



# The Pros and Cons of CoronaVirus on Students of Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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## Abstract

The study provided discourse on the Pros and Cons of COVID 19 on Students of Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The inception of COVID 19 diseases which was first diagnosed in Wuhan, China in December 2019, occasioned the immediate closure of all educational institutions in Nigeria by government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in March 2020. This painful but necessary development was in a bid to contain the dreaded virus which can easily spread through close contact with affected persons. Although, the corona virus lockdown experienced in over 70% of major towns and cities of the world is perceived as having negative impact on almost all sectors including the educational sector, however, it has been observed that there is the other side of the coin that exposes the positive aspect of the COVID 19 lockdown even on education and by extension, students of public secondary schools in Rivers State. Most school managers and administrators of schools have devised innovative means of managing the educational challenges posed by the emergency lockdown of schools while at the same time, keeping to the protocols and guidelines put in place by World Health Organization (WHO), Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and other medical experts in and outside the country.

**Keywords:** Corona Virus (COVID-19), Pros and Cons, Public Secondary School, Pandemic, Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC), World Health organization (WHO), Rivers State.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus known as COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic that was earlier diagnosed in Wuhan China in late December 2019 (WHO, 2020). The World health organization (WHO) on the 11th of February 2020 christened the virus “COVID 19 “as declared by Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus who doubles as the Director General of the organization (WHO, 2020). The new Coronavirus since its first index case was diagnosed in Wuhan has gained wide spread

knowledge as statistics shows that the virus has spread to almost all the cities in various Continents (Africa, America, Antarctica, Asia, Australia/Oceania, and Europe) of the world claiming more than a million lives and over 5 million persons has tested positive to the virus (Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). Here in Nigeria, the virus has also gain popularity after its first index case was reported in Lagos State on the 19th of February 2020, the index case was an Italian Nigerian based worker with Lafarge Cement Company in Ewekoro, Ogun State.

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was established in the year 2011 in response to the cumbersome tasks of public health emergencies and to enhance Nigeria's preparedness and response to epidemics through prevention, detection and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases (Cennimo, 2020). NCDC announced that it has been on the forefront of combating this disease. NCDC through its official twitter handle, daily announces the update on the virus across the nation. As at 20th May 2020, the virus has spread to 34 States of the nation including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with exception of Cross Rivers State. As at this date, Nigeria has recorded over three hundred and ninety two (392) deaths and 15,181 have been reported in 35 States and the Federal Capital Territory, though it was reported that the index case in Nigeria survived the virus.

The major symptoms of this virus as reported by Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) are pneumonia, dry cough, high temperature, difficulties in breathing etc. It has been advice by NCDC that with good hygiene routines like washing of hands with soap under running water for at least 20 seconds or the use of alchohol based sanitizer, social distancing, wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), the community spread of the virus can be reduced to its barest minimum.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Pros and Cons**

The phrase 'pros and cons' is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase pro et contra, 'for and against', It actually means 'the positive and negative aspects of an argument' and has been in use in the abbreviated form since the 16th century, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. 'Pros and cons' is a well-established standard usage; Oxford's larger dictionaries do not mark it as 'informal' or in any way restricted in use. The much longer alternative is the phrase 'arguments for and against', it could be used interchangeably with advantages and disadvantages.

### **The Concept of CoronaVirus (COVID-19)**

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) According to Cennimo (2020) is adisease caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV). This virus was first identified amidst an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency as the disease had widely spread to major cities globally. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009.

Illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 was recently termed COVID-19 by the WHO, the new acronym derived from "coronavirus disease 2019. The name was chosen to avoid stigmatizing

the virus's origins in terms of populations, geography, or animal associations. WHO (2020) overview on COVID 19 describes Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Majority of the persons infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and may recover without requiring any special treatment or vaccine. However, older people, and those with underlying medical issues like cardio diseases, High blood pressure, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, cancers and tumors are more likely to develop severe illness that might end up fatal if not handled with care.

