

**CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL  
SYSTEM: THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES.**

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) which broke up in China and spread to many countries across the world, has led to a long period of lockdown and eventual closure of all educational institutions in Nigeria. This could affect the achievement of educational objectives and endanger the development of the nation. This paper therefore identified the changes in the educational practices as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and the influence of these changes on curriculum content, methods of teaching, teachers' roles as custodian and disseminator of knowledge, teacher's and administrator's location of job performance, health facilities and teaching-learning resources. The changes have posed challenges on the use of digital technologies by teachers and learners, power supply, socio-economic security and educational administrator's supervisory roles. The administrator is responsible for ensuring the achievement of educational objectives. Thus, it was recommended that he should adopt strategies such as improvement of personnel digital skills, adequate provision of relevant teaching-learning and health facilities and ensuring security of lives and properties in schools among others, in order to be able to implement the positive changes and mitigate the negative changes initiated during and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian Educational System, Educational Administrators, Responsibilities, Federal Government of Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

People of all nations and continents across the globe witnessed drastic, unprecedented and unexpected changes in their ways of life at the early period of year 2020 as a result of an outbreak of corona virus disease. The disease was caused by a new type of virus which was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It spread very rapidly to many countries and became a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). It is popularly referred to as COVID-19 (CO for corona, VI for virus, D for disease; and 19 for 2019, the year the disease was first detected (Lawrence, 2020)). It posed challenges to the developed, developing and underdeveloped countries in the world and it led to the death of people in thousands. It has been declared a public health emergency of international concern (UNICEF, 2020). According to the World Health Organisation, its common symptoms are fever, dry cough, tiredness, headache, nasal congestion, and difficulty in breathing, among others. It is transmitted through breathing of

droplets from nose or mouth of a COVID-19 carrier. Touching of eye, nose or mouth with a hand which has been contaminated with the droplets could also be a source of infection.

Effort to prevent the spread of the scourge had led to lockdown which the Federal Government of Nigeria announced in March 2020. People were directed to stay where they were in order to protect themselves from the disease. Public and private establishments, markets and places of religious worship were closed down. Foreign and local transportations were suspended and all educational institutions were closed down. According to the United Nations (2020), COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education system in history. This situation portends danger for Nigeria as a developing country which is in dire need of competent workforce for its service and production industries.

In this paper, the changes experienced in Nigerian education system due to the outbreak of COVID-19 were identified. The paper also highlighted the challenges posed by these new normal and the roles of educational institutions' administrators at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in ensuring effective administration of their organisations. The administrators are the heads who are directly in charge of managing and overseeing the affairs of their educational institutions.

### **The COVID-19 Lockdown**

The first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Nigeria at the end of February 2020 when an Italian citizen who returned to Lagos from Italy was confirmed to have been infected with the virus. Contact tracing of the people on the same flight with him was initiated by the Government and a total of 39 people were eventually quarantined. Another case was reported in early March 2020. The number of cases was on increase and in the last week of March 2020, the Government directed that Nigerian borders should be closed down. The Government also shut down offices

and club houses, banned interstate travels and restricted movements (Alagboso & Abubakar, 2020). The Government also directed the Federal Ministry of Education to close down all public and private schools and ordered staff and students to stay at home.

The lockdown affected educational and socio-economic development of the country. It disrupted the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills at all levels of formal education. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (2020), there was need for the Government to address the socio-economic disruptions caused by the outbreak and also to ensure a balance between preserving lives and livelihood. The Government therefore decided to embark on the process of easing the lockdown stage by stage. It spelt out conditions for movement and interaction among people. These include: mandatory use of facemasks and provision of hand washing facilities in public places, prohibition of mass gathering of more than 20 people for religious and social programmes, banning of religious worship in mosques and churches, control of access to markets and other locations of economic activities, mandatory temperature check in all public places, continuous closure of schools and encouragement of educational institutions to adopt remote learning system (Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, 2020).

### **Education during the Period of Lockdown**

The Federal Government directed all educational institutions to close down from March 23<sup>rd</sup> in order to contain the spread of corona virus (World Literacy Foundation, 2020). Private and public schools at primary, secondary and tertiary levels were closed down in compliance with Government directives. Hence, teaching and learning activities were put on hold in all the educational institutions. Parents and guardians, who were also forced to stay indoor as a result of

the pandemic, became teachers. Many private schools organised a variety of online teaching and assessment of learning outcomes such as e-learning, remote learning and other types of virtual learning methods. Some State Governments e. g. Lagos and Ogun States prepared radio and television lessons for students in public schools (World Economic Forum, 2020a). Teachers and their students also engaged in blended learning when the lockdown was partially eased and the teachers were able to interact physically with their learners.

