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**EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA; LESSONS FROM HISTORY AND THE WAY FORWARD.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*As schools are severely disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic nationwide, the process of planning and practice of education should be adjusted to conform with the new situation. Now that schools are re-opening for the continuation of teaching and learning under the new circumstance, there is need to make adequate provisions in order to adjust to a more suitable practice. The paper intended to study and analyse similar situations in the past and the actions taken to make things better for the continuation of teaching and learning under such unprecedented condition. The paper explains the meaning and nature of pandemic and specifically looked into COVID-19 pandemic. It's nature and how it affects our education system. Some major pandemics that occurred around the world were also studied and analysed. The paper recommends that government and stakeholders should adopt new methods and techniques in tackling the educational crisis as designed by the concerned authorities. Also the guidance and counseling services should be accelerated in schools and colleges in order to comfort both the teachers and learners under the new situation.*

**Keywords:** *Education, Pandemic, COVID-19, History, Challenges*

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**Introduction**

Education being a civic right to citizens of any nation deserves priority. In any situation citizens have the right to be provided with appropriate access to learning. It should also be noted that in any crises schools or education systems

should prepare to operate. This process of reopening schools after closure as a result of crises or pandemic remains a major challenge for education authorities. According to United Nations (2020) Education is not only a fundamental human right, it is an enabling right with direct impact on the realization of all other human rights. It is a global common good and a primary driver of progress across all 17 sustainable Development Goals as bedrock of just, equal, inclusive, peaceful societies. When education systems collapse, peace, prosperous and productive societies cannot be sustained. With the continued spread of COVID-19 worldwide the communities and authorities should take control and preventive measures against this deadly disease in order to prevent further transmission thereby reducing its impacts on the education system. On this B. Lisa (2020) suggested that " The protection of children and educational facilities is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in schools settings: however, care must also be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus. It is important to remember that COVID-19 does not differentiate between border, ethnicity, disability status, age, or gender. Education settings should continue to be welcoming, respective, inclusive, and supportive environments to all measures".

This further guides us to make sure that our children and their families remain protected during school reopening since education is inevitable with the confirmed transmission of the COVID-19, continuation of learning process is necessary. According to UNICEF (2020) Education can encourage students to become advocates for disease prevention and control at home, in school and in their community by talking to others about how to prevent the spread of viruses. Maintaining safe school operations or reopening schools after a closure, requires many considerations, but if done well, can promote public health.

### **Conceptual Framework.**

For readers to have a good understanding of this research work there is a need to give a detail explanation of some key concepts as follows:

### **Education**

The concept of education has been a topic of interest among scholars worldwide over a long period of time. That is the main reason why it has different

definitions depending on the perception of these scholars and philosophers. Aristotle one of the leading philosophers define education as “the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the faculties to the fullest extent as a member of society. Y. Magaji (2021) further explain this definition when he said “According to this definition, the main aim of education is to help an individual to fully utilize his potentialities, talents or gifts, to attain self satisfaction towards social development. On this premise, education therefore, focuses on both individual and the society at the same time.”

Another scholar Socrates sees education as “an effort of bringing out the ideas of universal validity which are latent in the mind of every man”. Socrates views education from an individual’s perspective, as the ability for individual to realize the encrypted potentialities embedded in his inner domain.

In modern day, education has been defined as a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills Thangeda, Baratiseng, and Mompoti, (2016). Education must continue to be seen a very crucial because it is the only way you can develop a holistic understanding of the world around you.

### **Pandemic**

A pandemic simply means an epidemic that occurs not in a small territory but covers large area covering several countries at a time. According to Wikipedia, a pandemic is an epidemic occurring on a scale that crosses international boundaries, usually affecting people on a worldwide scale. A disease or condition is not a pandemic merely because it is widespread or kills many people; it must also be infectious. For instance cancer is responsible for many deaths but is not considered a pandemic because the disease is neither infectious nor contagious.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic.**

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of Corona virus. ‘CO’ Stands for Corona, ‘VI’ for Virus, and ‘D’ for diseases. Formerly, this disease was referred to as ‘2019 novel corona virus’ or ‘2019-n cov.’ 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.