### **Pandemics in Schools**

Pandemics such as Covid19 has created wider disturbance of schooling activities in all spheres of academic life. Aside from its immediate effect on tutoring, the effect of the pandemic incorporates the imaginable utilization of school offices as emergency clinics, as in some provincial regions the school might be the main administrative structure accessible. That may cause lengthier disturbance of the educational schedule making the structure inaccessible for instructing and learning purposes. Likewise, as a feature of the methods for dealing with stress (examined beneath) the act of offering elective administrations of remote learning may work better for those students in family units with better network and with higher starting advanced capacity (Björklund & Salvanes, 2011). This leaves those effectively distraught further behind, and closing down schools is not the improper way of dealing with the stress, may infer intensification in disparity in the educational system.

### **Secondary Education in Nigeria**

In contrast to most British colonized countries in the past, Nigeria began realizing meaningful changes to its educational sector in the 1980s, whereby, secondary education was a priority in such changes. In the former educational system, copying the British model, students received a JSSC Certificate (Junior Secondary School Certificate) at the end of the completion of their ninth year of education. These sets of students progress into SSS classes (Senior Secondary School) where they are prepared for external examinations in the likes of WAEC (West African School Certificate), Ordinary Level General Certificate Education (“O” Level GCE). Such certificates are issued at the end of the 11th year of their study. However, in 1989, Nigerian government phased out the “O” Level GCE, interested students in the enrolment into tertiary Schools or Universities continues in the two year form six and sits for General Certificate of Advanced Level in other to obtain “A” Level GCE certificate.

The Nigerian government also, in 1982, came up with a new system called twelve year secondary school scheme with a 6 year secondary school system after completing the six years of primary education. At the third year of secondary education, students are enrolled to sit for the JSS Exams (Junior Secondary School Examination) and successful students will be issued Junior School Leaving Certificate (JSLC). While interested successful students progresses with another three years duration. At the end of the three years senior students will be enrolled and prepared to sit for an external examination like West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSC), General Certificate Examination (GCE). Students are tested based on their choice of subjects; Arts students were tested in subjects like: English, Literature, Economics, History, Government, Commerce, Geography, Fine Arts etc., while science students are tested for subjects like : Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Additional Mathematics, English Language,

Mathematics are common subject offered by both arts and science students of secondary school. West African Examination Council (WAEC), a body responsible in certifying students' academic achievement has the grading scheme as thus: A1 (Distinction); B1 (Excellent); B2 & B3 (Very good); C4,C5, C6 (Good); D7 (Fair); E8 (poor); F9 ( Fail). In the Nigerian educational system, for a student to gain admission from secondary education to tertiary especially into the university, the child is expected to have a minimum six credits in external examination or alternatively opt for a direct entry through one year of remedial studies. It is important to note that tertiary institutions have higher admission requirement and also higher grade level to successfully gain admission. Students who do not have a satisfactory result in their WAEC examination may opt for GCE to argument their academic lapses. They are also required to forward their transcript to the relevant bodies responsible for the determination of their academic performance in lieu of WASSC or GCE.

Vocational education at the senior secondary school level is also offered in Nigerian educational sector. This type of education just like the senior and the junior secondary education has a minimum of 3 years duration. When a student completes and obtains the junior school living certificate (JSLC), students can further sit to obtain the National Technical Certificate, National Commercial Certificate or the National Vocational Certificate as the case may be. Consequently, teacher's training courses are also available to be offered at the senior secondary educational level. The teachers grade 11 certificate is also obtained after a two year primary teachers training is acquired.

Furthermore, in 1998, the Nigerian educational system adopted the 6-3-3-4 system of education which replaced the 6-5-4 system. In the 6-3-3-4 system, students are required to spend six(6) years of primary education, followed by three (3) years of junior secondary education, and then a three(3) year senior secondary education while a four (4) years minimum is spent in the university with exception of few professional courses like Law and Medicine.