The Government identified three strategies for reopening of schools while the lockdown continued: reopening based on grade levels, reopening for final year students to be able to write external examinations, and localised reopening of schools based on regions with few cases of the pandemic. Schools were to reopen on meeting all conditions laid down by the Government.

The Government approved resumption of final year secondary school students as from 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 to enable them prepare for year 2020 West African Senior School Certificate Examination which came up from 17<sup>th</sup> August to 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. Also, Junior Secondary School pupils who were in exit classes resumed for Basic Education Certificate Examination as from 10<sup>th</sup> August to prepare for their examinations which started on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020. Other levels of Basic and Secondary schools were directed to open as from 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 while tertiary institutions were expected to open as from 12<sup>th</sup> October provided they complied with Government directives on health security.

### **Changes in the Education System as a Result of COVID-19.**

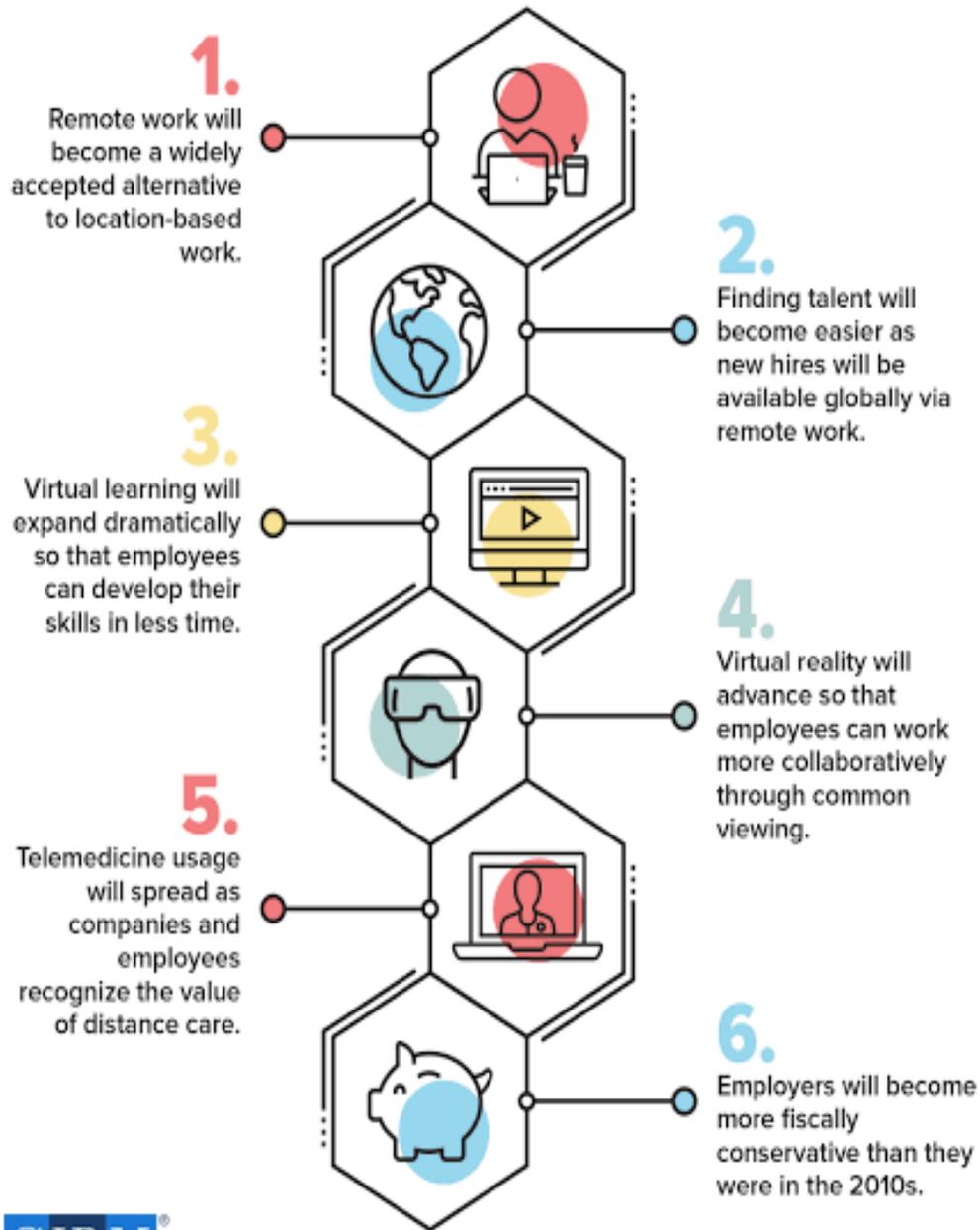
COVID-19 which started as a health challenge later resulted in socio-economic and psychological problems. These further created problems for the education system and forced many changes into the system.

