

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A COMPARISON OF EDUCATION MINISTRIES' RESPONSE IN NIGERIA AND GHANA

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Abstract

The Covid-19 crisis has negatively impacted all educational systems around the world. Developed and developing countries are dealing the situation in various ways. This paper compares how the Nigeria and Ghana systems of education responded to the pandemic. This topic is very important, but it is scantily researched. Looking at this topic it, has relevance to both economies as it will provide a learning and mirroring platform where lessons can be learnt in terms of making necessary adjustments and implementing various strategies that help both educational systems to manage the ongoing crisis effectively and efficiently. The paper does not use quantitative empirical reporting, but uses a literature or secondary research to provide content for analysis. The paper concludes that the outbreak of corona virus has shaken the educational systems of Nigeria and Ghana; and the adverse situation may continue for a long period of time. The paper suggests that educational stakeholders should ensure that there are futuristic plans in place in case of another similar experience. This includes adequate funding that is vital for the effective running of schools and educational institutions.

Keywords: Covid-19, education system, e-learning, instruction, professionalism, teacher training

Introduction

As of April 21th, 2020, approximately 1.723 billion learners were affected with the sudden closures of school in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNESCO monitoring, as of the date above 191 countries have implemented nationwide closures and 5 have implemented local closures, impacting about 98.4 percent of the world's student population (Aborode et al., 2020). Efforts to curtail the spread of COVID-19 through non-medical interventions and preventive measures such as social-distancing and self-isolation was prompted the widespread closure of primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling in over 100countries (UNESCO, 2020). Nigeria and Ghana have as well ensured all schools and personnel experience a compulsory stay at home order so as to prevent further spread of this deadly virus from spreading among students and school personnel since it can easily be contacted through direct contact with the carrier of the virus. In fact many unified examinations have to be suspended as a result of the pandemic.

Ghana and Nigeria are among Africa's 54 countries which had confirmed cases and death tolls due toCOVID-19. In fact, some borders were closed, interna-

tional and local flights were banned, local and international trade declined at a drastic rate. According to Wondwosen & Damtew (2020) research on the April 2020 Africa economic forecasts revealed that Africa has experience economy loss of between US\$90 billion and US\$200 billion in 2020, with the GDP shrinking by three to eight points which Nigeria and Ghana are part.

In Nigeria, Ghana and the world at large, Mathematical modelling was effectively and efficiently calculated and had the capacity to reduce or slow down transmission of an outbreak by closing of schools which are the major atmosphere for social gathering. However, effectiveness of this move depends on the contacts and social distancing principles when children maintain outside their schools. School closure helped a lot when it was introduced at the early stage, but if it occurs late to an outbreak, it could have been less effective and may not have any impact at all because by then the disease could have gone viral in the school system. This is why over the years educational sector have remain a sensitive part of the sustainable development of any country, thus the tune in the development of any country is majorly dictated by the educational sector. Adelokun (2020) posited that even with all the precautionary measures used, it is difficult to measure the specific impact of school closures, because it varies from place to place and persons to persons. Be that as it may, the impact negative. However, this paper will compare Education Ministries' response in Nigeria and Ghana during Covid-19 Pandemic.

The sudden disruption of educational activities in Nigeria and Ghana was negatively felt by many families, students, educational stakeholders and government. Home schooling was not only a massive shock to parents' productivity, but also to learner's social life and learning (Agbele et al., 2020). New methods of teaching had to be adopted by institutions of learning from the basic level of learning to the highest educational level. Sadly, these interruptions are not just to be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality. The pandemic created an adverse situation which may continue for a long period of time and have turned out to be the new normal.

Conjectural Context

To begin this comparison, the paper will begin with Nigeria. The outbreaks of Lassa fever, bird flu, monkey pox, Ebola disease and others disease outbreak did not weigh down the socio-economic and educational system of Nigeria as of the case of coronavirus. This has been raising dust in the country, educational system and heartfelt burden to the concern personnel, knowing well the possible effects of the prolonged holidays as a result of the COvid-19 pandemic (Wondwosen & Damtew, 2020).