Students in Secondary schools spend six years in school, Three years in Junior Secondary school (JSS), and 3 year of Senior Secondary School (SSS). Secondary School Education in Nigeria ought to be free and compulsory for children within the age group. At the level of the 3 years of JSS education, students offer such subjects as Mathematics, English language, Social Studies, Civic education, Home Economics, Religious Studies, Integrated Science, etc. The combination of the six years primary education and the three year of senior secondary education forms the 9- 3-4. In this system of education, students are expected to spend a total minimum of six (6) years in the secondary i.e. three years in junior secondary and three years in senior secondary. The average age group of students in the Secondary category of students in Nigeria ranges from 10 to 18 years.

Secondary school curriculum anchors on four (4) core subjects while four or five elective subjects are selected to complete the number of approved courses for secondary education. Examples of the core courses are: Mathematics, English, Civic Education, and Economics. The students will then be made to select from the pool of elective courses like: Chemistry, Physics, Integrated Science, Literature, Geography, History, Social Studies, Home Economics, Agricultural Science, Food and Nutrition, Commerce, Technical Drawing, Fine Arts, depending on the student's stage choice and of study (Arts or Science, junior or senior secondary school). In Nigeria, thirty six (36) states and the Federal Capital Territory make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Every state in Nigeria has a minimum of two Federal Government Colleges (FGC). Some states like Rivers State has one of the colleges as a mixed school while the other college is either an all-male or all female school. All Federal Government Colleges gets her funding and

managers directly from the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education. Both academic and non-academic members of staff are direct employees of FGN.

Qualification requirement of federal government recruited teachers is a minimum of bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed.) or a degree in a particular subject like Mathematics, English, Chemistry, and Computer, etc. These federal government owned schools serves as models for maintenance and actualization of the FGN ideals of what a secondary school ought to be. Admission into Federal Government owned schools is purely by merit and not favoritism. Interested students in primary six (6) enrolled to sit for the national entrance examination, successful students are expected to pay subsidized fees that is as low as twenty five thousand naira which when converted to United States dollars is as low as sixty nine dollar and eight cents only. The Federal Government assumes the responsibility of funding all Federal Government colleges in other to achieve a smooth and successful day to day running of the schools. There are also state owned secondary schools where funding is the sole responsibility of the State Government, though the state owned school is not at par with the federal owned schools as some of these schools are being neglected by the state government sometimes due to political interference.

State schools ought to be free of charge but it has been observed that secondary school students in the state school are made to buy books , school bags, school shoes, school uniforms and other necessary items needed in schools. These items accrue to an estimated high cost of about fifty thousand naira only per academic session. The teaching qualifications of state owned secondary schools are a minimum of National Certificate of Education (NCE) or a Bachelor degree in education (B.Ed.). However, it is worthy to note that this is in contrast with the quality of teachers we have in state government owned schools, these could be due to tribalism, bribery and corruption, political interference and 'godfatherism'.As a result, most schools are under staffed, salaries are paid to 'ghost workers', the problem of low budget and lack of incentives and irregular payment of staff salary

A few State owned school just like the federal colleges assumes the position of elite colleges due to their historically high standards, most prominent and famous individuals in the society are products of such schools and by extension members of their alumni association. However, nowadays, most of such State owned schools are now a shadow of itself as the standards have dropped drastically due to poor funding, mismanagement and general poor maintenance culture experienced in most government owned institutions. Also through the influx of private schools which is observed to be better managed by their administrators reduce the enrollment of students in State Government schools.

### **Preventive Measures of COVID 19 as Prescribed by WHO**

Though the Coronavirus diseases is in no doubt a dreaded disease which has brought untold hardship and fear amongst many families of the world, the good news is that WHO and other medical experts have declared some hygienic protocols that could help to contain the virus. Some of the most reliable methods to prevent and slow down transmission of the disease from spreading from one person to the other is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the symptoms, and causes and how it spreads. Washing of hands thoroughly with clean water and soap under running water for at least 20 seconds will enable protection for oneself and others around him or her. Alternatively one could make use of an alcohol based sanitizer for rubbing of

hands frequently and then touching the eyes, mouth, nose and indeed the face with dirty hands should be avoided by all means NCDC (2020).

