

Repositioning Primary Education for Sustainability in Post Covid-19 Era

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Abstract - The outbreak of mysterious pneumonia caused by a novel corona virus vis-à-vis Respiratory Syndrome Corona virus 2 (SARS-Cov-2) began in Wuhan China in the Month of December of the year 2019. SARS-Cov-2 exhibited person to person transmission of what became labeled as COVID-19 which quickly led to a World Wide (WW) outbreak of potentially fatal pneumonia and was declared as a pandemic in March 11, 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO). It has spread (WW) with over 174 million infected cases and more than 3.79 million deaths as at (June 11, 2021). This paper is therefore centered on the repositioning of primary education for sustainability in the post covid-19 era. The concept of primary education as perceived by various authors was brought to bear as well as the objectives of primary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education. The paper considered the different challenges of primary education such as; covid-19 pandemic which led to lockdown and closure of schools, insecurity, food insecurity, inadequate competent and qualified teachers, poor funding among others. The repositioning of primary education was highlighted based on the identified challenges/problems. This include the following; establishment of good safety and health habits through vigorous compliance with covid-19 protocols by wearing nose masks, face mask, practicing regular hand washing and maintaining of social distance in the schools; equitable and adequate funding of primary education to check future interruption of the primary education sector etc.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Repositioning, Primary Education, Sustainability.

I. Introduction

The outbreak of mysterious pneumonia caused by a novel corona virus vis-à-vis Respiratory Syndrome Corona virus 2 (SARS-Cov-2) began in Wuhan China in the Month of December of the year 2019. Chinese health authorities identified a novel corona virus (severe acute respiratory

syndrome corona virus 2 [SARS-CoV-2]) that was responsible for the outbreak [16]. Corona viruses are a large family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases, such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). SARS-CoV-2 exhibited efficient person-to-person transmission of what became labeled as corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which quickly led to a worldwide outbreak of potentially fatal viral pneumonia. COVID-19 has spread around the world with over 174 million infected cases and more than 3.79 million deaths as at (June 11, 2021) SARS-CoV-2 is thought to commonly spread via respiratory droplets formed while talking, coughing, and sneezing of an infected patient. As several cases, with an absence of travel history to the majorly affected areas were identified, a strong possibility of community transmission could have been possible. Broadly, two modes of transmission of COVID-19 exist—direct and indirect, [16].

The direct mode includes (a) transmission via aerosols formed via surgical and dental procedures and/or in the form of respiratory droplet nuclei; (b) other body fluids and secretions, for example, feces, saliva, urine, semen, and tears; and (3) mother-to-child. Indirect transmission may occur via (a) fomites or surfaces (e.g., furniture and fixtures) present within the immediate environment of an infected patient and (b) objects used on the infected person e.g., stethoscope or thermometer Further dissemination through air travel is likely. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

Primary Education is the aspect of the basic education offered to every child of school age. It is the foundation of education where children are prepared for post primary or post basic and tertiary education. Globally, primary education has been regarded as the most important as well as most patronized by the people, [1]. This perhaps may be due to the fact that it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit which is expected to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens. [1], asserted that the importance of primary education

can be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of other levels of education by necessity have to pass through it.

Primary education according to [5] in [7] has to do with learning and being instructed in basic fundamental concepts, skills, principles and knowledge etc in the first level of educational system. [6] Defined primary education as the training/education given to children aged six to eleven years plus. The policy maintains that the primary level of education is the key to the success or failure of the whole system as the overall educational system is built upon it. In consonance with the statement, [5] opined that primary education is the backbone of the educational system.

A solid foundation of primary education is a panacea for sustainable secondary and tertiary education. Transformation of secondary and tertiary education as a matter of necessity starts from the primary school. According to them, any program agenda that intends to transform secondary and tertiary education without first transforming the primary education must be insincere and unreasonable.

[7], Viewed primary education as the Nigerian stepping-stone to pursue higher academic and social goals. They further asserted that children who are able to undergo primary education have a better probability of continuing up to secondary and tertiary institutions as they so desire.

[10], Considers primary education as a single phase where programs are typically designed to provide fundamental skills in reading, writing and Mathematics and to establish a solid foundation for learning. In the views of [13], basic education (primary) is a level of education that prepares individuals to have firm roots in literacy and numeracy. They further stated that it includes basic life skills of learning and possesses the elements of development oriented strategies, as such focused on eradication of dependency and betterment of the living conditions of people especially as such condition affect the underprivileged.

Nigerian primary Education is experiencing some emerging challenges which include the following: corona virus pandemic food insecurity, inadequate competent teachers, poor teaching strategies/techniques, corruption, inconsistent government policies, un-conducive learning environment, poor remuneration, epileptic power supply, insufficient instructional materials, insecurity etc.

1.1 Objectives of primary education

Objectives are broad statement of what the school is expected to achieve and accomplish at the end of each program or level of education. Objectives of primary education are broad statement of school-wide outcomes.

Primary school should be able to help people acquire, demonstrate inculcate those general outcomes spelt out by the policy these include:

- Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively.
- Lay of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his society.
- Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

II. Challenges of primary education in Nigeria

2.1 Corona-virus pandemic covid-19

This is a type of common virus that infects human typically leading to an Upper Respiration Infection (URI). According to [4], the viruses are spread through the air by coughing, sneezing, close personal contact, touching an object or surface contaminated with the virus etc. it is characterized by running nose, sore throat, feeling unwell, cough and fever. It was first discovered in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in China and is recently posing a global challenge to health and educational sectors especially the primary education. [4], the outbreak coupled with the spread of the disease in Nigeria led to shutdown of schools ranging from primary to tertiary institutions.