Nigeria's response to managing coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria education system

According to the coronavirus response monitoring plans by unlike developed western countries, the Federal Ministry of Education's school-closure directive was not able produce policy measures on how to ease learning disruptions for learners and how to address the digital new-normal of learning which had to become alternative method to physical teaching learning process in the dynamic society. In the account of Taiba (2020) the Coordinated Education response to COVID-19 pandemic on the landing page of the Nigeria's Ministry of Education website was vague and does little to address the learning needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. The single well-documented response is the Nigeria Education in Emergency Work-

ing Group (NWiWwg) Strategy, published on 7 April 2020 which aims to mitigate the negative impact of the school closure on learners and teachers in North-East Nigeria (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020). While the efforts of the Federal and State government in the health sector and in providing financial stimulus packages and emergency palliatives must be commended, ignoring the education sector would be disastrous. As emphasised by UNESCO, Nigeria had temporary school closure comes with high social and economic costs and severe impact on children from disadvantaged background.

UNICEF Nigeria (2020) Nigeria Education sector maintained a Response Monitoring Tool named 5W Matrix which are

1. Who is doing?
2. What are you doing?
3. Where are you doing?
4. When are you doing?
5. Whom are you doing?

This template is used for monitoring Education Sector partners' activities under the current COVID19 contingency response. While the pandemic is still on, partners submitted their reports on a monthly basis to the Education Sector secretariat appointed team. Based on the submissions, the Education Sector Secretariat team on a regular basis developed maps and other tools to strengthen the coordination on the response. They ensured proper documentation in identifying gaps and prevent duplication of activities/programmes during and post-pandemic period. The Monitoring System also aimed to minimize reporting requirements to partners while at the same time provide regular required information about the progress of programme implementation and ensure alignment with the (tobe) amended Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Along the line in Nigeria, there was regular partnering and participation as this monitoring was critical to maintaining strong coordination. This was because it was observed that it is through joint efforts we all can manage the continuous plaguing of coronavirus. This was in view to continuously allow the Sector to visualize gaps and needs, build partnerships and collaborations, and advocate on behalf of the entire educational sector in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government ordered a total close down of all schools. The decision was largely applauded, and the National University Commission (NUC), a regulatory body for all universities in Nigeria also gave a follow-up directive to all universities in the country to shut down. Muthu Lakshmi and Archana (2020) presented that the education ministry on Nigeria sector has on a regular basis conducted monitoring meetings on COVID19response at least twice a month since the inception of pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. These meetings has been holding online (via Skype, zoom etc) in line with the social distancing rules and all implementing partners and other stakeholders have been partaking in the meetings to come out with substantial plans in managing the educational sector in such the trying times of the covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Kapasia et al, 2020). Information on partner activities and reports from periodic meetings is been shared directly with the Federal Ministry of Education and State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) for considerations and implementations in which education data collection strives to use the official Education Management Information System (EMIS) school codes to allow for seamless integration with Federal Ministry of Education's data. Furthermore, Also Education in Emergencies working Group (EiEWG) Information Management Officers do conduct regular capacity building opportunities for both EiEWG mem-

bers and SUBEB focal points in order to improve information management within the Education Sector even at the critical time of the country (Sambo et al, 2020).

Also, UNICEF Nigeria response team to coronavirus, designed a framework according to a specific need resulting from COVID19 crisis (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020). This framework is to

1. Give partners concrete information on the impact of the pandemic so far on the educational sector
2. Suggest ideas of how they can support in term prevention.
3. How they can continue to support learners during the pandemic lockdown period that schools are on complete lockdown.
4. Provide more detailed guidance on how the education partners can support both the federal and states' Ministries of Education to re-start learning on a good footing and the activities to prioritize once the shutdown of schools is lifted.

According to UNICEF Nigeria (2020) there were three strategic selected objectives linked to the COVID19 main consequence on school system: School closure: Before, during and after (School reopening) the school closure.

1. Prevent spread and transmission of coronavirus through and among learners, teachers, parents and School Based Management Committee (SBMC).
2. Mitigate/Minimize the impact of school closure due to COVID19 on learning and wellbeing of learners, teachers, parents and SBMC through alternatives solution.
3. Ensure effective, inclusive and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, and SBMC.

As at April, 2020 many States in Nigeria have switched to the radio-television means of communicating with learners whereby teachers go on air teaching their respective subjects and topics to learners listening and watch at home, some learning channels were lunched on various satellite networks even though not every home in Nigeria can afford the purchase and monthly subscriptions of satellite networks and the issue of paralytic and unavailable power posed a major challenge (Oluwatuyi et al, 2020). At least with this development some of learners are still being updated in their academics. Some private universities in Nigeria took this advantage to further develop their ICT section to create platforms in reaching out to their students' even while in their respective homes with their parents/guidance. My institution Ignatius Ajuru University of Education did not miss a semester or a session as a result of the use of WhatsApp, zoom and other medium which enabled teleconferencing. Even though these mediums were not very efficient as a result of poor network in some areas, unavailability of android devices and laptops for some teachers and learners and of course inefficient power supply in Nigeria.