### **Spread of the Virus (COVID-19)**

Just like other infectious diseases, the COVID-19 virus spreads mostly through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs, sneezes or yawns, WHO (2020). Therefore it is important that the practice of respiratory etiquette (for example, coughing into a flexed elbow or a tissue paper, observing social distancing of a minimum of 1.5meters and the use of face mask) should not be undermined. Medical experts have observed that when these protocols are neglected especially in public places like the bank, schools, markets, malls, Churches, Mosques, other places of worship, eateries, motor parks, hospitals, etc., it could portend a grave danger on the entire neighborhood.

### **Claims of COVID -19 Cure**

As at the time of this writing, there are no specific vaccines or treatment for COVID-19 cure. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential cure. For example, Madagascar, an African country came up with the claim of discovering a cure for the COVID 19 called “COVID Organics”, The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has in recent years recognized the concept of "Traditional Knowledge". Making this claim more viable. Given the high risks and sensitivity of the COVID-19 pandemic, African countries or other countries in the world cannot expect to make such claims without clinical proofs that will not be challenged. If the belief is that the Western scientists are inclined to find a way to "kill" such claims as part of "scientific imperialism", then we have scientists versed in standard "western" scientific traditions that should first do the job in the continent, and then provide evidence of that internal verification. Science is a matter of accuracy for the most part, so what is scientifically true can be largely, even if not always absolutely, proven. We have seen this in the controversies over other Covid-19 medication hypotheses around Hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir and so on, as well as the controversies over "cures" for HIV/AIDS.

The jury is still out on a cure for COVID-19. It could certainly come from Africa with hard work, but we can't just expect that we or anyone else in the world should take anyone's word for it without adequate proof and scientific verifications. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) is expected to continually provide updated information as soon as clinical findings becomes available. The COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis. Many countries have (rightly) decided to close schools, colleges and universities. The severe short-term disruption is felt by many families around the world: home schooling is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity, but also to children's social life and learning. Teaching is done online, on an untested and unprecedented scale. Student assessments are also done online, with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments have simply been cancelled. Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality.

## **Impacts of COVID 19 on Education: Schools**

The COVID-19 pandemic health crisis at a time did force many leaders of various countries to take a difficult but necessary decision to close all schools, colleges and institutions of higher education. The crisis sets the dilemma policymakers are facing between closing schools (reducing contact and saving lives) and keeping them open (allowing workers to work and maintaining the economy). Teaching is gradually becoming digital with the use of all forms of social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, zoom, Google meet), etc.

Most of these platforms are scientifically unproven for academic purposes and unprecedented scale. Student assessments are also moving online, with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for parents, students and even the government. Many assessments have simply been cancelled. Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences.

## **Impacts of COVID 19 on Education: Family**

Amid the lockdown, most children, had childishly thought that the closure of schools automatically means a license to play, but perhaps to the disappointment of some, they have not generally been sent home to play but the idea is that they continue their education at home either through online learning or through home schooling, in the hope of not missing out of their academic work. Families are central to education and are widely agreed to provide major inputs into a child's learning, as described by Bjorklund and Salvanes (2011).

The present global-scale increase in home schooling might initially be thought to be seen as reasonably positive in outcome, as it shows likely to be effective. But in the real sense of it, this role is seen as a complement to the input from school authorities. Parents supplement a child's mathematics learning by practicing counting or solving simple mathematics problems in everyday life; or they alternate history lessons with embarking on a trip or excursions to important monuments or museums. Many parents globally do successfully school their children at home, generalizing this claim over the whole population may be unfounded. So while global home schooling will surely produce some inspiring moments, some irate moments, some entertaining moments and some exasperated moments, it seems very unlikely that it will on average replace the learning lost from the face to face learning at school. But the bigger picture is that: there will likely be significant disparities between families in the extent to which they can help their children learn.

The key differences include (Oreopoulos, 2006) the quantity of time available to devote to teaching, the non-cognitive skills of the parents, resources (for example, not everyone will have the kit to access the best online material), more so here in Nigeria were statistics had shown that most persons live below the poverty level with an income of less than a dollar per day, the luxury of providing an internet facilities for their kids will be far-fetched and also the amount of Information and communications technology (ICT) knowledge acquired by parents may not be adequate to teach their children at home – You can't give what you don't have, therefore, it's hard to help your child learn something that you may not fully understand yourself. Consequently, this episode will lead to an increase in the inequality of human capital growth and development for the affected persons.

