

POTENTIALS OF COVID -19 FOR ECONOMIC GREATNESS IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

School closures as a result of Covid-19 interrupted learning and threw students, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders in confusion and disarray. To determine the potentials of Covid-19 for economic greatness in education, this paper examined and analysed the effects, experience gained and potentials of Covid-19 greatness in education as well as some of the challenges faced by education. The paper analysed; interrupted learning, poverty, poor healthcare and high economic costs among others. Similarly, the paper discussed the prospects of distance learning and different learning models towards addressing some of the challenges of school closures. The paper recommended among others review of national budget on education, provision of infrastructural social protection, safety and hygiene as well as adequate sensitization.

Keywords: Covid- 19, Education, Economic, Potentials, Greatness.

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus otherwise known as Covid-19 Pandemic which affected all aspects of life including educational system the world over. In Nigeria, Covid-19 forced government to suddenly close all schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities. The closures of these institutions were indefinite and resulted to serious disruptions in academic calendar of events. This situation has far-reaching economic and social consequences in the society.

School closures as a result of Covid-19 have exposed a number of economic and social issues including the need for online learning, distance schooling, food insecurity, student debt, homeless, access to healthcare inadequacies in social protection system, loss of job, restriction of movements among others. The impact of Covid-19 was more severe for disadvantaged families especially children, causing serious disruption of learning, malnutrition, childcare problems and economic meltdown among low income earners.

In the light of the above situation (school closures), universities recommended use of distance learning programme , open educational applications and platforms that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely. This approach may limit the disruption of education and academic calendars. However, it appears that only the few privileged members of the society are enjoying the system. The vast majority of the population are left out of the system. To this end, therefore, this paper will focus on the following;

- i. School closures and its effect on education
- ii. Experiences gained during Covid-19

- iii. Potentials of Covid-19 for economic greatness in education
- iv. Challenges of school closures to education
- v. Recommendations
- vi. Conclusion
- vii. References

SCHOOL CLOSURES AND ITS EFFECTS ON EDUCATION

School carries high social and economic costs for people across communities in the world. According to UNESCO (2020) the impact of school closures is more severe for boys and girls and their families. UNESCO noted that the resulting disruptions increase the already existing disparities within the educational system and other aspects of life. Such as:

- Interrupted learning: schools provide essential learning and when schools close, children and youths are deprived opportunities for better growth and development.
- Poor nutrition: school provides opportunity for supporting children with balanced diet, when schools close meals are compromised. Thus children and youths who rely on free meals provided at schools are denied. As such food and healthy nutritioun do not longer come for students.
- Confusion and stress for Teachers; usually, when schools close unexpectedly and for unknown durations, teachers got disenchanted and disilled because they are known for respect to their obligations. Teachers are also known for maintaining connections with their students and provide support services to learning. All these are abruptly stopped when schools close
- Parents unprepared for distance and home learning, it is worthnoting that facilitating children learning from home is a huge challenge to parents especially when it comes at a time of economic meltdown due to Covid-19.
- Gaps in childcare: Absence of schools creates gaps that give rise to risky behaviours among children of working parents.
- High economic costs: working parents are more likely to stay at home and care for children at the expense of their jobs. This means loss of jobs and reduction in incomes
- Unintended strain on healthcare systems: Healthcare systems such as hospitals and clinics were thrown into confusion, unexpected demand of healthcare facilities. This means parents and individuals take responsibilities of providing healthcare to members of their family.
- Increased pressure on schools and school systems that remain opened; it is obvious that only schools that are operating get learners. Most of these schools that remain opened are privates and not affordable by many less .privileged families.
- Social isolation: schools are known as hubs of social activity and hub and interaction. When schools close many children and youths miss out on social contact that is essential to learning and development.
- Challenges of measuring and validating learning: calendered assessments such as examinations that determine admission, placement, and advancement to new education levels. As such institutions are thrown into disarray and cancellation of terms and sessions when schools close. Strategies to postpone, skip or administer examinations at

distance location raise serious concerns about fairness, especially when access to learning becomes variables. Disruption to assessments results in stress for students and then families as it triggers disengagement.

- Infrastructural damages: buildings that are not used for a long time as a result of school closures gradually started developing structural defects. Classrooms, halls lecture theatres, laboratories and other facilities were all closed when schools are not on sessions. Thus disuse and decay occurred. Consequently, termite or isopteran set in various buildings.