Rios (2020) observed that emergence of COVID-19 would necessitate changes in planning and implementation of school curriculum. In curriculum planning there would be need for incorporating behavioral, socio-emotional and organizational skills so that the students would be creative, self reliant and confident to take responsibilities for their actions in any period of crisis. In curriculum implementation, Rios observed that there should be a change in method of teaching and learning and that face-to-face method would need to be supported by online methods.

In the same vein, the World Economic Forum (2020b) highlighted four different ways in which COVID-19 had changed the education system. These changes are evident in the way we conduct the educational programmes in an interconnected world, the roles of the educator, the teaching of life skills required for the future and the use of technology for education delivery. The Forum noted that educational activities all over the world are interrelated and interconnected and that a teacher is no more the sole custodian of knowledge.

In another dimension, the Society for Human Resources Management (2020), identified six changes introduced into the world of work as a result of corona virus pandemic, which are affecting socio-economic well being of human race and consequently their education system (See Figure 1). The changes include acceptance of remote work as an alternative to location-based work, easy access to information across the globe and expansion of virtual learning that would facilitate skill acquisition. Others are collaborative work among employees, distance health-care services for organisations and employees, and prudent financial management on the part of employers.

# 6 WAYS CORONAVIRUS WILL CHANGE THE WORLD OF WORK



Source: SHRM editors.

Figure 1: Society for Human Resources Management (2020).

Increase in the use of digital technology such as website, social media, computer and smart phones has made virtual learning to be more prevalent in Nigerian education system during and after COVID-19 lockdown. Hence, e-teaching, e-learning, e-administration, e-counselling, e-supervision and e-examination have become the new normal in Nigerian education. It will not be binding on the teacher and the learner to meet at a fixed location (school or classroom) before knowledge and skills can be acquired. Also, blended learning method, a combination of virtual and face-to-face teaching-learning method, will be on increase as fallout from COVID-19 lockdown.

Social distancing was introduced as a means of containing the pandemic. In school, social distance will affect class size and classroom sitting arrangement as students will be expected to sit in at least one metre away from one another. Social distancing will also change the conduct of many school programmes in order to avoid overcrowding. An open-tent class may also emerge in order to get larger spaces for a class and to have enough ventilation in the class.

COVID-19 has shown that overcrowding, social interaction and other practices which we have trivialized could have negative health implications. Temperature checking, fumigation, hand washing and maintenance of personal hygiene are now taken seriously as methods for curbing the spread of the disease. The Government and all stakeholders in education are now focusing attention on health services in the educational institutions. In fact, maintenance of a high standard of environmental health is a condition for opening a school after COVID-19 lockdown. Moreover, distance health care is now playing a role in the educational institutions.

Teachers can no longer be complacent with knowledge and skill acquisition after the COVID-19 lockdown. Skills in management of classroom of different sizes have to be acquired. Moreover,

socio-emotional, organizational, motivational and innovative skills, which are essential for the teacher to be able to assist learners in coping with the world of uncertainties, must be incorporated into the school curriculum.

COVID-19 also shows the need for collaboration not only among individuals but also among nations. The need for nations to come together to find solutions to problems and to be at peace with one another cannot be overemphasized better than now. The rate at which COVID-19 disregarded nations' boundaries and moved into different countries confirmed the fact that any problems anywhere is a world problem and it has to be solved by all. The need for collaboration for providing solution to any challenging situation was established.

Working from home was in vogue during the period of COVID-19 lockdown. It has become a practice and a working condition.