## Impact of COVID 19 on Students Assessments

The closure of schools, colleges and institution of higher learning not only interrupted the teaching and learning process for students and teachers around the world; most schools here in Nigeria and even globally, were at the verge of conducting their second term or semester examination and assessment when the government declared the closure to reduce the possibility of community transmission of the virus, therefore many exams have been either postponed or out rightly cancelled. Internal assessments are perhaps thought to be less important and many have been simply cancelled. But their point is to give information about the child's progress for families and teachers. The loss of this information delays the recognition of both high potential and learning difficulties and can have harmful long-term consequences for the child. Looking at the consequence of a major IT crash in the testing system in Denmark is critical at this point. As a result of this, some children could not take the test. Authors found that participating in the test increased the score in a reading test two years later by 9% of a standard deviation, with similar effects in mathematics. These effects are more pronounced children from disadvantaged homes.

Most importantly, the lockdown of academic organizations and institutions of learning not only affected internal assessments and grading but also the academic calendar. In the UK, for example, all exams for the main public qualifications – GCSEs and A levels – were all cancelled in most institutions of learning. As the world continues to record more positive cases of COVID-19 the lockdown is yet to be relaxed in most affected countries in the world, we will likely observe similar actions around the countries yet to record any positive case of the virus as it is very likely to spread round the world (WHO 2020). One potential alternative for the cancelled assessments is to use 'predicted grades', but Murphy and Wyness (2020) show that these are often incorrect, and that among high achieving students, the predicted grades for those from disadvantaged families is relatively lower than those from more advantaged families. Another solution is to replace sightless exams with teacher assessments.

Observations from various locations show systematic deviations between un-blind and blind examinations, where the direction of the bias typically depends on whether the child belongs to a group that usually performs well (Rangvid, 2015). For example, if girls usually perform better in a subject, an un-blind evaluation of a boy's performance is likely to be downward biased. Because such assessments are used as a key qualification to enter higher education, the move to un-blind subjective assessments can have potential long-term consequences for the equality of opportunity.

It is also possible that some students' careers might benefit from the interruptions. For example, in Norway it has been decided that all 10th grade students will be awarded a high-school degree, and Maurin and McNally (2008) show that the 1968 abandoning of the normal examination procedures in France (following the student riots) led to positive long-term labour market consequences for the affected cohort.

In higher education of learning, many universities and colleges are replacing face to face exams with online assessment tools. This is a new area for both teachers and students, and assessments will likely have larger measurement error than usual. Research shows that employers use educational credentials such as degree classifications and grade point averages to sort applicants (Piopiunik et al., 2020).

The increase in the noise of the applicants' signals will therefore possibly reduce the matching efficiency for new graduates on the labour market, who might experience slower

earnings growth and higher job separation rates. This is costly both to the individual and also to society as a whole (Fredriksson et al., 2018).

### **The Dawn of Electronic Learning (e-Learning) revolution in Nigeria**

The e-learning in some part of the world is not a new concept in promoting education in teaching and learning processes. Presently, some institutions in Nigeria are using it to promote distance learning (DL) and a lifetime learning experience. E-learning according to Sale (2002), is the use of electronic technology to deliver education and training applications, monitor learner's performance and report learner's progress. Hedge and Hayward (2004), defined it as an innovative approach for delivering electronically mediated, well-designed, learner-centered and interactive learning environments to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the internet and digital technologies in consonance with instructional design principles. It is all about learning with the use of computers. In this contemporary age, the use of computer and other ICT facilities for teaching and learning is an innovative way of acquiring knowledge through the internet or through the offline – CD-ROM. The online involves the use of Internet Explorer/Navigator. It may be in form of Audio, Visual, and or Audio/Visual. The convergence of the internet and learning, or Internet enabled learning is called e-learning. The applications and process of e-learning include web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classroom and digital collaboration where contents is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet, audio and or video tapes, satellite TV and CD-ROM (Hedge & Hayward, 2004; Islam, 1997).

