NEW DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION POLICY AND LEADERSHIP IN POST-COVID ERA: THE NIGERIAN TEMPLATE

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Abstract

Covid-19 is a lethal viral infection that ravaged many countries of the world. Coronavirus which broke out in December 2019 in China was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation, WHO, when the virus became a global scourge with thousands of deaths in its trails. As at last count, no fewer than 56.5million infections and 1.3million deaths have been recorded globally. Consequently, coronavirus pandemic has created a lacuna in the educational system especially in Nigeria thereby disrupting teaching-learning process. It is no gainsaying that this novel virus has come to change our life completely; as a result the way we do so many things changed. For example, education that has been on one-one basis will have to be done remotely. This paper examines education policy and the leadership roles in post-Covid era. The decision to pivot on remote learning must be made swiftly and the facilities that will aid this should be provided by the government. The opportunity is here for academic leaders who are goal oriented, risk takers, and strategic long-term thinkers to create a spiral of success and gain a competitive advantage, by revitalizing proficient faculty in their redesigned educational environment. The time has come for academic leaders to change the status quo as well as challenge opinion and longstanding patterns of behaviour.

 The academic leaders with emotional intelligence and emotion stability should organise training workshops to train and re-train teachers and university lecturers on how to migrate to online teaching. This paper highlights three of the leadership best practices for navigating unpredictable adaptive challenges posed by the pandemic by utilizing a type of servant-leadership that emphasizes empowerment, involvement and collaboration. Academic leaders should communicate clearly and frequently to all stakeholders through a variety of communication channels so as to intimate them with the new dynamics. This paper applies the qualitative type research in the analysis of New Directions in Education Policy and Leadership in Post-Covid Era.

KEYWORD:

Post-Covid, Education Policy, Leadership Role, Servant-Leadership, Government.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is an illness caused by a new virus with a phenomenal global spread. The pandemic has created a yawning lacuna in the educational system especially in Nigeria, thereby disrupting the teaching-learning process. It is no gainsaying that this novel virus has come to effect a complete and palpable change in our ways of life. For example, education that has hitherto, been on a physical contact (one-on-one) basis will have to be done remotely. This paper thus navigates through the devastations and shocks occasioned by the pandemic, and examine education policy and the leadership roles in the post-Covid era, with the view to allowing leaders of educational institutions, policy, formulators and other stake-holders to give birth to some logical reasoning that will deal with the situation.

Already, in a pre-Covid-19 survey, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), "out-of-school children and youth" holds that the world was already facing formidable challenges in fulfilling the promise of education as a basic human right. Despite the near universal enrolment at early grades in most countries, an extraordinary number of children – more than 250 million- were out of school. Adult illiteracy peaked at nearly 800 million – 773 million according to most recent UIS data.

The UIS 2017 Facts Street, more over presents that, even for those in school, learning was far from guaranteed. Some 387 million or 56 percent of primary school age children worldwide were estimated to lack basic reading skills.

From the financial point of view, writing on "The Impact of Covid-19 on the cost of achieving SDG 4", UNESCO reports that the challenge was already daunting before COVID-19. The early 2020 estimate of the financing gap to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4- qualify education-in low and lower-middle-income countries was a staggering $148 billion annually. UNESCO therefore estimates that the COVID-19 crisis will increase this financing gap by up to one-third.

In Nigeria, one would be termed a "low brainer" for supporting the grossly inadequate funding of the education sector by the government. Perhaps, justifiably so, especially when one juxtaposes the Federal Government's allocation with the 26% minimum allocation for the sector as recommended by the UN. Figure 1 below shows a tabulation of FG allocation for the education sector covering 1999 to 2020.

Figure 1: FG Allocation for Education in Percentage.

Year	Percentage (%)

2020	6.9
2019	7.1
2018	7.04
2017	7.41
2016	7.92
2015	10.75
2014	10.63
2013	10.21
2012	9.86
2011	9.32
2010	7.37
2009	8.79
2008	10.04
2007	9.75
2006	10.43
2005	8.21
2004	5.24
2003	7.75
2002	6.9
2001	7.13
2000	8.71
1999	4.46

The Nigeria yearly budget proposals for education, as copiously shown in figure 1 above lend credence to the daunting financial challenge in a developing country like Nigeria, as expressed by UNESCO and apparently, one of the most fundamental challenges of the education sector remains inadequacy of funding, even before the Covid-19 crisis.