According to [14], the closure of schools affected 36,400,000 primary and secondary school learner across Nigeria, including those in internally displaced camps. Few of these learners, mostly from financially privileged homes have good access to quality learning opportunities from the comfort of their home whereas the reverse is the case with the learner from financially underprivileged homes. These problems include limited or non-availability of smart phones or computers and internet services thereby hindering the migration of learning to online environment.

2.2 Food insecurity

Covid-19 increased food insecurity in almost every country. The lockdowns, curfews and restrictions of interstate travel and border closures have been part of the problems faced by citizens and this led to drastic hike in food prices

across the globe, which went up by 3.3 percent, [15]. This in real terms exacerbated the severity of food insecurity especially for the low and middle income countries. Besides reduced incomes have caused many household to, reduce the quantity and quality of their food intake. According to [15], the economic down-turn due to covid-19 badly affected the availability and affordability of nutritious food.

Food insecurity causes persistent malnutrition in children and youth which may result in restiveness, decreased energy level, delayed maturation and growth which leads to impaired cognitive ability and a diminished capacity to learn etc.[11].

Learners are also losing access to the daily meals made available by the federally funded school feeding programs [12], whose benefits such as encouraging enrollment in schools and boosting learning dropped drastically. School feeding yield larger socio-economic benefits for children, their families and society at large which are especially pertinent to children of low socio-economic groups; boosting health and nutrition and providing social protection and safety nets. Due to school closure, over 9million public school children are currently being deprived of this benefit [2].

2.3 Inadequate competent teachers

Effective instructional delivery depends on availability of competent and qualified teachers. No educational system can rise above the level of its teachers. [1] In [8] identified inadequate number of qualified teachers, irregular payment of teacher's salaries and teachers' dissatisfaction with their conditions of service as serious obstacle to effective classroom delivery in Nigeria.

2.4 Lack of appropriate implementation of primary education policy (objectives)

The objectives received commendations from stakeholders, yet the implementation by relevant authorities has never met the expectation of the Nigerian government.

2.5 Poor infrastructure

Some of the Nigerian primary schools still experience inadequate infrastructure like well-equipped libraries, good classrooms furniture and fittings etc, since the commencement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programs [1]. Where the infrastructures are available, they are in a very deplorable state. In most primary schools inadequate classroom, buildings have resulted in overcrowded classrooms a situation which is not ideal and conducive for effective teaching and learning.

2.6 Inadequate funding

According to [9], finance acts as a lubricant for the system (primary education), without financial resources, programs cannot be properly planned and policies implemented. With inadequate funds, proper management, transformations are bound to fail. Funding determines the success, change and development of an organization or institution, etc.

2.7 Insecurity

Insecurity in Nigeria has affected primary education tremendously in recent times especially in some states in Northern Nigeria. Boko Haram insurgency has dealt a blow on basic education delivery in Borno, Zamfara, Kasina states etc, [3].

The terrorists have destroyed over 512 schools, when this is translated to classrooms, it is over 1000, in addition to more than 350 teachers killed. With unspecified number of children missing or killed, Boko Haram insurgency kept about one million children out of schools in Nigeria (UNICEF 2015). More than 2000 schools were shut down while hundreds were attacked, looted or set ablaze. All these constitute serious problems to primary education.

III. Repositioning primary education for sustainability in post Covid-19 era

Repositioning refers to the process of altering the existing space or position. The repositioning of primary education for sustainability in post covid-19 era cannot be over-emphasized. It has therefore become very imperative to reposition this sector having identified some major challenges confronting it. [7], opined that a faulty foundation of this level of education may result in poor finishing at other levels (secondary and tertiary). The following should be done in order to reposition primary education.

- 1) Government should ensure that safety and good health habits should be established through vigorous compliance with covid-19 protocols by wearing nose mask, face mask, regular washing of hands and observing social distances in the primary schools.
- 2) Parent /guidance should ensure that their children are taken to nearest hospitals and health centers for vaccination.
- 3) Teachers and pupils should be abreast of health information and data from trusted sources such as world organization (WHO).
- 4) Continuous research should be carried out by medical sector on the pandemic to find a lasting solution.

- 5) Government in collaboration with Universal Basic Education commission (UBEC) should carry out equitable and adequate funding of primary education to check future interruption of the sector.
 - 6) Government should make provision for preventive kits for both teachers and learners in the schools to curb the spread.
 - 7) Government should create access to basic education for children of school age as well as an expanded understanding of the right to education to encompass fluidity and the changing contexts of contemporary society.
 - 8) UBEC and SUBEB should carry out rigorous enlightenment on the importance of primary education and a strengthened public commitment to education as a common good.
 - 9) The need for policy makers such as UBEC and SUBEB to value professional expertise of teachers and create conditions that give frontline education autonomy and flexibility to act collaboratively.
 - 10) Government should make free and open source technologies available to teachers and learners.
 - 11) Government should protect domestic and international financing of public education.
 - 12) Government should increase budgetary allocation to education in line with the UNESCO'S 20% recommendation to also cater for school feeding program.
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4. Conclusion

For primary education which is the key to the success or failure of all other levels of education that is, secondary and tertiary, all hands must be on deck to reposition it for sustainability. Therefore all the objectives of primary education must be met through thorough implementation; the challenges confronting this level of education must be adequately addressed to cope with the post covid-19 pandemic era.

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