The virus 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). The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but single disinfection can kill it (UNICEF, WHO, and IFRC 2020)

Also on this Samuel, A.I. (2020). Further described Corona virus (COVID-19) as such: on January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that this outbreak had constituted a public health emergency of international concern. The novel Corona virus was initially named 2019-nCoV and officially as severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). As of February 26, COVID-19 has been recognized in 34 countries, with a total of 80,239 laboratory-confirmed cases and 2,700 deaths.

### **Pandemics and education system**

COVID-19 poses one of the serious challenges to education world wide just as the other scourges did at several times. Agbele, A.T.K & Oyelade E.A (2020) reviewed the effects of various pandemics on the education analysing the degree of their impacts on the education system. He reported that Over the years, humanity had fought various global health scourges which threatened to wipe human beings off the face of the earth. It is worthy to know that corona virus is different when compared with the plagues and epidemics that have ravaged humanity throughout its existence, in the sense that none has greatly affected the education of everyone in the world like COVID-19. Few of these plagues are: The Black Death (1346-1353) that traveled from Asia to Europe, living devastation in its wake. Also the Spanish flu (1918-1920) is among the worst pandemic in history, despite the common name of the pandemic, scientists are not entirely sure where the virus originated, though they do know it was caused by an H1N1 virus (Similar to Swine Flu) that originates from birds. In addition, the Asian flu (1957-1958) was another global pandemic that originated from China, the disease claimed more than 1 million lives worldwide. The centre for disease control and prevention (CDC) claimed that the disease spread rapidly and was reported in Singapore in February 1957, Hong Kong in April 1957.

Further more, the west African Ebola Epidemic (2013-2016) ravaged the west African Countries with over 28,600 reported cases and 11,325 deaths. The first case to be reported was in Guinea in December 2013, then the disease quickly spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone. However all these plagues and pandemics mentioned above have ravaged the globe thereby interrupting the educational processes in several ways. Sometimes. It leads to closure of schools which caused serious draw backs for learners and deprives them of their right to education and postures them to future risk.

As schools have been closed to cope with the global pandemic, students, parent and educators around the globe have felt the unexpected ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. While governments, frontline workers and health officials are doing their best slowing down these difficult times. Many students at home/living space have undergone psychological and emotional distress and have been unable to engage productively. The home schooling are yet to be explored. Petrie, C. (2020).

As of July, 2020, 98:6% of learners were affected by the pandemic, representing 1.725 billion children and youth, from pre-primary to higher education, in 200 countries. United Nations Cited by Phokhrel and Chhetri (2021).

### **The impact of COVID-19 on Nigerian Education system.**

In Nigeria the effect of previous plagues such as Lassa fever, Ebola, Bird flu is not as much as that of Corona virus (COVID-19) only because the educational system has been hampered by holidays and school closures.

Going to school is the best public policy tool available to develop skills and potentials, schools time can be fun, and from an economic point of view the primary point of being in school is that it increases a child's ability to become a useful and acceptable member of the society. Even a relatively short time in school has a longer impact in the life of a child; a short period of missed school may have consequences for skill growth in future. This is why we can not estimate how much COVID-19 interruption will affect learning: it is only visible effect we can see, the gradual decay of inbuilt abilities may not be easily noticed very precisely. Samuel, A.I. (2020)

The sudden interruption of the education system in Nigeria as a result of the pandemic has led the government, Parent, individuals, ministries of education

at various level and other concerned personnel to have shift in their plans and strategies to finance the education of their children and the education system at large. The continuous closure of schools led to the extension of school calendars and subsequently the increase in extra payments at various levels of educational system.

COVID-19 pandemic has devastating effect on the Nigerian tertiary education since it is outbreak and spread. This has been observed by Ebohon, Obienu and Omoregie (2021). COVID-19 pandemic has affected higher education in Nigeria. The Closure of schools meant that administrators of higher education had to come up with strategies to ensure that learning continues during the lockdown. Some Nigerian Universities particularly the privately owned universities quickly moved from traditional face-to-face teaching method to remote education. As the period of total lockdown extended, more universities quickly switched to online teaching. Both the teachers and students had to adapt swiftly to the new mode of education as they were trained virtually on how to use distance learning tools.

