

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RURAL  
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE  
OF PRIVATE SECTORS**

**BY**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

COVID'19 was detected in mainland China in December of 2019. Every continent in the world has been affected by this highly contagious disease, with nearly a million cases diagnosed in over 200 countries worldwide. The cause of this outbreak is a new virus, known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On February 12, 2020, WHO officially named the disease caused by the novel coronavirus as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (PsychCentral, 2020).

Before the outbreak of the disease which consequently led to the lockdown of several countries with their various economic sectors around the world, Education inclusive. Prior to the Covid'19 pandemic both civil and non-governmental organizations were working round the clock to ensure a reduction in the number of out of school children. The Nigeria education system has been in a state of crisis. According to a 2019 [Executive Summary on Poverty and Inequality](#) by the National Bureau of Statistics, 40.1% of the population in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the largest producer of oil in Africa, is classified as poor. That is, on average, four out of 10 Nigerians has per capita expenditure below \$400. UNESCO in 2013, ranked Nigeria as the country with the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, approximately 10.5 million. Present research shows that over 14 million children are out of school in Nigeria.

Despite that, 60% of the children enrolled in primary school are not learning. The quality of teaching and learning is so poor that many are not able to transit to secondary school, and of those that go to secondary school many cannot even read and write when they finish and only about 10% make it to the tertiary level. This has severe consequences on the development of our country. The sad reality is that

over 60% of these out of school children are living and growing up in rural or underserved communities across Nigeria.

The continuous spread of the covid'19 forced both the federal and state governments in Nigeria on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2020 to shut down schools indefinitely across all levels of learning. The covid'19 pandemic and school closure has further exposed and widened the education inequity gap in Nigeria, especially for children in low income and underserved communities. During this period, children from high income families switched to learning virtually. There felt little or no impact of school closure. But it was an entirely different scenario for children from low income families are and communities. These children live in communities where access to electricity is difficult, parents are mostly local farmers and they can't access or afford Technology.

Teachers in rural communities are less equipped, lack requisite knowledge and training to employ technology in the classroom.

## **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The closure of schools in Nigeria was an urgent need by the government in order to curtail the continuous spread of the disease among citizens. Schools across all levels immediately shut down. Top private schools in Nigeria immediately resorted to online classes and some state government like the Lagos and Ogun launched Radio and Television classes for students in primary and secondary schools. While those in urban communities could afford the online classes with their televisions, devices and access to electricity, it was a different scenario for children in rural or low income communities. For most of these children, the school environment is a safe space, there is low supply of electricity and lack of access to learning devices.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

- i To assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on rural education in Nigeria
- ii To analyze the role of private sectors on ameliorating the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on rural education.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Iprojectmaster (2020) conducted a study that examined the impact of covid-19 on education in Nigeria. This study was guided by the following objectives; to examine the impact of Covid-19 virus Nigerian Education system, to determine the relationship between COVID 19 virus pandemic and education in Nigeria, to evaluate the awareness of COVID-19 virus among students in Nigeria, and to evaluate the after effect of Covid-19 pandemic on education system in Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive and explanatory design; questionnaires in addition to library research were applied in order to collect data. Primary and secondary data sources were used and data were analyzed using the chi-square statistical tool at a 5% level of significance which was presented in frequency tables and percentage. The respondents under the study were 100 residents of Lagos State, Nigeria. The study findings revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has a significant impact on education in Nigeria; based on the findings from the study, schools need resources to rebuild the loss in learning during the pandemic.

For the education sector, year 2020 has been a challenging and turbulent one. The first inkling of what the year held for Nigerians manifested in the first quarter when the world woke up to the reality of the coronavirus pandemic that threatened everything the sector held dear. As part of measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic, the Federal Government, on March 23, closed schools and educational institutions nationwide.

The closure, which lasted for more than six months, halted teaching and learning across the country; academic calendar took a hit and almost everything came to a standstill. While private schools switched to online learning, most public schools

could not continue learning as they were not prepared, although some states later introduced radio and television teaching programmes.

WeForum in 2020, reported that one major issue that may stem from this inequality is that these kids who currently cannot keep up with their peers because of inaccessibility to digital tools may never catch up and will continue to feel the effect of this gap long after the pandemic is over. This may result in a severely diminishing pool of young adults who have not garnered the necessary skills to stay ahead in the future. With Nigeria already behind in preparing its young people for the workplace of the future, the effects of the pandemic further exacerbate this issue.