Ojeleye, J. (2020), writing on "The Future of Education in Nigeria: Budgetary allocation as an Albatross", sees a "…bleak future for educational development with consequent negative effects on the future of children, youths and adults and national development at the macro level".

The crisis has exacerbated pre-existing under-funding of the education sector in no small measure. An estimated 40 percent of the poorest countries failed to support learners at risk during the covid-19 crisis (UNESCO), and past experiences show that both education and gender inequalities tend to be neglected in responses to disease outbreaks – IIEP – UNESCO, "Covid-19 school closures: why girls are more at risk".

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education in history, having already had a near universal impact on learners and teachers around the world, from pre- primary to secondary schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, universities, adult learning and skills development establishments – (USNDP, 2020).

The learning loss, in the start and long term, is expected to be great. (Catherine Haeck and Pierre Lefebvre.) The World Bank identifies three possible scenarios for the loss of learning levels for reduction in average learning levels for all students, a widening of the distribution of learning achievements due to highly unequal effects of the crisis on various populations, or a significant increase of students with very low level of achievement due in part to massive drop outs. It maintains that 25 percent more students may fall below a baseline level of proficiency needed to participate effectively and productively in society, and in future learning, a result of the school closure only.

In Nigeria, the crisis presents a very dire situation; the crisis has exacerbated the pre-existing education disparities in the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youths, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities, forcibly displaced persons who live in camps and those living in poor or rural areas.

However, this crisis has endangered innovation within the education sector. Innovative approaches in support of education and training continuity from radio and television, distance learning method were preferred as quick response mechanisms for solutions by governments and partners, both in Nigeria and all over the world.

But, these seeming changes have also sign-posted that the promising future of learning, and the accelerated changes in modes of delivering quality education, cannot be completely divorced from the imperative of leaving no one behind - the case in point being the children and youths affected by a lack of resource or enabling environment to access learning.

Speaking on the "Impact of COVID-19 on education in Sub-Saharan Africa", Olaitan A; et al (2020) advice that, "It is imperative to seriously seek alternative means and approaches in order not to leave behind students with little or no access to electronic communication." "The painful reality of the digital divide on the continent has to be strategically and systematically managed; reaching out to millions of "marginalized" students must become a national priority in this time of crisis. The decision to pivot to remote learning must be made swiftly and the facilities that will aid this should be provided by the government. The opportunity is here for academic leaders who are goal oriented, risk takers, and strategic long-term thinkers to create a spiral of success and gain a competitive advantage, by revitalizing proficient faculty in their redesigned educational environment. The time has come for academic leaders to change the status quo as well as challenge opinion and longstanding patterns of behavior.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at examining education policy, and the leadership roles, in a post-Covid era, with a focus on Nigeria. Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

1. To account for the effects of Covid-19 on education in Nigeria

2. To evaluate the measures introduced to mitigate the devastating consequences of the Covid-19 on education in Nigeria.

3. To examine the policy thrusts and leadership roles in the education sector in the post-Covid era in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education remains fundamentally critical for social welfare and for sustainable development in a given society. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 lends credence to the above statement, with reference to quality education by 2020. The UNO incorporated the imperative of making sure that all girls and boys enjoy free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes, ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education, ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education including university, and substantial increase in the number of youths, and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (UNO, 2015). Education is thus the most powerful tool for basic developmental strides of the individual. But, the sad note is, the grossly inadequate funding of the education sector by government in Nigeria, and the attendant obvious lack of facilities for academic excellence, has been further exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Leadership roles in the sector must, among other things, question the status quo as examined in this study.

Research Questions

Questions raised in this paper are:

1. What are the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the education sector in Nigeria?
2. How workable were the measures introduced to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 on education in Nigeria?
3. What specific policy thrusts and leadership roles are required for the education sector, in the post-Covid era in Nigeria?

2.1   Literature and Methodology

Effects of Covid-19 0n Education:

As of March 30, 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in tracking the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on education, stated that 87 percent – a whopping 1.5 billion learners globally, made up largely of primary and secondary schools have been affected by school closures. Just as millions more of learners were affected at the pre-primary and tertiary education levels. Speaking on the "Impact of Covid-19 on the Higher Institutions Development in Nigeria", Ogunode, N.J. et al (2020) points out a number of identified areas as the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on institutions in Nigeria, such as: disruption of academic calendar, teaching and learning gap, loss of workforce in the educational institutions, and cut in budget of higher education, among others.