Teachers and students faced challenges in adapting to online classes and maintaining the minimal communication to support learning and development. Migrating to remote learning within a short period was difficult, especially in a developing country like Nigeria where advanced technology has not been well integrated into the educational system.

Another impact of the COVID-19 on the Nigerian education system is that it forced some school children to drop out due to economic problems especially the girls. Adejoke, I. (2021) reviewed the situation and came up with these findings. "There is a gender component to the inequalities. More girls than boys have been pushed out of school due to the economic crisis COVID-19 caused. Many of these girls became involved in petty business activities such as hawking to earn money to help their families during lock downs, and when classes resumed, many parents determined it was better for their daughters to continue with these activities than to go back to school.

In one secondary school in the Iyana Ipaja area of Lagos, about 20 percent of the senior secondary school students have not returned to school after resumption and most of the students in this group are girls. Many girls have also

become victims of unwanted pregnancies and early marriages due to the prolonged period spent out of school.

This is very disturbing looking at the already existing problems we are facing in the country in terms of out of the school children. Anyika, Anikelechi and Thobejene (2021) cited the report of unicef thus: "Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children. About 10.5 million Nigerian children aged 5-11 years do not go to school and only about 61% of 6-11 years do not go to school regularly. The report further stated that half of the school aged girls in some states in Northeast and Northwest Nigeria are not enrolled in school. This disturbing revelation shows that Nigeria is the highest contributor to the illiteracy index. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Nigeria still has about 60 million illiterate citizens constituting over 30% of its population. According to UNICEF, "too many Nigerian children and young people are being left behind especially when it comes to education."

### **Conclusion**

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has in so many ways affected the educational system of Nigeria. If we critically look at the pattern of spread of the virus we can easily understand that this noble disease could last for a long time with us. Especially if we consider the way authorities are approaching it. If care is not taken seriously deploying appropriate measures there would be serious set-back in the development of the Nigerian education system.

Academic calendars have been disrupted due to the changes in the learning processes and at the same time the economic development of the country have been affected by the pandemic and consequently affected the educational system. Economically while governments could not provide adequate funding for the education system because the funds were redirected to other sectors to take care of the situation. Without government's willingness to do the needful in formulating the adequate policies to make sure the process of teaching and learning continues, the standard of Nigerian education system will continue to face challenges, and will definitely continue to fall, and this will also affect our national development.

### **Recommendations:**

Having observed the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our educational system and the likely more effect it may have on the education, the following measures are recommended in order to curtail the continuous effects.

1. That governments at all levels and other stake holders should adopt measures put in place by the Health authorities to curtail further spread of the disease. This may include the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs).

Under this the following measures are highly recommended:

1. Sick students, teachers and other staff should not come to school.
  2. Schools should enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap, alcohol rub/hand sanitizer or chlorine solution and at a minimum, daily disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces.
  3. Schools should provide water, sanitation and waste management facilities and follow environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures.
  4. Schools should promote social distancing, this include limiting large groups of people coming together.
2. Guidance and counseling services should be accelerated in all the schools. This time the process should integrate medical advices to both students and teachers. Integrate disease prevention and control in daily activities and lessons. Ensure content is age, gender, ethnicity, and disability-responsive and activities are built into existing subjects.  
Encourage children to discuss their questions and concerns. Explain it is normal that they may experience different reactions and encourage questions or concerns. Provide information in an honest, age-appropriate manner.  
Guide students on how to support their peers and prevent exclusion and bullying.  
Ensure teachers are aware of local resources for their own well-being. Work with school health workers/social workers to identify and support students and staff who exhibit signs of distress.
3. Authorities should ensure continuity of learning in the event of school closure. This can be ensured through the following strategies:
    - Use of online/e-learning strategies.
    - Assigning reading and exercises for home study.



- Radio podcast or television broadcasts of academic content.
- Assigning teachers to conduct remote daily or weekly follow up with students.
- Review/develop accelerated education strategies.

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