Another case of reference is that of Bowen University Iwo, Osun State which immediately took a swift action at the beginning of the lockdown. The university's ICT unit developed a software to reach out to their students in their various homes, they teach and even conducted examinations as at when due. This software was able to view learners in the comfort of their homes, to detect the students face, and ensure nobody is helping them write their exams. This was a commendable effort from Bowen University's management in ensuring there is continuous education even in the face of corona virus pandemic. Unfortunately, the development was unable to get down to all government universities because the period of the pandemic lockdown came after the academic staffs of universities union declared indefinite

strike action as a result of unmet demands from the government. Along the line, on April 22nd 2020, President Muhamadu Buhari ordered the payment of all university staffs to further encourage them in carrying out relevant researches in finding a lasting solution and vaccines to prevent the spread of corona virus in Nigeria, but this move was not effective because there was still strike action in place.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the socio-economic inequalities of the Nigeria education system (Adeola et al, 2013). Many wealthy families in Nigeria send their children to private schools leaving the poorly resourced and facilities in public schools all because of the increase in mismanagement of resources allocated to the education system. The children in private schools might experience little disruption in their learning, because the authorities of most standardized private schools do ensure their schools are well equipped with ICT infrastructures and they can afford remote learning. Learners from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities without access to computers and other devices outside school will however be left struggling. In many cases, these learners live in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and epileptic power supply. Inevitably, if this digital innovative is the only alternative to switch to during the Covid-19 Pandemic lock-down it will make worse the existing learning disparities among these learners because not many parents can afford an android phone talk less of other sophisticated ICT tools used in aiding learning.

While trying to curb the further damage of the corona virus pandemic on the educational sector, some State governments ordered the reopening of schools on 29th June 2020 for students in terminal classes such as Primary 6, JSS 3, and SSS 3 to prepare them for their respective external examinations. This was carried out even while there was still a standing order by the federal government of Nigeria that all schools are to remain closed till further notice (Obiakor & Adeniran, 2020). While doing this, some State government promised to ensure all health precautions are in place to prevent staffs and learners in this category from being infected with the virus. Another control measure by the federal government of Nigeria on the effect of covid-19 pandemic on the education sector was the step to reopen schools to terminal students to write terminal examinations. The directive came from the president on 29th June 2020 with the advice of Nigeria Center for Disease Control and Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 after uninterrupted school closure since March 19th 2020. With this, learners in primary six, Junior Secondary School three, and Senior Secondary School three resumed on the 6th of July 2020 for adequate preparations for their terminal exams, other classes and all tertiary institutions are to remain closed till further notice (Sambo et al, 2020). All necessary health precautions was put in place in various concerned schools, the ministries of education and school authorities are played their role to abide by the laid down rules while the temporary opening of school activities was ongoing. There is no doubt this decision helped the learners in this category to have time to prepare for their external examinations so as for them not to experience massive failure. Nigerian Union of Teachers and Academic Staff Union of Universities rejected this reopening of schools' proposal by the federal government, saying they are not going to resume and expose their lives to the risk of Covid-19, they were of the opinion that the government should first provide health facilities along-side isolation centre in schools before they will be willing to resume.

Ghana's response to managing coronavirus pandemic in Ghana education system

In Ghana, Basic schools, senior high schools and universities, both public and private were also closed. Only BECE and WASSCE candidates were permitted to remain in school under social distancing protocols. The government banned all public gatherings including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, church activities and other related events as part of measures to stop the spread of coronavirus in the country (Jonas, 2020). All Universities, Senior High Schools, and basic schools, i.e. public and private schools, closed Monday, 16th March, 2020, till further notice (Sahu, 2020). The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communication was tasked to roll out distance learning programmes. However, Basic Examination Certificate Examination (BECE) and West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) candidates were allowed to attend school to prepare for their examinations, but with prescribed social distancing protocols.

The GES and Zoomlion Ghana Limited also joined forces to launch an initiative to fumigate all senior high, special and technical schools in the country to curb the spread of the pandemic. The Ghana Education Service (GES) and Zoomlion Ghana Limited rolled out an exercise to disinfect and fumigate all senior high, special and technical schools across the country as part of measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In all, a total of 1,130 schools was carried out within the next three weeks. The exercise inactivated organisms and kill pests in 722 public senior high schools (SHSs) and technical schools; 380 private SHSs and 28 special schools. The Minister of Education, Dr Mathew Opoku Prempeh, who was present at the launch of the initiative, said closing schools across the country as a measure to stop the spread of the coronavirus, as directed by President Akufo Addo, had affected both public and private schools "and our way of life" (Emelia, 2020).

