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COVID-19 to Post-COVID Eras: A Paradigm Shift of Educational Sector

Sushanta Kumar Tarai¹

Abstract: The entire education system, from elementary school to higher education, distorted during the lockdown period. The latest 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is not only recorded in India, but also globally. This is the fact that the world has faced with the present realities of coronavirus pandemic, an outbreak which has not spared public related endeavors, institutions, not even education. The crippled human activities, endeavors and the economy of the world as a result of the corona virus pandemic came as rude shock as there was no canary in the coal mine to suggest something of such magnitude. In this regard, this paper examined the present state of the coronavirus pandemic, highlighted sterling transitions from COVID-19 to post-COVID eras, and gave some recommendations that may assist the Indian government or other bodies concerned with educational matters. As emphasized, the governments and concerned subjects must ensure justice in bridging the gap of educational inequity, by ensuring adequate funding of the education sector and training (and retraining) of teachers, and lastly, by creating an enabling environment for both students and teachers to thrive. In the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, the purpose of this article is to provide an in-depth overview of online learning. These activities took place during a time of isolation, including the creation of a link between the process of change management and the online learning process in the education system to tackle current issues of academic interference and, however, the re-establishment of educational practice and debate as a normal system of procedural education.

Keywords: COVID-19, Education, Post-COVID, Educational Transition



1.1 Introduction

The crippled human activities, endeavors and the economy of the world as a result of the coronavirus pandemic came as rude shock as there was no canary in the coal mine to suggest something of such magnitude. The prediction would have been derided and no attention or cognizance would be received by the prognosticator if anyone had earlier predicted it. Obviously, such person would have been tagged a prophet of doom and probably shunned. However, the world is faced with the present realities of coronavirus pandemic, an outbreak which has not spared public related endeavors, institutions; not even education. Prior to COVID-19, education in Nigeria has been in a dwindling state, and now this global health challenge has heightened its sorry condition. Apparently, with regard to the emergence and status quo of the coronavirus pandemic, no one seems to know when schools across the country would be officially reopened, as many rumored dates credited to some government officials have been debunked several times.

This paper is aimed at examining the present state of the coronavirus pandemic, with the thrust to delve into the ramifications that are associated with it, and aim to see from the global perspective to further make the Indian society a bone of contention. In this regard, the paper considers the emergence of COVID-19 in this present era, examines the educational transition into a post-COVID era, and further seeks a paradigmatic shift as a way to proffer possible solutions to the existing threats.

1.2 An overview of the ravaging covid-19 and its implications

The gargantuan efforts and attempts put in place by internationally recognized bodies like The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), with the aim to promote and ensure the rights to education for all, considering programs like Education for All (EFA), amongst others, seem to have taken different dimensions as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, with its acronym, COVID-19, that once surfaced in Wuhan, China, about late 2019. For emphasis, a UNICEF report once stated that about 10.5 million of Nigerian children, between the ages of 5 and 14 are left out of school and with about 61% of ages between 6 and 11 regularly attending primary school. How saddening that despite the frantic attempts in ensuring that these young children have access to proper education, an unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic takes the throne by enforcing various businesses (and churches) and governments world over to temporarily engage in defense mechanism, by shutting down and placing restrictions on movement (though with the exception of essential services providers) respectively. Wistful and regrettably, the educational sector has been stiltedly affected, with teachers, staff, and children (especially the less privileged) bearing the brunt. UNESCO once published an estimated over 1 billion learners being affected with the closure of schools as of 16th June 2020.