There are measures that must be taken to help bridge the divide when the urgent needs of the pandemic subside. They centre largely around Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and government aid. PPPs can do much to improve the quality of, and increase access to, education for poor children in underserved communities.

Candidates for National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE), Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) had to deal with the uncertainty of schedules for their exams. After much pressure from many quarters, government, putting in place COVID-19 guidelines, announced a phased reopening of schools, while most states cancelled the third term. Private schools could not meet their obligations to teachers, parents could not pay school fees, while many school owners who had taken loans could not service them. To save the sub-sector, government offered to support private schools with intervention funds, though not much has been done in this regard.

While efforts were on to contain the pandemic, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reported that about 60.2 million teachers and 1.37 billion students, representing more than three out of four children and youth worldwide were out of the classroom due to the coronavirus pandemic. The body said school closures globally have impacted nearly 80 per cent of world's student population.

A policy paper by the agency's Global Education Monitoring (GEM), warned that global aid on education might decline by \$2 billion as a result of recession caused by COVID-19. This means a 12 per cent drop in international support for education. Aid to education in 2018 reached a record \$15.6 billion, an increase of nine per cent from the previous year. From one year to the next, it rose by six per cent for basic; seven per cent for secondary; and 12 per cent for post-secondary education, providing each with the highest amount of aid ever recorded. The report noted that without new measures, aid to education would only reach 2018 level in 2024, which posed a serious threat to the recovery of the sector from unprecedented disruption caused by coronavirus pandemic (The Guardian, 2020).



### **3.0 DISCUSSION: ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTORS**

The covid'19 pandemic has forced stakeholders in the education sector to begin to rethink education. State governments are beginning to consider the deployment of technology to classroom in order to facilitate learning. The Lagos state government started training for teachers in order to get them equipped on how to use digital technology in the classroom. First Bank of Nigeria has also partnered with the Lagos State Government to provide learning devices for students across the state.

The Ogun State government when it reopened schools after the lockdown directed that there be morning and afternoon shifts at both primary and secondary levels in order to reduce the crowd in schools.

Teach for Nigeria is a Non-governmental organization. Through partnership with state governments and support from donors and funders places fellows to teach for two years in low income communities high need schools. These fellows who are top young graduates from universities sacrifice 2 years of their lives to teach, lead and impact children in underserved communities. During the course of the 2 years they are expected to carry out an initiative called Be The Change (BTC) project in these low income communities that will leave the school community better than they met it.

Quite a no of these fellows displayed great leadership during the lockdown through different initiatives. Some of them prepared and distributed worksheets weekly to kids in rural communities, some were meeting and teaching kids in clusters in various communities and some even went ahead to seek for funds, purchased tablets, loaded the tabs with videos and other learning resources and distributed to these children for free.

Some of these fellows during the lockdown got funds, bought relief materials and foods for families in rural communities. A fellow has organized a learning platform that is helping to equip teachers in rural communities with digital skills.

Slum2School is a Non-governmental Organization in Nigeria that's focused on ensuring that children in low income or rural communities have access to quality education. During the pandemic, with the support of her donors and funders, slum2school was able to distribute laptops to students in a low income community in Lagos, Nigeria. They were able to also launch a virtual learning studio where they taught these students from. Slum2School has also adopted and refurbished schools in Lagos State into modern schools.

Street2School is another NGO that has displayed great leadership during and after the covid'19 pandemic lockdown. They identify and cater for vulnerable children in low income communities. They build schools for these children to learn through the support of donors and funders. Just recently in collaboration with interswitch, they gave out new school bags to students in low income communities.

These are the works of few private sectors in the education sector. More private sectors are needed to come on board either by supporting the existing ones or taking up new initiatives.

Private sectors for instance can take up projects of fully digitalizing schools in rural communities. They can equip teachers with resources and materials needed to fully go digital.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The covid'19 pandemic has revealed the dearth in Nigeria's education system, most especially rural education. Children in rural education account for over 60% of the school children in Nigeria. If education at the grass root is not given maximum attention it becomes difficult for any developmental strides to be recorded. The role of private sectors in making up for the lapse of government and ensuring that children in low-income communities continue to learn cannot be overemphasized. The private sectors through various NGOs continue to do so much for rural education in Nigeria. More private sectors need to come on board and join in providing support for children in low-income communities to continue to learn.

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