By June, 2020 the President of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo ordered reopening of schools and in his address to the nation, assured parents of students to be calm over the reopening of schools amidst the increasing number of coronavirus in Ghana (Nii Larte, 2020). In his presentation, he assured all parents and guardians that Government will not put the lives of 750,000 students, teachers and non-teaching staff, who will be returning to school. He assured all parents and guardians that Government will not put the lives of 750,000 students, teachers and non-teaching staff, who will be returning to school during the peak of the pandemic, at risk. He further presented that they have made all the required provisions to protect students whilst in school. It bears repeating, however, that they must all adhere strictly to enhanced personal hygiene and social distancing protocols, regularly wash their hands with soap under running water, refrain from shaking hands and hugging, and wear masks to protect themselves and others.

The impact of covid-19 on pre-university education in Ghana

Schools and Universities in Ghana were closed by Mid-March 2020 and restriction on movement was further imposed. The closure was announced at the time when Final year Basic school students were preparing for their BECE exams in June and the Final year Senior High School students were also warming up to take their WASSCE exams in May 2020. The fate of these students remains a mirage. The Ministry of Education do not seem to have any solution to the problem at hand. Par-

ents are confused and teachers are depending on the Ghana Education Service for the way-forward. What is more worrying and confusing is that no one knows how these candidates will gain admission into Senior High Schools and Universities in September 2020 as suggestion of aptitude test and entrance exams for these candidates was rejected by the universities. Clearly the pandemic has come to expose the lack of planning and preparedness towards such emergency educational situations. We do not seem to have any alternative solution to a problem that is likely to draw the entire educational system back and further deepen the woes of vulnerable children and youth in the country (UNESCO, 2020). According to the WHO, domestic violence in the wake of the lockdown increased worldwide. Experts say lack of social activities and financial pressures are contributing factors. A recent report by Manusher Jonno foundation (MJF), a human right organization explained that, at least 4,249 women and 456 children were subjected to domestic violence in 27 out of 64 districts of Bangladesh in April, with 424 children facing violence for the first time in their lives. The case of Ghana is not known yet, there has not been an official reports and statistics of how many children have gone through similar ordeal but news bulletins have reported exponential rise in child abuse. Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS) have estimated that, over 94,000 private school teachers have lost their jobs due to the corona virus outbreak as at May 2020.

The effect of Covid-19 on tertiary education in Ghana

Teaching and learning in the Universities and their affiliate colleges in Ghana have also suffered a shock. Even though, online learning on educational platforms such as Google classroom, Telegram, Zoom app etc (Singh et al., 2019) are not entirely new ways of engaging and interacting with students in our universities but the shift from traditional face-to-face to 100% online teaching and learning threatens continuity and requires much efforts to sustain high academic standards. The decision to go online was not immediately welcomed by all students and lecturers. Some university students through the Students' Representative Council demanded for the supply of internet data to enable them participate in the online learning. The decision also meant that lecturers needed enhanced knowledge in emergency remote teaching to be able to have effective online interaction with their students. Online training for University and College of Education lecturers was then organized by the Digital Society School, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with T-Tel from 1st – 8th May, 2020 and the programme was worthwhile according to the participants (Taibat, 2020; Sintema, 2020). Currently, teaching and learning for university students is ongoing amidst infrastructural and technological challenges however, there are lessons to learn from this pandemic for the future.

Remote learning for schools and universities in Ghana

Many stakeholders of education had earlier recommended online learning for Basic school children however, the numerous challenges that come in the implementation of emergency remote learning have overawed most education systems worldwide (Dhawan, 2020). An overwhelming lack of training for basic schools teachers, students, tools and devices for e-learning means that Ghana and other African countries can only rely on mother-nature to survive (Ayebi-Arthur, 2017). For many years, the use of mobile phones by students in the Senior High Schools in Ghana have remained prohibited and any student who flouts this directive is dismissed particularly if the student is a second time offender. In villages and pseudo-

urban areas some parents cannot afford the cost of a smartphone and internet data and even do not have the technical know-how to assist their children to participate in online learning. Even in the most advanced countries, not all students have the needed facilities for online learning. A report by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) indicates that over 20% (21 million) of students in California (US) do not have the means to get on the internet at home. Providing the devices and connectivity to students and teachers remains key to ensuring successful online learning in Ghana.