Understanding the novelty of the COVID-19 with its attendant startling nature, which could be likened to the pursuit of an elusive moving train that each and everyone strives to achieve, however, explains its contingency and this has contributed immensely to the revolutionary change, quintessential, adaptive and transformative challenge, that each person needs to find their right turn, leaving a cure in process till it becomes found. More importantly, the pandemic has expedited the massive transformation of digital revolution in every nook and cranny of the world – in situ, Nigeria and other countries are not left behind. While rethinking the future of education in post- COVID era, the words of Emeritus Professor Akinpelu and Alvin Toffler resonate. Akinpelu (1981) rightly stated that the path of evolution is littered with the fossils of organisms that failed to adapt. Toffler (1970) in raising the exposition beyond the philosophical stance, posited that, the illiterate of tomorrow will be one who has failed to learn, unlearn and relearn – hence, the evolutionary and expository dicta have been drawn home by the current pandemic, and education cannot be an exception.



1.3 Educational transition from covid-19 to post-covid eras

Albert Einstein asserted that everybody is a genius, but if a fish is judged by its ability to climb a tree, it would live its whole life believing that it is stupid (Calaprice, 2010). The new normal is here for all and sundry, the era of guide on the side, not a sage on the stage, where the world is experiencing a new season – from didacticism to interaction, learning by acquisition to learning by doing (in the words of John Dewey), coverage to knowledge explosion, uniform learning to customized learning, teachers as experts to knowledge economies, standardized assessment to specialization. Apparently, COVID-19 pandemic has triggered emerging educational needs and responses of/from the digital natives for the facilitation of design thinking and implementation, pivotal for education challenges and possibly to protect young people’s educational opportunities during and following the pandemic. Due to the closure of schools, education institutions and governments have suggested alternative methods for students and teachers to continue with their lessons virtually, yet many are not getting it rightly. Also, while access to digital devices and the Internet may be for those who can afford it, the less privileged in most countries are left behind.

The world of education in contemporary times is currently experiencing a transformation, similar to the transition from apprenticeship to universal schooling that occurred in the 19th century due to industrial revolution. During the apprenticeship era, most of the things learned were outside the school. On the contrary, universal schooling brought people together. It would be agreed that though schooling cannot be erased as it is considered germane, one of its manifestations is moving beyond the traditional face-to-face pedagogy to blended pedagogy – the combined use of traditional classroom teaching methods and the use of online teaching methods for learning.

With the aid of new technologies like simulations, serious games and virtual worlds, children become opportune of playing complex video games; workers interacting with simulations that put them in challenging situations; students engaging with e-learning tools like massive open online course (MOOC), learning management system (LMS), web conferencing, digital textbooks, social bookmarking, mashups and digital storytelling for effective and fun-filled learning; and adults consulting blogs and Wikis.

By now, WASSCE (The West African Senior School Certificate Examination) candidates ought to have taken their exams and students seeking admission into various universities of their choice would have at least known their fate. Aside from the few private schools in Ibadan city of Oyo state, many schools had not concluded the second term calendar, let alone conducting the term's examination when the pandemic hit the country. For the first time in about a century, the whole world has been brought to a standstill. As the day passes, parents, teachers, school administrators, proprietors and all major players in education sector are hoping the puzzle is solved once and for all and schools resume as soon as possible. As it does not seem resumption will come anytime soon, owners of private schools, concerned parents, information technology entrepreneurs, teachers and the government have turned towards online teaching, an option aimed at responding to the threat posed by the virus against face-to-face learning situation. As unpalatable as this moment is, virtual learning has the potential to change the face of pedagogy forever. It has come to stay; hopefully, internet service providers would up their game with improved network service to make virtual learning easy and more realizable. However, be in the know that there have been e-class mode facilities in the country before the outbreak of COVID-19, as University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre runs online lectures, though complemented with face-to-face interactive sessions.



Among the electronic teaching options employed by education stakeholders in the face of this global health challenge include Zoom, the HD video meeting room, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, to say the least. Others are Google classroom, Edmodo, Class dojo, etc. These social media and learning management system teaching options may not have been completely as suitable as the usual face-to-face class mode, at least, they have reduced educational backlog, students' tendencies to play throughout the "compulsory" holidays, teaching problems, to mention a few. To a large extent, this online option has availed many private schools the opportunity to continue preparing their students (both juniors and seniors) for external examinations. The Lagos State Ministry of Education is also running a free radio and television school, just like its Oyo counterpart runs it on Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS).