Disruption of Academic Calendar of Higher Institutions:

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sonny Echono, told reporters on 19 March that the directive to shut down all tertiary institutions and allow students to go home was part of the country's overall strategy to contain the spread of the virus. Similarly; Ogunode (2020) observed that the closure of all educational institutions from primary schools to the higher institutions would affect the students' academic plans and programme.

Simon & Hans (2020) submits that the global lockdown of education institutions is going to cause major (and likely unequal) interruption in students' learning, disruption in internal assessments, and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative.

Teaching and Learning Gap:

As examined by Ogunode, N.J et al (2020), teaching and learning in all Nigerian higher institutions and (other institutions) across the world have been put on hold occasioned by the Covid-19 virus. To them, the implication of this is that many Nigerian students will not be in school for a period of one month or even more. Making references to study as advanced by Simon & Hans (2020), and Lay (2015), who estimate the impact on learning with differences in instructional time across countries, Ogunode, N.J. et al (2020) conclude that the

studies possibly suggest a likely effect of not greater than 10% of a standard deviation but definitely above zero.

Loss of Workforce in the Educational Institutions:

Ogunode, N.J et al (2020) further take stock of workforce loss to the pandemic, starting with the Longtime University of Washington faculty member Stephen Schwartz who died on Tuesday, (March 17) from Covid-19. A renowned South African scientist, Gita Ramjee, and the Criminal Justice instructor, Lenard Wells, of Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office, both died of the Covid-19 complications.

Worldometers. Info (2020) also reports that Covid-19 is responsible for the death of over 74,431 persons across the world.

Cut in Budget of Higher Education:

The emergence of Covid-19 and its increasing incidence in Nigeria had prompted a drastic review of the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections. (Seaafrica (2020) submitted that the Nigeria federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at ₦8.24 Trillion, an increase of about 20% from the 2019 figure. In addressing these daunting economic challenges, the government revised the budget downward. To this effect, the Academic staff union of universities (ASUU) had faulted the proposal by the federal Government to slash ₦50.76 billion from the ₦111.78 billion budgeted for universal Basic Education Commission. (Vanguardngr.com/2020/04/)

Suspension of Examination:

Many higher institutions in Nigeria had started their first semester examination before the incident of the Covid-19 pandemic that led to the national shut down of all the educational institutions in Nigeria (Ogunode, N.J. etal.2020). Simon and Hans (2020) observe that the closure of schools, colleges and universities not only

interrupted the teaching for students around the world, but it coincided with a key assessment period and many exams had been postponed or cancelled.

Measures for Mitigating the Effects of Covid-19 on Education:

The Strategic Advisory Group of Education in Emergency Working Group had identified and agreed on objectives, activities and indicators for the education on covid-19 response strategy. Three very germane objectives of the group linked to the Covid-19 consequences on school system are:

1. Prevent spread and transmission of coronavirus through and among learners, teachers, parents and SBMC.
2. Mitigate/Minimize the impact of school closure due to Covid-19 on learning and wellbeing of learners, teachers, parents and SBMC through alternative solution
3. Ensure effective, inclusive and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, and SBMC.

Prevention/Wellbeing:

The Nigeria Education in Emergencies Work Group's (NEIEWG) Covid-19 contingency plan for the education sector listed the first objective as prevention of the spread and transmission of coronavirus through and among learners, teachers, parents and SBMC. This resulted in the creation of awareness of the corona virus, its mode of transmission, signs of infection and mitigation/referral measures.

Respond/Wellbeing

On mitigating/minimizing the impact of school closure due to Covid-19 on learning, and wellbeing of learners, teachers, parents and SBMC through alternative solution, the group claims that children had the possibility to continue to access quality education opportunities through learning at home/distance or radio education programing in the case of school closures. Children kept their learning behaviour during school closure.

More so, learners, teachers, SBMC, SUBEB and MOE received updates on the coronavirus situation and information, and guidance on alternative learning solutions. In poorer households, many children do not have a desk, books, internet connectivity, a computer, or parents who can take the role of house schooling.

However, Olaitan, A; et al. (2020) remark that going online is not that simple on a continent where only 24% of the population has access to the internet, and poor connectivity, exorbitant cost and frequent power interruptions are serious challenges.