EXPERIENCES GAINED DURING COVID-19

The best experience is the one an individual happens to go through and acquire new knowledge and skill of a particular job or activity. This means an activity that has been performed repeatedly for a purpose. A new experience therefore, is what people have tried to do or done to survive the effects of covid-19. People developed new knowledge skills and competences in acquiring education, economic survival, personal hygiene, social protection and healthcare among others. When schools were closed abruptly and for unknown time, families started feeling the effects of lockdown variously:

- Many parents who are struggling with home schooling realize the value of teachers who always take care of the children during school hours. When schools closed, parents took over the burden.
- Home schooling has made parents and families realize how demanding and complex a teachers work can be. When schools close, parents home take notice.
- When schools were suddenly closed, teachers experienced the need to switch to remote learning. Teachers are therefore, struggling with many challenges in their efforts to meet the development needs of their students.
- Teachers resorted to new strategies of development in training and retraining through online learning,
- Lockdown and social isolation have made activities such as meetings, seminars, conferences and other congregations possible through online learning operation or mechanism.
- Families and individuals have gained new experience of personal hygiene social isolation and protection through regular hand washing, use of facemask and physical distance. similarly, people have become more conscious about attending social gatherings and congregations
- Families have learnt to manage meager incomes and resources ultimately. Families seek for alternative sources of income generation to support basic needs as a result of loss of jobs. Thus youths and young adults have gained new experience on vocational jobs.

POTENTIALS OF COVID-19 FOR ECONOMIC GREATNESS IN EDUCATION

Potentials refer to latent qualities or activities that may be developed and lead to future success or usefulness. When schools were closed in mid-April 2020 over 192 countries were affected involving more than 90% of the world's learner's almost 1.6 billion children and young people (UNESCO, 2020). It is worth noting that while some governments are starting to order teachers

and students back to work, education which is one of the most important drivers in human capital investment continues to be largely closed for business.

UNESCO (2020) observed that how long schools will remain closed, how students learning will be affected, and how greatly this will affect the poorest and most vulnerable populations remain difficult to say. This gives rise to questions, such as whether it is possible for recovered patients to be reinfected to how long it will take to develop a more viable along. However, it is obviously known that learning will be lost and such losses will not likely be evenly distributed.

It is worth noting that when children lose out on education, they lose out on future opportunities including economic benefits, such as additional earnings with ear reaching consequences. UNESCO (2020) noted that the consequences of school closures cannot be overestimated and protected that every additional year of schooling equates to 10% in additional future earnings. This explains the number of moths of education closures to estimate the loss in marginal future earnings. In this connection, Psachanopous, Collins, Patrinos and Emilliana (2020) projected that potential loss of future earnings as a results of the current school closures can be estimated as follows:

- Uneven quality of learning.
- Differences in provision of effective distance learning.
- Loss of jobs by family members and increased poverty level among people in the society.
- Scarcity of jobs in future to support the child education and healthcare by families
- Education as one of the most important drivers in human capital investment continues to be largely closed for business which affected sources of income for many people.
- Young people are forced by these closures to make sacrifice in so many ways :
- Continues school closures have protected multiple effects across countries, continents and generations even yet to come. This indicates that governments have to rethink about their economic policies and charge directions on various sectors.
- The most enduring part of school closures is the impact on children and young people of the pandemic which is more likely to take the form of long crisis rather than short sharp shock. This demands change in mind set and re orientation of youth and young people towards better future life.

In ensuring safety when schools and learning facilitated reopen, Federal Ministry of Education (FME) (2020) emphasizes implementation of Covid-19 guidelines to the later; sensitization, safety and hygiene, social protection, learning, financing and build back better. FME (2020) proposed alternative learning models which include: outdoor learning, staggered attendance, alternate attendance, platooning, decreased interaction, flexible schedule and creative delivery. All these alternative learning models for social distancing require adequate planning provision of resources and gradual implementation.

CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES TO EDUCATION

The challenges faced by schools and education systems are enormous. UNESCO (2020) FME (2020) and Johnson (2020) observed and noted among others the following challenges:

- School closures interrupted learning and created serious gap in students, academic performance
- Gaps in health care systems, especially child healthcare
- The situation resulted to high-economic costs in all sectors, especially education and health care delivery
- Loss of jobs and reduction in income generation by families
- Increased in droption rates, particularly among low income families
- Increase in crime rates and violence especially among youth's and community members
- Social isolation demands caution and resilient which are usually difficult to achieve at all times
- Challenges associated with distance learning strategies
- Increased pressures on schools and school systems.
- Students with special needs particularly those with disabilities and disadvantaged groups are badly affected by the long school closures because they cannot cope with effective remote learning strategies
- Increased burden on parents who need to stay home or find new arrangements if children have to stay at home
- Unlike in some countries of the world, in Nigeria schools were closed abruptly. As such academic calendars were distorted as a result students, teachers and parents were thrown into confusion
- Increased demands on schools to provide additional infrastructural facilities including isolation centers in the face of scarcity of funds
- Enforcing and supporting implementation of covid-19 guidelines and preventive actions while schools open
- Limiting physical contact by reducing social and extra-curricular activities which in themselves useful in achieving the hidden curricular in schools
- It is important to note that both governments and private sectors are faced with serious shortages of funds due economic meltdown. Payments of salaries are in shamble and provision of additional facilities required for managing Covid-19 pose serious problem to most organizations.

Similarly, UNESCO (2020) observed and noted the following challenges:

- Interrupted learning
- Gaps in child healthcare
- High economic cost
- Loss of jobs
- Reduction in income to families
- Increased in drop on irate particularly from low income families
- Increased in crimes and violence
- Issue of social isolation
- Demands for distance learning
- Pressure on schools and school systems

- Students with special needs are badly affected by the long school closures because they cannot cope with effective remote learning stresses
- Increased burden on parents who need to stay home or find new arrangements if children have to stay at home
- unlike in some countries, in Nigeria, school closures were abruptly without any caution as such academic calendars were distorted and students, teachers and parents were thrown into confusion.
- The need for more isolation centers by schools
- Enforcing and supporting implementation of guidelines and preventive actions while schools open.
- Limiting physical contact by reducing social and extra-curricular activities which are equally useful in achieving the hidden curriculum in schools
- Most not all schools lack the basic infrastructure to accommodate the needs for schools reopening.
- Lack of funds by most schools even to pay salaries let along provision of additional basic infrastructure and facilities required for Covid-19 management.

RECOMMENDATION

According to FME (2020) for schools to be reopened, it has to be demonstrated that it is safe for teachers and learners to go back to school in a phased and gradual reopening. This means schools' reopening is only advocated to minimize the risk of infections in schools and resurgence of coronavirus infections in the community. In view of this, the following steps or actions are recommended.

- All schools should prepare to reopen when the time comes. To ensure adequate preparation, central planning is essential by giving due consideration to finance, infrastructural and human resources.
- Federal government should re adjust national budgets for education
- All schools must have operational budget and ensure that both teaching and non-teaching personnel are paid their salaries
- Health authorities should ensure that all schools, are fit for reopening by adhering to the infrastructural provision, adjustment; safety of buildings and their surroundings before reopening.
- Schools should guarantee the well being of returning students and ensure that the risk of contagious is minimized.
- All schools must ensure that renovation and improvement of schools buildings as well as installation of necessary hygiene facilities such as washrooms, toilets, bathrooms, washing stations, running and other items like soap and disposable hand towels.
- Federal, state and local governments should ensure that teachers are adequately, mobilized and explore measures of employment, and or deployment to areas affected by high teacher morality rates during the crisis.
- Federal, state and local education sectors should train teachers to monitor children, students and identify those experiencing particular difficulties when they are back in schools.

- Federal, state and local government should take responsibility for ensuring that learners are safe to learn at home. In this connection all learners should participate in an inclusive arrangement irrespective of their locations access online learning facilities.
- Schools should review and reassess learning needs of learners due to long stay away from schooling.
- Alternative learning models should be adopted by all schools depending on locations, infrastructural facilities, learner's population and availability of teachers.
- Federal, state and local governments should ensure proper sensitization of schools and communities on social protection by providing Information, Education and Communication (IEC) facilities in the system.
- Federal, state and local governments should ensure proper school feeding programme by providing regular balanced meals to learners, especially at pre-primary and primary school levels.
- Federal, state and local governments as well as private sectors should create employment opportunities to support families mitigate the effects of the crisis
- Federal, state and local governments should create more access to education to reduce dropout rates and provide inclusiveness for all categories of learners including out of school children.

CONCLUSION

School closures were sudden and interrupted academic calendars in all institutions of learning. The situation created serious gaps in living and healthcare. It resulted to lockdown, loss of jobs, crimes, violence and high poverty level. School closures threw parents, learners, teachers and all stakeholders in education sector into confusion. Consequently, it calls for policy review, special budgetary provision, alternative learning models and diversification of income generation to support education and healthcare of families. Schools reopening strategies should be phased gradual through careful planning while giving consideration to finance, infrastructure and human resources.

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