The development of e-learning in Nigeria could be traced back to the development of telecommunication which began in 1886 when e-cable connections was established by the colonial masters between Lagos and the colonial office in London to transmit information and receive feedback. By 1893, all government offices in Lagos were provided with telephone service for easy communication, feedback and easy access and later all other parts of the country were provided with telephone services. A lot of changes have been witnessed in the telecommunication industry since 1886. The provision of telecommunication services was initially monopolized by the Nigeria Telecommunication (NITEL) until sometimes in 1990's when the federal government of Nigeria commenced Privatization policy of telecommunication industry. Four (4) private telephone service providers (Mtel – NITEL, Econet Now Vmobile, MTN and Communication Investment Limited – CIL) were initially licensed to provide General System for Mobile Services. CIL license was later revoked for inability to pay the license fee before the prescribed date which was later given to Globacom (Glo) Nigeria.

Most educational institutions (Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions) in Nigeria and even globally have begun to respond to the lockdown order and social distancing protocols occasioned by the COVID-19 Pandemic, by the paradigm shift towards e-learning. In fact, the pandemic has necessitated a boom in online education worldwide. It became a catalyst for educational institutions to rethink and redesign innovative methods of administering teaching and learning experiences. In the past years, there were apprehensions about the impact technology could have on young people's learning, growth and development, especially through constant usage at the home and school. Ironically, technology is now being used to ensure that education is not disrupted, and learning continues. Interestingly, current studies have shown that technology can be used to support learning even here in Nigeria and in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

The pandemic analyzes the eagerness of educational institutions to deal with a crisis that requires online learning. Many educational institutions in the western world seem to be prepared

for this eventuality. For instance, in the United States, a national online platform was launched for primary and secondary school students at home and free online courses for higher education were made available. Some schools in Nigeria are leveraging online learning platforms like Google classroom, a platform where the teacher provides reading resources and explanatory videos that the students can watch anytime. Online games and applications are now being used to engage and interact with students to keep them busy at home.

The need for e-Learning in times like this cannot be over emphasized as it offers highly effective learning environments where students are in control of their learning and can learn at their own pace with flexible scheduling and the possibility of use of any device available such as computers, tablets, phones, and laptops. Teachers can give direct feedback on assessments and discussions can occur between students and their teachers. E-Learning has become an invaluable resource for teachers who can use this medium to share knowledge with their students. It encourages a student focused approach whereby teachers can tailor their teaching to the individuality of the students. There are many online resources that can be used to support learning in primary and secondary education level. For example, a Learning Management System (LMS) like Moodle helps teachers to keep track of their students' progress while students learn new concepts at their own pace and gain ownership of their experiences. In these times of social distancing, the LMS has proven itself useful for teachers and students.

### **The Cons of COVID-19**

The emergence of digitalized teaching and learning in Nigeria due to COVID-19 pandemic is driving digital transformation and exposing the differences between people and communities at an unbelievable manner. The compulsory lock down enforced by Nigerian Government from 30th March 2020 to contain the pandemic within major metropolises has refocused conversations on e-learning. With the shutdown of schools, some schools have easily transitioned to e-Learning as teachers have begun to use online resources to continue students' learning. However, for schools located in the rural areas who do not have consistent access to technology, continuing learning have proven difficult. There are therefore concerns about how students in rural areas can continue learning if the pandemic goes on for a prolonged period.

This brings to bear the salient issues that surrounds the digital divide in education in Nigeria with problems such as no or inadequate ICT facilities and equipment, lack of qualified teachers who are digital natives, epileptic power supply, poor internet network, high cost of data plans, no network coverage etc. It is disheartening that the digital divide will disrupt learning for most students in Nigeria especially those in the rural and semi-urban areas as the quality of teaching during this lockdown will be heavily dependent on the level and quality of digital access by all stakeholders (Government, students, parents, teachers and guardians). For some students, e-learning will be easy on personal tablets and computers, while students in rural areas will rely on learning via WhatsApp, radio, TV, or email, or nothing at all.