The implication from the above remark is that first and second objectives, with the attendant results as claimed by the Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group, stated above, could suffer integrity test in the face of other empirical conclusions.

Back to school:

The objective of ensuring effective, inclusive and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, and SBMC, the Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group claims, among other successes, that learners, teachers and SBMC are aware of the possibility and importance of safe return to education. Teachers and students can continue accessing education in a safe environment.

Again, the claimed result has not turned attention to the rural areas where the most vulnerable live. More often than not, such laudable interventionist groups concentrate their operations in the urban centres.

New Education Policy in the Post Covid Era:

Education is obviously not only a fundamental human right, but also an enabling right with direct

impact on the realization of all other human rights. It drives primarily the global common good

and progress across all 17 sustainable development goals, which guarantees bedrock of just,

equal, inclusive peaceful societies. It implies, therefore, that the collapse in the education system affects sustenance of peace, prosperity and productivity in a society.

From the above, mitigating the potentially devastating consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic

requires concerted efforts of governments and stakeholders in the education sector to pursue vigorously the following policy thrusts:

Strengthen Capacities for Risk Management at All Level of the System:

Highly needed at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels to combat emergencies

are capacities to develop and implement contingency plans, such as alternative education

 pathways, to mitigate effects of devastation.

It is paramount to strengthen the capacities of education stakeholders with the view to revising

existing education sector plan and policies to accommodate adaptive responses for the Covid-19

crisis. To this end, integrating data on risk, and their impacts into education management, and information systems facilities, the design and implementation of crisis-sensitive educational policies and programmes is greatly required.

Create Strong Leadership and Coordinate Agency:

National ministry of education leadership of crisis planning and management is important for

education resilience. Inefficiency, duplication, and confusion in the process of responding to and mitigating the impact of crisis could be avoided by setting up national ministry of education

leadership, who will ensure that humanitarian initiatives are sustainable, aligned with national

priorities, and able to mitigate the impact of crisis on learners and education communities.

Build Mechanism for Construction and Communication:

In retrospect, education directors, teachers, parents and caregivers – all played a critical role in

the response to the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, engaging these stakeholders can improve the education system's resilience. Consultation and communication with all actors in the education

sector are very germane and effective in the implementation of plans and responses, to meeting the needs of all learners, and to enhancing their resilience and that of the education system.

Ensure Adequate Education Funding:

The pandemic has dealt a devastating global economic consequences, particularly so, when looking at the low and lower-middle income countries. Therefore, in the midst of these public financial constraints, national authorities need to act to mitigate long-term consequences for children. Increasing fiscal space for education must be seen as an inescapable commitment.

Establish a Programme for Support for Teachers' Needs:

Teachers were immediately saddled with implementing distance learning modalities, often without adequate guidance, training or resources. In low-income countries in particular, like Nigeria, where parents stopped paying fees or teachers have been unable to teach remotely teachers lost their livelihoods. Sometimes refugee teachers are often not part of the national education system and also were vulnerable to the cessation of salaries and jobs losses while schools were not in session.

Therefore, the need for an established programme for support for teachers' needs should not be

subjected to mere governmental bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Ensure a Stress-free Digital Connectivity:

The Corona virus pandemic brought with it a depth of understanding of the digital divide and

related equity gaps, which require urgent attention. Governments and development partners must

work in synergy to remove technological barriers by investing in digital infrastructure and drastic

connectivity costs. Bridging the digital divide will also require investment in digital literacy for

marginalized populations. Teachers and learners need free and open source technologies for

teaching and learning, since those digital solutions to improve teaching and learning which are

institutionalized in the aftermath of the pandemic need to put equity and inclusion at their centre,

to ensure all children may benefit from them.

Anticipating a post Covid era with the attendant effects on education, which certainly will, since the present disruption is only transient; leaders in the sector will mostly likely be presented with some difficult trends as they re-strategize. What to do with these make-shift online course offerings, rolled out in an emergency to get through the semester? Will they be refined and sustained in a new reshaped reality or discarded as a used band-aid? (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Academic leaders with the adaptive capacity (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) to take advantage of strategic opportunities as they arise may now redefine organizational responsibilities by disruptive innovation and employ digital technologies to alter or eliminate inefficient legacy practice. Perhaps the digital resources produced in response to the crisis may be employed to assist disadvantaged students, (Fernandez &Shaw,2020), those with physical and learning disabilities or in vocational course designed for non-traditional students returning to education once the crisis subsides.