Dealing with Covid-19 in Ghana Educational system

To deal with the disease, there are preventive measures that were followed, which include; frequent washing of hands under running water, the use of alcohol based sanitizer (alcohol 65-80 %), coughing or sneezing into flexed elbow or a tissue and disposing it into dustbins, avoid touching nose, eyes and mouth with unclean hands, avoid touching untreated or unsanitized surfaces, maintaining social distancing, wearing of mask to cover the nose and mouth (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2020). Citizens have been cautioned to stay at home to avoid getting infected with the virus and this was reiterated by The Minister of Education, Dr. Mathew Opoku Prempeh, when he said “the virus moves, when human beings move”. Among the measures put in place by the government to fight the virus included the reduction in cost of internet data.

In response to the closure of schools, the Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service (GES), developed the COVID-19 Coordinated Education Response Plan (GES, 2020). Launched in April 2020, the plan outlined strategies to deploy remote and virtual learning in the short term (within three months) to the long-term, post COVID-19. Based on its assessment, the GES — the implementing agency for pre-tertiary education — identified three remote learning platforms for all grades: television, radio and internet. Complementary education programmes were rolled out for each of these platforms. Covid-19 coordinated education response plan for Ghana by the Ghana ministry of education is the official document for the response of Ghana to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Ghana provided a proposal which considered strategies for the immediate and short term need (next 4 to 8 weeks), medium term (3 to 9 months) and a long term strategy (2021 and beyond). According to Ghana Ministry of Education (2020) this proposal was segmented by grades as the follows:

1. All Kindergarten and Primary School pupils
2. All Junior High School students
3. All Saviour High School students

Considerations covered review of the existing infrastructure to deliver content and facilitate distance and remote learning on the understanding that as many students as possible are provided with the opportunity to access the content. The next consideration was the content to deliver under the emergency situation and how it can best be packaged for delivery over the existing infrastructure. The infrastructure identified as most appropriate for remote learning for all the grades were Radio, Television and Internet. According to Agbe and Sefa-Nyarko (2020) the strategy for leveraging these different media are presented below.

Launch of television and online solutions: The GES, Ministry of Education and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation launched and started airing a 24-hour free-

to-air digital television channel called Ghana Learning Television (GLTV) on 14th April and 6th May 2020, respectively. It relied on existing infrastructure, such as the dormant Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS) that was set up in the 2000s, and tailored it to align with current content provided by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment for basic and senior high schools. GLTV is aired on paid-for television channels such as DSTV, StarTimes and GoTV. Lessons are delivered by selected professional teachers trained by the GES and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in audio-visual lesson preparation and delivery. English is the medium of instruction and no translations are made for local languages. This effectively leaves out slow learners and pupils from low-performing schools who are only conversant in their mother tongue.

Utilization of Radio: The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) indicated its readiness to collaborate with Ghana Educational System to use Radio as a means of providing content to all levels of students, from KG to SHS. The GBC provided a production studio for radio as well as transmission. The necessary facilities were made available to GES. The GBC also provided the technical support to enable the production and transmission. Additionally, production of appropriate radio content was done by identifying the right technical assistance and skills to support the MoE and the GES to co-create and produce content for radio. They also sought the support of development partners in identifying the right resources to support radio production.

Utilization of Television: The GES has further secured the commitment of the GBC to use television as a means to deliver content. The support services include:

- i) A 24-hour dedicated channel that simultaneously carried on the GBC DTT platform and the National DTT platform as a Free-to-Air Broadcast.
- ii) A dedicated studio space at the Broadcasting House at Kanda for the exclusive production of educational content as specified by GES.
- iii) Additional production studios was also identified with Planned International to support for the production of educational content for television broadcasting.
- iv) Available content from CENDLOS for SHS aired immediately a station is launched.

Launch of complementary radio programmes: Two months after the launch of GLTV, the Ghana Learning Radio and Reading Programme (GLRRP) was launched. Once on air, it adopted storytelling and play-based activities for improving reading, writing and imaginative skills among lower-primary learners. Targeting the regional radio networks of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and other local stations, each lesson is delivered for one hour, in examinable Ghanaian languages. The GES named the dedicated TV channel as the Ghana Learning TV (GL-TV), taking a cue from aspirations as a “Learning Nation”.