As classes are transitioning online, students could be exempted from learning opportunities because of lack of access to digital devices or cost of data plans. A pro-active government would provide hi-tech and low-tech solutions to ensure the continuity of learning for all students, with special focus on low-tech solutions for under privileged students because no child should be left behind. In the future, if quality education is dictated by access to the latest technologies, the digital divide could be more extreme. Sadly, a lot of Nigerian kids have been staying idle at home with parents and school managers striving to work out feasible learning

methodology, with little or no success. For some, the idea of homeschooling is not just realizable considering the socio-economic effect of the shutdown, while for others, it is a necessity in the interest of the children. The Guardian checks, however, reveal rising frustrations for schools, parents, and students, who noted that lockdown of this measure has put a strain on families for apparent reasons. In developed areas, teachers are using Zoom and Google classroom to teach various subjects, and these tools cannot work effectively where there is poor connectivity. It is worthy of mention that in this part of the world, Internet connectivity is still a major issue.

Again, the Federal Government of Nigeria who had earlier announced its plans to commence online classes for students in its 104 unity schools. In the interim, students are asked to stay glued to their radio and television for educational programs. Regrettably, the much-touted online learning seems to be gathering momentum only in the media, much has been achieved in that regard and the existing platforms are not appropriate. In fact, parents on their part have alleged that the system/platforms adopted by the government and individual schools have not only succeeded in further widening inequality gap, but has also unjustly separated the wheat from the chaff. While elitist schools are partnering with parents through various learning apps, email and recorded video keep their children on track, some are at the mercy of electricity service providers to at least listen/view the government's radio and television program, while others are oblivious of the pandemic homeschooling for obvious reasons.

Furthermore, taking a clue from McGregor's theory X, which states that an average human being has dislike for work and would do everything possible to avoid work. For a theory X individual to engage in any meaningful work, the use of force and coercion and supervision is absolutely necessary. Theory X students of public secondary school may have developed a carefree attitude towards their studies. Most students find it extremely difficult to read their books without being coerced or forced. Many students rather engage in activities in their area of interest or just lazy around sleeping almost all through the day. This attitude will in no doubt affect their academic performance negatively which may in turn affect their mental health.

### **Parents Home Schooling Experience**

Narrating her experience, a parent, Mrs. Blessing Ginger-Eke, said, "for some weeks now, the school has been engaging them with online classes. Initially, it was very difficult to log into the school's website because so many parents were trying to log in at the same time. "When you finally logged in, you will be greeted with a prompt notifying you that it has reached the maximum numbers that is required. Although the school kept reassuring parents that they are working to improve on their website, we always try to log in on time from 8:30 am to meet up with the classes at 9 am. "We are also experiencing some issues with network providers and their data services. In our area, all the network providers' data are usually epileptic and they fluctuate so much, which is always frustrating.

To ensure seamless participation in the online classes for our kids, we have tested virtually all the networks to see if we can get a better or steady network but to no avail. "We spend an exorbitant amount of money in subscribing. At first, we subscribed for N5000 and it finished within three days because of the visual classes being taken by my older son in the higher institution. Now, we subscribe with N10, 000, which gives about 40gig and it lasts for just nine days. So far, that is how we have been coping with the kids' online classes in this lockdown. We pray that God will heal our land shortly. Another parent, Mrs. Eucharika Ikpor, said her children are studying on their own as no such exercise is going on. "There is no homeschooling or online

learning for now. My children study on their own. The food consumption is much now, they are becoming lazy as well and glued to phone too. The only good thing about it is the family bonding.”

### **The Pros of COVID-19 Lockdown**

The impact of the dreaded Coronavirus has in no small measure brought about a lot of changes to the world of today, of which many persons are of the opinion that things will hardly go back to normal in the near future. However, some of these changes has been perceived by the writer as positives of the COVID 19 lockdown holidays. Before the COVID compulsory lockdown holidays in Nigeria, most students of public secondary schools especially in Rivers State have little or no awareness of the possibilities of having their classes online or through other forms of media. Parents on the other hand had not thought of an alternative learning procedures for this age group of students apart from the face to face missionary method of teaching. Nowadays, parents are more and more becoming aware of the possibilities of virtual learning for their kids at most parents due to this awareness now make provisions of information and communications facilities like: Television, radio, phones, computers and other gadgets for their children and wards to enable ease of virtual learning.