For the purpose of hindsight, as the study projects into the post Covid era, global reports show how academic leadership hastily organized workshops to familiarize faculty with modern remote digital teaching and learning tools, which have advanced considerably in sophistication and effectiveness. Nonetheless, as Doraiswamy 2012) has remarked, many in the academia are in uncharted territory, faculty, staff, and students, now working remotely are stressed, uncertain and even afraid in their new reality with their well-established teaching and learning routines disrupted; empathy, compassion, and flexibility are in order, and appropriate leader behaviors matched to the context of crisis management in academia will be crucial.

Fernandez & Shaw, (2020) enumerate the attributes of an effective academic teacher when facing adaptive challenges to include but are not limited to accountability, trustworthiness, and integrity. However, in a crisis situation, perhaps the most important of all is emotional intelligence and emotional stability that will allow the academic leader to place the interests of others above their own in servant leadership (Doraiswany 2012). According to him, servant leadership that emphasizes empowerment, involvement, and collaboration is a leadership style that becomes more critical in a crisis. This paper identifies with the tripartite servant leadership attributes and has adopted them as the ideal academic leadership qualities to midwife the education sector in the post-Covid era.

Empowerment

Fernedez & Shaw (2020) remark that academic leaders must use new toolbox of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspiration to support the campus collective in pivoting to remote learning, while providing essential training support, and resources to faculty suddenly immersed in online teaching. While Fernandez & Shaw's remark is addressing the spontaneous response of the academic leaders in the heat of the pandemic, this paper gives it to the concept of empowerment, because it provides essential training, support and resource to faculty, for a sudden immersion in online teaching. This is attributable only to the academic servant leadership quality of empowerment. Empowerment of the entire leadership support team in the education sector is all essential toolbox for the post Covid era, ably captured in one of the three leadership best practices as "communicating clearly and often with all stakeholders".

Involvement

Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, (2007) opine that academic leaders can build relationships by inquiring, advocating, and connecting with individuals as people first, to gain their perspectives while leveraging the many benefits of diversity and establishing a mutual trust. Without mutual trust, they maintain, there can be no transformative change. To Heifetz & Laurice, (2001): a complex adaptive. Challenge such as academic leader that posed by the coronavirus pandemic cannot be successfully navigated by the charismatic academic leader acting alone. A top-down hierarchical approach is unlikely to be successful in an academic context in the post-Covid era. Therefore, the leader should be initially responsible for identifying the post-Covid era challenges and setting institutional priorities before leveraging the collective knowledge of the academic community. Once these institutional priorities have been established, these leaders (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) should delegate leadership responsibilities to a network of multi-disciplinary teams or task forces that will have significant role in the implementation of the crisis management strategy. As Sorensen & Stanton (2013) put it, the ability of teams to successfully accomplish their roles, is related to their distributed situational awareness.

Collaboration:

This leader must trust these teams to address the crisis with a moral purpose and implement solutions (Sorensen & Stanton, 2013). Academic leaders should avoid micromanaging these teams that will utilize a shared leadership model to pursue a common purpose to maintain a quality student learning experience throughout the crisis without disruption (Fernandez & Shaw 2020). Having formed a network of teams in response to the crisis, these teams can work toward a response.

Methodology:

The study applies the qualitative research type in the analysis of New Directions in Education Policy and Leadership in Post-Covid Era.

Conclusion:

Servant leadership that emphasizes empowerment, involvement, and collaboration is a leadership style that becomes more critical in a crisis. This paper identifies strongly with the tripartite servant leadership attributes, and adopts them as the ideal academic leadership toolbox to midwife the education sector in post-Covid era.

For academic imperative, academic leaders with emotional intelligence and emotional stability should place the interests of others above their own. Leaders should distribute leadership responsibilities to a network of teams through the organization, leaders should equally communicate clearly and frequently to all stakeholders, more so, as a top-down hierarchical approach is unlikely to be successful in an academic context in the post Covid era. Therefore, academic leaders should avoid micromanaging the network of multi-disciplinary teams or taskforces that will have significant role in the implementation of the crisis management strategy, utilize a shared leadership model to pursue a common purpose; to maintain a quality student learning experience throughout the crisis without disruption, and make a case for a change in the status quo, especially, in the funding of the education sector in Nigeria.

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