Free browsing on selected platforms: To facilitate access to online learning platforms, the Ministry of Communication, along with telecommunication providers MTN and Vodafone, agreed to a zero rating, allowing free access to over 200 websites of schools, universities and colleges (with a daily cap of 500MB). This reduced the cost of browsing for students and teachers.

Private sector involvement: Key stakeholders in the education sector, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), private education service providers, media houses and development partners initiated various online, digital, television and ra-

radio learning programmes to complement the efforts of the government. While UNICEF, Plan International, FHI 360 and USAID are directly supporting GLTV and GLRRP, others like Sabre Trust and private schools have developed separate remote learning programmes for online, television or local radio stations

To enable the GES implement this, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) supported GES in the identification of Master Trainers on the new standard-based curriculum to help with the delivery of content. Additionally, the GES identified the topic areas that were covered in schools at all levels from KG to JHS across the country and used that as a starting point for production to address the immediate need. All periods and timetabling for television shall be designed in collaboration with NaCCA to ensure that they meet the approved standards.

Online Provision: In the immediate and short term, the GES is worked with the Center for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS) to provide access to the content on the iBox and iCampus to all SHS students. To date all SHS students (approximately 1.2 million), have been registered on the iCampus system to allow them to do online and self-guided learning. GES in collaboration with the Ghana Library Authority worked to provide an online learning tool to all students at the Upper Primary, Junior and Senior High School level and with Scholastic to provide online content at the KG and Lower Primary level. In addition, the GES seeks to immediately begin the establishment of a robust integrated Learning Management System that can support the multiple learning resources, platforms and open source materials including the iCampus content and the Edmodo online learning tools which were set up.

Parents were sensitised through television, radio and online facilities on the approach of the Ministry with respect to remote education and the role parents played to ensure their wards are following the broadcast schedules.

While remote learning strategies aim to ensure continued learning for all children, Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020) posited that the most marginalized children including those experiencing disabilities, low performing students, children on the move (migrant, refugee and internally displaced children), children in the most rural hard-to-reach and poorest communities and girls tasked with caring for ill family members may not be able to access these opportunities. At the same time in the poorest households where caregivers/parents may have low educational attainment, never experienced distance schooling or themselves are experiencing disabilities, they may struggle to support their children's learning. Echoing the leading principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to 'leave no one behind,' and SDG 4 that aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,' the MoE/GES sees the need to ensure that no child is left behind during this period as well as facilitate strategies to support continued learning for children take into consideration the needs of the poorest and most marginalized children. This ensured that all children benefit and are able to continue with their learning.

Considering the above, the MoE/GES prioritised learning of most vulnerable children including children with special needs through the provision of learning devices/equipment and connectivity where possible, accessibility of instructions/ language of instructions (sign language, subtitles, sending of recorded lessons etc), caregivers/parental engagement to support learning of their wards as well as help plan the structure and routine for the learning. The informal sector like the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme, who were out-of-school children are engaged in learning, were also considered.

The MoE and GES explored means to ensure that remote learning is properly assessed to measure how students were learning. Exercises given after each lesson and parents encouraged to supervise their wards. These exercises were turned in after schools reopen as scores for continuous assessment of student/pupils. Teachers sensitised to follow through these broadcasts to know the assignments/exercises given to students/pupils during this period.

Existing infrastructure to facilitate access to remote learning Ghana educational programmes

The effectiveness of the remote and online learning programmes is dependent on adequate infrastructure for electricity, television, radio and internet. Household access to devices like computers, radio sets and mobile phones is also important (Belinda, 2020). However, these are not evenly distributed across social and geographic strata.

Low electricity, television, radio and internet coverage in Ghana: While electricity coverage is high in urban centres (94%), it reaches only 67% of households in rural areas (World Bank, 2020), leaving children in 33% of rural households without access to GLTV and online learning platforms. Television (60%) and radio (57%) coverage is even lower throughout the country, and much lower in rural areas (43% television, 55% radio) than urban areas (67% television, 59% radio). Poor and low-income households in urban areas also have limited access to television; even where they do have one, children have less access to programmes than adults. Data from the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey shows that at the national level only 45% and 30% of households in Ghana have access to the internet and a computer at home, respectively. In rural areas, this is down to 13% and 8% of households, respectively.

