp (2009), pupils could learn by the scaffolding method; where an older or more knowledgeable pupil, instruct the younger or less knowledgeable. However, for a long time now in Nigeria, the conventional methods of teaching hold sway in the education sector (Aina & Langenhoven, 2015).

Many countries and governments amidst the pandemic have put in place various logistics towards avoiding the total disruption of learning: some have introduced continued learning through online platforms (e.g., **Cyprus, Croatia, Argentina, Egypt, Italy, China, Republic of Korea, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Greece, France, and United States**); learning content delivered through the television and other media (e.g., **Croatia, Republic of Korea, China, France, Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, Spain, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Islamic Republic of Iran, Peru, Thailand, and Viet Nam**); adopting existing apps in maintaining communication between learners and teachers (e.g., **Costa Rica, Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand**); initiating awareness campaigns for students, parents, teachers and school administrators (e.g., **United Arab Emirates**). Nevertheless, in Nigeria's education context, the issue of e-learning is strange (Kyari, Adiuku-Brown, Abechi & Adalakun, 2018; Ajadi, Salawu & Adeoye, 2008).

Recently, studies have begun to gather around the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on education. Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson, and Hanson (2020), conducted a study aimed at accessing the impact of Covid-19 on learning among students in the second cycle and tertiary institutions in Ghana and revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the study habit of students, as many of them are not used to effectively learning all by themselves and that the online system of learning is ineffective. It also reported that parents are incapable of assisting their wards on how to access online learning platforms and it posed a challenge to the majority of students due to limited access to the internet and lack of technical knowhow in regard to the various technological devices. Aina (2020) in his study focused on mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the teaching and learning of science in Nigerian higher institutions; arguing that the conventional methods of teaching are inadequate in teaching science as a result of social distancing and the lockdown during the pandemic. The study supported the adoption of e-learning (the Google Classroom framework) as the best teaching and learning alternative.

A measure recommended by the world health organization in mitigating the spread of the Covid-19 or any other influenza pandemic, globally; is 'social distancing (Ahmed, Zviedrite & Uzicanin, 2018; Blocken, Malizia, van Druenen & Marchal, 2020). It is a safety protocol aimed at reducing or preventing physical contact among persons (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). In the Nigerian case for instance, the federal and state governments, banned all social gatherings such as birthday celebrations, burial ceremonies, weddings and marriages, religious centers, football viewing centers, markets (at the initial stage), interstate movements, political gatherings, clubhouses, schools and the economy itself, leading to a total national lockdown for about a period of three months. This forced many schools and educational institutions at

all levels, especially in the urban areas, to embark on intensive e-learning.

Franklin and Nahari, (2018) submitted that e-learning has engineered a paradigm shift in the usual physical teacher-student interactions in an educational setting. Nigeria and other third-world nations are yet to fully grasp and unlock their potentials in e-learning (Kyari, Adiuku-Brown, Abechi, Pyochi & Adalakun, 2018). E-learning could be computer or internet based (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). Computer e-learning entails the use of information and communication technology, computer software, and hardware (Algahtani, 2011) while internet-based e-learning is purely online and comprises of e-mails, blogs, and other references (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). Bryan and Volchenkova (2016) reported that e-learning can be divided into blended and online learning. The blended learning consists of rotation, self- blending, and enriched virtual.

Similarly, Cleveland-Innes, and Wilto (2018), classified blended learning into the blended block, blended presentation and interaction, and fully online. Pande, Wadhai, and Thakare (2016) listed some of the essential e-learning tools: social bookmarking, wiki, RSS, weblog, instant messaging, podcasting, text chat, and internet forums; and listed the benefits of e-learning to include: efficiency in enhancing knowledge and qualification, motivating learners' interaction, flexibility, and affordability. Nonetheless, many studies had reported that Nigerian schools (the tertiary institutions) have been using e-learning in fostering distance and lifelong learning (Franklin & Nahari, 2018; Ajadi, Salawu & Adeoye, 2008; Zare, Sarikhani, Salari & Mansouri, 2016 and Aina & Olanipekun, 2018).

A popular e-learning platform is Google classroom (Henukh, Rosdianto & Oikawa,2020). It has been used significantly for transmitting knowledge and skills around the world (Azhar & Iqbal, 2018). It is an App in Google designed for educational (teaching and learning) purposes; as it supports teachers in effectively executing instruction and evaluation of learning in the following ways: generating and organizing assignments and homework for learners, efficient provision of feedback, smooth and easy communication between teachers and learners (Shaharane, Jamil & Rodzi, 2016). Studies have reported that learners learn best through electronic means and teachers have ample time with learners than what is obtainable in the regular face-to-face classrooms, and it fosters learning in different geographical locations (Rabbi, Zakaria&Tonmoy (2018); Basher (2017) Henukh&Rosdianto, Oikawa, 2020; Mafa, 2018).

The Google classroom is flexible as it enables teachers to post assignments, notes, create different class groups at a time, and invite other teachers into the class (Hussaini, Ibrahim, Wali, Libata & Musa, 2020). Despite all the aforementioned merits of the Google classroom, in Nigeria, the adoption and wide use of this e-learning platform have a lot of limitations: poor and weak broadband facility (Trucano, 2014); poverty, social and economic inequality between rural and urban learners or teachers (Mohamedbhai 2014); bandwidth and network diversion problems (Ajadi, Salawu & Adeoye, 2008); to mention but a few.