Unarguably, this is the right time that educators and policy makers take a paradigmatic shift, with the consideration that education (including schooling) becomes a lifelong enterprise. Education, as bethought, is not limited to schooling; the latter is just one (formal education) of the three forms of education – formal, informal and non-formal education. Technology has transformed not only the schools or institutions, but also the larger society that it has become the kernel of people's engagement in reading, writing, calculating, and thinking, yet technology has been silenced in the periphery of schools for the most part only in specialized courses or activities. The concern however is whether the institutions and schools are willing to adapt and incorporate these technologies to aid learning. In this interest, if schools remain traditional and unchanged, the identification of schooling with education, developed over the past decades will dissolve into a world where privileged students pursue their learning outside of the public school.

In facing the moment and preparing for the future, education may come in diverse forms like distance education, home schooling, adult education, workplace learning, educational centers, educational television and radio enlightenment, computer-based learning environments, technical certifications and the like. Home schooling could come in form of parents hiring tutors to take their children or engaging in distance learning or education. However, this may lead to more burdens on the parents acting as facilitators, and derailing children from learning necessary ethical values from their peers in school. Distance education seems to be the order of the day with daily increase in MOOCs and other degree programs offered by higher institutions. Workplace learning is one of the emerging programs, setting the reality that workers need to engage in education to stay updated and survive in the changing workplace. This can come in form of MOOCs or Community of practice, where everyone comes together with skills learned for the posterity of their workplaces. Adult education is growing with more adults taking courses in the evening at adult education centers in order to get skills that are of interests to them (though this seems prevalent in the developed countries). There are also many computer-learning environments for younger children and adults such as interactive books, kid's websites and Massively Multi-Player On-Line Games (MMOGs) that have led to an explosion of participation in virtual worlds. Learning centers are places where people can learn specific skills and knowledge that are of necessity to them. These centers serve the aim of preparing students for national and international tests, such as SAT, GRE, IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, amongst others, and to further tutor learners who are having problems in schools. Others include technical certifications, offered by host of companies, such as Microsoft and Cisco, as well as technical societies to certify that a person has a particular level of skill in some occupational niche, such as creating web pages or maintaining computer networks, and lastly, educational television and videos such as the Children's Television Workshop (in the late 1960s) aimed to provide young children with access to education.



1.4 Blended pedagogy: a fusion of offline and online learning

Having signaled a harbinger of what education tends to form in a post-COVID era, it is imperative to bear in mind that blended learning in schools is the future of pedagogy. Teachers must therefore focus on the pedagogy, identify the benefits of blended learning design and delivery in one's specific situation, choose technology that suits the needs of the subject matter and students carefully, bear the curriculum and outcomes of the program in mind, create a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes, descriptions of technology devices, clear delivery methods, explicit engagement opportunities, and assignments aligned with learning outcomes (Cleveland, 2018).

A cue can be taken from India's success considering how a customized blended learning integrates computer-assisted model online activities with traditional face-to-face teaching (chalk and talk). The greatest success of online teaching achieved in the rainbow nation is the combination of online and offline interactive resources with pre-installed applications that are aligned with the Indian school curriculum. This can be used as a guide for teaching, home schooling, after-school study and tutoring. The techno-blended learning solution has a structured approach which mostly uses offline applications in an integrated way with the full participation of a trained educator. Another major recent breakthrough experienced in India is the Gamma Tutor Software Package primarily intended for teachers. It is an offline device preloaded with interactive material which could be plugged into any data projector, a TV or digital screen, and navigated by the click of the mouse. The device which covers full curriculum for high school Mathematics and Physical Sciences are presented in video, PDF or animated PowerPoint format, along with glossaries, exam revision support materials, and can also be used for interactive teaching online and remotely. This development has been greeted with huge success and applause in the country. Though blended learning (BL) can be expensive and time consuming, ensuring the aforementioned makes errors less likely. All the same, as good as these online options are, and with respect to various peculiar challenges of education in Nigeria, it will augur well to highlight the problems virtual learning will encounter. These knots may include:

- Lack of funds for salaries, fixed costs, infrastructure, communication and other expenses for remote teaching
- Lack of motivation for teachers to take up remote teaching due to non-payment of salaries and job insecurity
- Problems with understanding practical aspects of subjects such as Physics, Chemistry and the like (demonstrations with practical apparatus are somewhat impossible)
- Limited or zero access to devices or hardware to sustain online learning
- Financial survival of schools due to loss of revenue from school fees owing to the impact of COVID-19 crisis on parents' income
- Poor internet access
- Zero learning structured environment
- Under-resourced schools (public) inability to run online teaching

Nonetheless, if we fail to act fast after the COVID-19 crisis, we would be at risk of millions of Nigerian children/students being left behind.

2.1 Conclusion

To this end, in a bid to fill the huge hole the pandemic extremity has left in the heart of education, the government should encourage private schools to discourage retrenchment owing to COVID-19 crisis. This may be achieved by forfeiting private schools' taxes for the year. Also, after-school lessons, especially in public schools should be made compulsory, as this will enable teachers to address the backlog caused by COVID-19 crisis. Further, to avoid



unnecessary hardship due to forfeiture of salaries in times like this, teachers should engage in farming or vocational skills on weekend basis and peradventure, during holidays. Lastly, parents should employ home tutors to assist their children, so that they (students) will not have a huge volume of work to catch up with on their own. Similarly, parents should motivate their wards in any way they can to read voraciously, so as to cover the term syllabi.

The paper, as considered in the early phase of this study has rightly examined the status quo of the coronavirus pandemic, highlighted the possible transitions that the post-COVID may bring, and gave some recommendations/suggestions that may assist the Nigerian government or other bodies concerned with educational matters. As emphasized, the governments and concerned subjects must ensure justice in bridging the gap of educational inequity, by ensuring adequate funding of the education sector and training of teachers, and lastly, by creating an enabling environment for both students and teachers to thrive.

2.2 Policy Recommendations

This paper suggests or recommends India's techno-blended learning solution and gamma tutor software package, specifically at the secondary levels. Also, the Ministry of Education at both National and State levels could give considerable considerations to some of the recommendations made by Sustainable Education and Enterprise Development (SEED) as to the way forward for the country's education after the COVID-19 crisis. The paraphrased recommendations include the following:

- State governments should partner with low-cost private schools for sensitization of free government radio and television school options and to distribute learning packets. Trust should also be built with low-cost private school sector by providing stimulus packages and/or relief funds for schools in exchange for their registration with the government. It should also revise Child Protection and Safeguarding policies and guidelines to provide for risks related to online/remote learning.
- Financial institutions should build relationship with low-cost private schools by supporting their financial literacy education in order to survive during crisis period such as this. They could also develop, maintain and increase if possible, access to finance/credit opportunities for these schools.
- Network providers should give concession on the cost of data and advertise them as solutions for education sector. Some schools are able to deploy tech tools for online learning, but data is still a major challenge, besides hardware.
- Ed Tech companies should support teachers with digital literacy training and resources They should also provide increased access to online/remote learning resources for students.
- Local and international funders should design projects to support learners returning to the classroom post-COVID. They should also provide flexibility with existing funding and additional short-term funding for grantees and investees.

In the same vein, governments must ensure justice in bridging the gap of educational inequity, by ensuring adequate funding of the education sector and training of teachers, and lastly, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions must create an enabling environment for both students and teachers to thrive. Bringing to the fore, it is to be borne in mind that, while students constitute a certain percent of the population, they are 100% of our future.



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