Inequity is heightened by low coverage: Such disparity presents barriers to virtual learning for children from rural and low-income households, as the media for accessing the private and public learning programmes are not accessible to them. Additionally, even though GLTV is the largest investment by the government to ensure continuous learning for children, it is only accessible on free-to-air digital television and on prepaid channels like DSTV and GoTV, which reach an even lower proportion of the learner population. Children in households with analogue television sets cannot access GLTV and are thus excluded from GLTV programmes.

Even though mobile phone ownership is significantly high in both urban (97%) and rural (88%) households, low digital literacy among poor and low-income parents and guardians impedes children's access. Children who use adults' phones (owned by elder siblings, parents and other family members) can be exposed to content that is not child-friendly and can risk exposure to online grooming, abuse and exploitation.

Ghana users' appraisal of mode of delivery for remote and online learning issues during the pandemic

Lack of commitment to schedule affects participation: The GES and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation developed a general schedule for lessons on GLTV and GLRRP. However, this was not followed. For example, morning sessions should be between 7am and 9:45am for junior high schools, followed by four hours of lessons for pre-school and primary schools (ending at 2pm). The evening sessions (until 7pm) are for junior high school students. I followed by repeat sessions for the rest of

the night. However, some parents and children have lost interest, as they are unable to plan for relevant lessons.

Inexperience of facilitators affects learning. GLTV and GLRRP are delivered by selected teachers trained at short notice by the GES and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation after the schools were closed. Unfortunately, McBrien et al (2020) posited that these teachers have not yet mastered the art of virtual delivery, which requires innovative participatory methods to engage the children. This affects the quality of teaching on the television channel.

Private schools started early. Unlike public and low-fee private schools, elite private schools already used blended learning approaches (a combination of in-person and EdTech solutions to facilitate learning) prior to COVID-19. They share e-resources on either their own virtual platforms or existing ones such as Zoom, Google Classrooms, WhatsApp and YouTube for self-guided learning. These platforms also provide curated digital resources for teachers and parents/guardians on how to support learning.

Inclusiveness response of the government solution to COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana

Although the COVID-19 education response plan acknowledged the need for inclusive online learning in line with the 'leave no one behind' theme of the Sustainable Development Goals, Affounh et al (2020) revealed that GLTV, GLRRP and the various online programmes exclude certain categories of children.

Children with disabilities are particularly excluded: About one in every five children between the ages of 2 and 17 years in Ghana have a form of disability or functional difficulty. Despite the available data, GLTV did not make any provision for children with learning disabilities until CSOs raised concerns and worked with the GES to include sign language interpretation of GLTV programmes for children with hearing impairments. But no support has been provided for children with visual impairments or other access needs. Moreover, GLTV lessons are taught in English, despite nine Ghanaian languages being well developed and taught in schools. This therefore excludes children with disabilities and learning difficulties that prevent them from learning a second language.

Girls are further excluded due to increased household chores: With entire households spending more time than usual at home due to movement restrictions and fewer opportunities to work, unpaid domestic work such as childcare and cooking has increased. More water is needed from public sources for laundry and cooking at home than usual, young siblings require care while parents who can still work are away, and food must be prepared throughout the day. These household responsibilities are typically assigned to girls, and so girls spend less time than boys on digital platforms. Respondents suggested that there is an increase in domestic violence, in which girls are often the victims.

Children in households without access to television, technology and internet connectivity are being left behind. Their inability to continue learning will further deepen the learning crisis and contribute to their dropping out of school.

Ghana Pre- and post-Educational Strategy

Ghana currently has three broad policy documents that are relevant to education, but one factors the the covid pandemic. They are:

The 2003 Ghana ICT for accelerated development (ICT4D) policy: This policy aims to deploy electronic distance education and virtual learning to increase access from primary to tertiary levels. The document, however, failed to outline investment strategies for filling the information and communications technology infrastructure gap. CENDLOS, established to support this policy, remains dormant and under-resourced, and its icampus and ibox virtual learning platforms have until recently been inactive due to limited and costly bandwidth (Favale et al, 2020).

The Ghana Education Sector Plan 2018–2030: This policy is a strategy guiding education management and delivery for the next decade. The plan seeks to transform Ghana into a ‘learning nation’ using improved technologies to facilitate equitable access to quality education. Yet, COVID-19 has exposed the inadequacies and lack of preparedness of the government to achieve this objective.

The Ghana COVID-19 Education Response Plan outlines some strategies for post COVID-19 recovery. First, it intends to establish accelerated education, remedial and catch-up programmes targeting children who were excluded from remote learning. While an education administrator at the GES insists that this ‘plan will be co-designed and co-created by all stakeholders through broad consultations’, CSOs and private educational providers argue that what the GES refers to as ‘consultation’ is often ‘information’ about policies already decided (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2020).