UNESCO (2020) outlined ten recommendations for teachers' and learner' engagement in e-learning:

- i. Examine the readiness of the learners and select the most appropriate tools: This may include video lessons, MOOCs, incorporated digital learning platforms, and dissemination through the mass media.
- ii. Ensure inclusion of the distance learning programmes: Temporary decentralisation of computer laboratory devices to families and provide them with internet access.
- iii. Protect data privacy and data security: Ensuring that the use of applications and platforms does not violate learners' or teachers' data privacy.
- iv. Prioritize solutions to address psychosocial challenges before teaching: Mobilize available tools to connect schools, parents, teachers, and learners, and address possible psychosocial challenges among learners.
- v. Plan the study schedule of the distance learning programmes: Organise discussions with stakeholders to examine the possible duration of school closures and decide whether the distance learning programme should focus on teaching new knowledge or enhance learners' knowledge of prior lessons.
- vi. Provide support to teachers and parents on the use of digital tools: Organise brief training or orientation sessions for teachers and parents as well, if monitoring and facilitation are needed. Help

- teachers to prepare the basic settings such as solutions to the use of internet data if they are required to provide live streaming of lessons.
- vii. Blend appropriate approaches and limit the number of applications and platforms: Blend tools or media that are available for most learners, both for synchronous communication and lessons, and for asynchronous learning. Avoid overloading students and parents by asking them to download and test too many applications or platforms.
  - viii. Develop distance learning rules and monitor students' learning process: Define the rules with parents and learners' on distance learning. Design formative questions, tests, or exercises to monitor learners learning process.
  - ix. Define the duration of distance learning units based on learners' self-regulation skills: Keep a coherent timing especially for live-streaming classes. If possible, the time limit for primary school learners should not exceed twenty minutes.
  - x. Create communities and enhance connection: Create communities of teachers, parents, and school managers to address the sense of loneliness or helplessness, facilitate sharing of experience, and discussion on coping strategies when learning difficulties arise.

### **Challenges on effective teaching and learning resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic**

The following are the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning in Nigerian primary schools:

- a. Transformation of teaching and learning styles: Teaching needs to be transformed from the usual traditional teaching style to the combined or electronic classrooms. The pandemic has exposed the many weaknesses and flaws of the conventional teaching methods. The clamour now is on e-learning and virtual classrooms.
- b. Effect on Teacher-learner interaction: There is a drastic reduction in intellectual, emotional, and social interactions between teachers and learners; as the pandemic has forced 'social distancing' on all.
- c. The conventional learning method has to adapt to online or hybrid methods; this is especially so for Nigeria with overcrowded classes and classrooms in most of her public schools.
- d. Financial challenges for both teachers and learners. Teachers, especially at the primary school, seem to be poorly remunerated and this can hamper their capability in accessing e-learning and virtual classrooms. The same is applicable to pupils whose parents are battling with poverty, inflation, unemployment, etc. this will make many learners from this background to completely disconnect from the learning continuum.
- e. Teaching and learning of mathematics and science oriented subjects: Some subjects that require practical teaching and learning could be a serious challenge for teachers and learners alike through the e-learning platforms. This is best taught or learned in a conventional classroom setting.
- f. Meeting or abiding by the Covid-19 guidelines and protocols for learners at the primary school, may not be tenable, feasible, and possible. Can their parents be able to afford the face mask and shield? Will the learners be able and willing to wear these face masks?
- g. The challenge of implementing the curriculum: there is the concern that e-learning and virtual classrooms may not provide avenues appropriate for the full implementation of the curriculum.
- h. Training needs: Professional training on e-learning and electronic classrooms for both teachers and learners have to be a top priority if teaching and learning are to be effective amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.
- i. Inequality in teaching and learning outputs may be on the rise due to the fact that e-learning and electronic classrooms, are highly selective. Only teachers and learners with full grasps of its use and application can perform.
- j. Effect on the school and exam calendar: the disruption and extension of the academic year has been brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Conclusion

It is hereby concluded that for teaching and learning processes to continue and be facilitated amidst the Covid-19 pandemic or any other future pandemic, the Nigeria primary school systems and structures (including the e-learning platforms), should be developed, improved, and maintained by the Nigeria Governments and educational stakeholders. There should be functional mechanisms in place to ameliorate or eradicate the various teaching and learning challenges that had been exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Implications for Nigeria primary schools

For the betterment of the Nigeria primary school and the educational system in general; it is therefore implied that:

- i. The government and education stakeholders should as a matter of urgency; fund and equip all primary schools with ICT teaching and learning devices in order to ensure a robust e-learning platform;
- ii. The government and concerned stakeholders should sponsor and fund development and training programmes for teachers and learners in computer and ICT knowledge, especially on how to use and appropriate e-learning modes such as Google classroom, in fostering teaching and learning in schools;
- iii. Computer laboratories should be built and fully equipped with electronic learning devices (e.g. interactive whiteboards, projectors, laptops, and internet facilities) in primary schools to ensure teachers' and learners' continuous use and adaptation to e-learning;
- iv. Government and non-governmental organizations should procure electronic learning devices such as laptops and browsing facility for teachers and pupils, to ease e-teaching and learning
- v. Pupils' parental support must not be underplayed. They are to encourage their wards in e-learning by procuring laptops and android phones and buying data for internet browsing for their wards.
- vi. The era of traditional classroom teaching and learning may soon be a thing of the past. It is left for the government to begin the initiation and funding of television and radio teaching classes and educational programmes for learners to watch and listen to from their homes.

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