Also, the Federal, State Government and educational managers are now making researches on innovative ways of continuous teaching and learning in public schools without necessarily having to bring the children under the confines of a life classroom lecture. For example, Rivers State now utilizes the services of the media (Television and Radio) as a medium to teach various subjects while students sits at the comfort of their homes to acquire same knowledge as being physically present in school. Some teachers who before now, are not computer literate and didn't deem it fit to acquire such knowledge make conscious effort to acquire relevant ICT skills required to carry out online teaching and assessment for their students.

Again, it is worthy of note to credit the reunion of most families to the COVID 19 total lockdown holidays that took most families by surprise especially here in Rivers State. Before the lockdown, some children never had the opportunity of their parents spending adequate time with them as most career parents stay longer time at their places of work or their business place than at home. Some leave home so early and return very late at night thereby, denying their children the opportunity of enjoying parents love. Also, parents who before now leave their children at the mercy of their house helps now have ample opportunity to observe their children's character traits and behaviors and then correct and reward where necessary. Parents also utilized these opportunity to teach their children various skills necessary that could empower them financially in future.

Furthermore, spiritual wellbeing of families have also been enhanced as families who before now have difficulty in observing family devotions and worship as a result of their busy schedule, now have ample opportunity and time to gather in family worship which in no doubt have enhanced the spiritual wellbeing of these families. Some families also hook on to watch and join in virtual services been organized by some religious organizations in line with the COVID 19 guidelines and regulations as advised by Nigerian Center for Disease Controls (NCDC).

## **CONCLUSION**

The number of Coronavirus positive cases in Nigeria and Rivers State as at the time of this study is still on the increase. Several countries had no option than to shut down the major cities and towns that are worse affected in order to contain and limit the spread of the virus. Due to the fast spread of this virus, emergency closure of all schools and Universities was declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria, thereby occasioning the abrupt movement of teaching to online platforms and home schooling. Though the world has dealt with other pandemics in the past, COVID-19 has gained wide popularity as it has fast spread into almost all parts of the world. Moreover, the virus is highly contagious and could be spread by infected persons with major symptoms of fever, coughing, difficulty in breathing etc. it's no longer news that asymptomatic patients can equally spread the virus without showing any.

The worry around the virus, and the effort to control it, stems from a lack of previous experience with it. Since the virus is previously unknown, highly contagious, and passes easily from one person to the next, public health and government officials around the globe are working hard to contain the spread of the virus while a vaccine is still unavailable though some countries like Madagascar came up with the claim of inventing a cure for the virus, this claim is still being investigated by WHO. Schools and offices ensure that people can limit their interactions with others and slow the spread of the virus while the healthcare sector copes with the pandemic.

In conclusion, school closures arising from COVID-19 pandemic impact not only learners, teachers, and families, but have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. School closures in response to COVID-19 have shed light on different social and economic issues, including learner's debt, digital learning, and food insecurity, and homelessness, as well as disability services. The impact was harsh for disadvantaged children and their families, causing interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and consequent economic cost to families who could not work.

## **Suggestions for Further Studies**

The following suggestions were made based on the findings and literature reviews. Both Federal and State Government should:

- Inculcate distance learning programs: Governmental policies should be put in place to ensure that learners including those with some form of disabilities and low-income backgrounds have access to distance learning programs;
- Provide adequate modern ICT facilities in public Schools;
- Motivate teachers to acquire relevant ICT skills required for online teaching and learning processes;
- Choose the suitable learning methods based on the status of school closures and home-based quarantines. For now, learning methodologies that require face-to-face instruction should be avoided until an approved cure for the virus is in place;
- Educational managers should design a curriculum model that will embrace the use of distance learning making use of internet based platforms.

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