Second, it proposes investment in infrastructure to build a future-ready (resilient) education system that can address the vulnerabilities exposed by COVID-19. While the education ministry intends to leverage the existing infrastructure of the Ghana Library Board to collaborate with third-party content and digital infrastructure providers, it remains unclear how and when this will commence.

Despite a quick national policy response to the closure of schools, systemic challenges exposed the inequity in gender, social inclusion and distribution of public goods and services in Ghana. To address these challenges, some immediate to long-term strategies must be deployed.

In the short-term, resource – learning materials, activity and guidance notes, and radio sets – must be procured and distributed to households in rural and urban-poor communities. The current GLTV and GLRRP programmes should not only contain COVID-19 sensitive information, they should also include child protection and gender equity messages to sensitise children and guardians about the effects of increased unpaid and gendered roles on the health and education of girls during the long home stay. CSOs should continue to monitor government responses and hold them to account.

In the long term, there must be conscious investment in using technology to improve infrastructure for remote and distance learning. The Ministry of Education must revive CENDLOS to develop guidelines for a blended approach to education delivery. The Education Management Information System data-collection systems must be reformed to enable digitisation and decentralisation and to allow timely and relevant data to inform decision-making at both local and national levels.

Conclusion

Corona virus has shaken the educational sector of Nigeria and Ghana off its strength. In fact, looking at the trend of the pandemic, it could be something we are going to live with for a long period of time. There is no doubt that there is going to be a serious set-back in the development of Nigeria and education systems if the coronavirus pandemic lockdown is not properly managed by the respective governments and

concerned personnel. Schools calendar have been disrupted, there is reduction in the economic development of the country which has affected the education finance as well. Since the family income depends on the economic growth of any country, most of the families in Nigeria and Ghana are experiencing economic hardship as a result of the pandemic lockdown. Some of the vulnerable families having their children under the federal government free feeding in Nigeria scheme are being faced with the challenge of going in search of food for their children while they were with them at home. Unfortunately, the illiteracy level of some parents in Nigeria and Ghana is not helping the matter because not every parent or guidance could handle the black and white teaching of their children. This on a long run will cause children in these category to experience a great set-back in their academic endeavours, in fact many of them may from there dropped out of school and took some other endeavours of life.

The pandemic has led to the shortage of funds for the educational system, parents as well are being faced with the reality of having to pay extra cost on their children academics as they resumed to school. This is certainly a trying time for the economies, a hit on the sustainable development of the countries and it is not going to be an easy experience for some households who could barely afford daily balanced diet who have been sacrificing a lot for their children to get the best education for them to become a useful and acceptable member of the society. It will not be surprising if a larger percentage of students dropped out of schools after the pandemic lockdown in Nigeria and Ghana as a result of inability of parents to bear the cost of financing their children's education.

The outbreak of the corona virus coupled with the lockdown of schools at various levels of education in Nigeria and Ghana has served as test for the government and education stakeholders for teaching-learning activities. Unfortunately, the Nigeria and Ghana education system arrived at this point not fully prepared. It was observed that even the E-Learning chosen as the alternatives to be used in reaching out to the learners in the period of lockdown has not successfully worked because of non-employment of expert to manage the IT section of the Nigeria Education system, huge tariff charges from various network providers in Nigeria, economic inequalities and social gaps in Ghana. Also, with the move to reopen schools to the learners in terminal classes, there was adequate time to prepare them for their respective terminal examinations, but this can only be possible if the government and the schools authorities make available preventive measures and facilities to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the various educational organs.

Suggestions

1. Educational systems of Nigeria and Ghana should put human and material resources in place to ensure that the future of education system is secured and not been disrupted with the emergence reoccurrence of disease.
2. Having observed that E-Learning chosen as the alternatives to be used in reaching out to the learners in the period of lockdown was not effectively and efficiently implemented, Nigeria ministry of education should employ experts in the area of ICT to further introduce programs that will enhance the productivity of the education sector in order to compete with the outside world even in the period of global pandemic lockdown.
3. Educational stakeholders should ensure adequate funding of the educational sector of Ghana and Nigeria so that there can still be effective running of schools and educational institutions even in the occurrence of unexpected global and local pandemics.

4. There should be a redesign of curriculum in all levels of education to allow for a flexibility that can accommodate unforeseen and unexpected occurrences like the coronavirus.

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