### **Challenges to the Educational Administrator**

Use of digital technologies posed challenges to the educational administrator. Their prevalence showed that they will soon rule the entire education sector. Yet, many teachers and learners do not have adequate knowledge and skills to operate the devices, many do not have financial capability to purchase and many do not know how to maintain the facilities. Insecurity, which could lead to the devices being vandalised and epileptic power supply, could render the devices nonfunctional. Also, ability of the administrator to exercise control on the use of the technologies in order to guide against abuse is a challenge.

Implementation of social distance in schools would reduce class size, increase the number of classrooms that are needed to accommodate learners, and increase the human and non-human resources needed for each of the classes. These are posing challenges because the school budget

may not be able to accommodate the cost of providing adequate resources. Social distancing could also reduce social cohesion among students, teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders.

Changes in the school curriculum and the methods of teaching them could also pose challenges. Teachers, non-teachers and students are needed to be trained so that adequate skills and expertise could be acquired.

Health facilities such as hand washing equipment, sanitizer and chemicals for fumigating school premises are essential as preventive measures. The administrators would encounter challenges in offsetting the cost of procurement of the facilities, their utilisation and their maintenance. Training and employment of health officers for schools also poses challenges.

Another change which was introduced during COVID-19 pandemic was remote working, remote teaching, remote learning and remote administration. Working from home or location other than offices poses a great challenge to the administrators. Moreover, procurement of facilities for conduct of assignments, commitment of staff and students who are working remotely are areas of challenges to the educational administrator.

The administrator is facing a challenge in the performance of his supervisory duties in this digital age as traditional mode of supervision would be grossly inadequate and in many situations, proof irrelevant. E-learning, remote learning, remote working and other virtual devices have necessitated the adoption of e-supervision.

Achievement of educational objectives is the responsibility of the administrator. In fact, he is accountable to the Government and other stakeholders on the extent to which he has successfully played his roles. He should therefore explore means of addressing and resolving the challenges.



## **Administrator's Responsibilities**

The school administrator is the director of affairs in his educational organisation. He has the responsibility for ensuring the achievement of educational objectives. The stakeholders in education would hold him accountable for the success or otherwise of the education system because this is the reason for his employment in that capacity. He should therefore adopt strategies for implementing the positive changes and eliminating the negative changes initiated during and after COVID-19 lockdown.

In order to achieve this, he should see education as a social system, which is capable of influencing and being influenced by socio-economic activities and other occurrences in the society. COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a health challenge. It has affected the socio-economic and psychological well being of the society. The Government, the parents, the community, the non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders' positive contributions should be sought in problem-solving activities. The administrator should also identify different parts and units of the education system such as curriculum, personnel, finance and facilities, and examine how each of them has affected the achievement of educational objectives as a result of the pandemic, and tackle them administratively. The educational administrator should also develop strategies for tackling environmental hazards by nurturing and graduating competent human resources who will assist in solving health, socio-economic and other societal problems.

Moreover, the administrator should encourage his staff to attend professional development programmes such as in-service training, where new skills in curriculum implementation, use of modern technologies, motivational and human relation techniques can be acquired. This will assist them in tackling any challenges arising from environmental changes.

There should be adequate security of life and properties. Security, as a primary human need should be guaranteed in schools. All school facilities should be protected from vandals. Physical, social, economic, psychological, health and food securities are essential for educational success.

Misuse of modern technologies by staff and students should be curbed through effective control of usage and installation of monitoring software on their devices. A facility manager could also be assigned to monitor and control the usage of the technological devices.

Facilities for health services and health education should be provided in the educational institutions. These facilities should be manned by adequate and competent staff.

Financing is very vital to successful implementation of any change in an educational organisation. The government and other stakeholders should provide adequate funding while the administrator should manage the funds judiciously.

The use of radio and television sets as educational resources reemerged during COVID-19 lockdown and should be sustained in all institutions. In order to achieve this, there should be coordination and cooperation between the educational institutions and the information media on aspects of the school curriculum and the level of education to be featured on the media. The Federal or State Ministries of Education and Information can serve as coordinating agencies while the heads of educational institutions are to ensure participation in the programmes.

Finally, the administrator should ensure regular communication and consultation between the school and the community. Both are agencies of education with interdependent and interrelated tasks towards effectiveness of the educational system.

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