

**Paper 9****An Appraisal of Emergent Post Covid-19 Challenges and Preventive Strategies in Nigeria Primary Schools**

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**Abstract**

The impacts of Covid-19 cut across every sector around the world. While many have taken interest in investigating the challenges and impacts of Covid-19 on a larger and major scopes, this paper is an appraisal of the emergent post Covid-19 challenges and preventive measures in primary schools in Nigeria. The paper reviews the changing methods and responsibilities of teachers and other stakeholders during post covid-19 period in primary schools in Nigeria. The paper appraises the challenges associated with post Covid-19 preventive measures in primary schools such as little understanding of the effective use of facemasks by primary school pupils, anxiety and loss of manpower. This paper also proposes better preventive strategies such as the use of face masks, hand sanitizer, placing of hand washing water at strategic places in school environment, distance seating arrangement, coughing, sneezing to the elbow, temperature screening equipment and their effects on health, psychosocial, interpersonal relationship and anxiety among school stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Post-Covid 19 Challenges, Preventive strategies, Nigerian primary schools

**Introduction**

The outbreak of Covid-19 virus which emerged in China precisely from a town called Wuhan city which was later declared a disruptive virus to human being by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) forced schools to be closed down temporarily globally. UNESCO (2020) reported that governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to curtail the spread of the pandemic. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education announced the temporary closure of all schools on March 19, 2020 as part of the strategic steps by government to prevent the spread of the corona virus among students who are naturally immature to handle such challenges (Premium Times News, 2020). These steps were directed to prevent total collapse of the education system in the country.

As at 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020, about 1.723 billion learners were reported to be affected as a result of the sudden closure of schools due to the outbreak of the virus (Adelakun, 2020). The Punch newspaper of June 7, 2020, reported that three weeks after Israel re-opened the doors to all of her schools, there were rising cases of the corona virus among pupils and teachers; 347 pupils and teachers tested positive to the virus. Similarly, News24 on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 reported that ninety-eight teachers in the Western Cape have contracted Covid-19. All these isolated cases underscore the need to investigate the challenges the schools, teachers, parents and students would face as schools reopened, and the new emerging school culture such as introduction of facemask to pupils, health and handling challenges, the proper use of hand sanitizers; washing of hands and time management for classroom lessons, management of induced stress from prevention and monitoring of physical contacts among students.

This paper reviews the challenges and preventive strategies of post-Covid 19 period with focus on primary schools. The paper covers the following thematic areas: Overview of the impact of Covid-19 on education in Nigeria, preventive measures, challenges faced by primary schools in implementing the preventive measures of Covid-19 and the emergent roles of teachers and stakeholders.

### **Definition of Concepts**

#### *Covid-19*

Covid-19 as described by World Health Organization (2020) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus. Most people infected with Covid-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2020).

#### *Primary Education*

This level of education is part of basic education as recognized in Nigeria. It is the education level that generally accommodates children from age 5 – 11 and is covered over a period of six years. The primary level of education is a vital level of education because it provides the foundation for the other levels of education.

### **Overview of the Impact of Covid-19 on the Educational System**

The impact of Covid-19 cuts across all human endeavors. It is significantly evident in the education sector ranging from loss of productive hours, altering of school academic calendar, to death of teachers and students. According to Education Cannot Wait (2020), education has been hit particularly hard by Covid-19 with 1.53 billion learners out of school and 184 countries

worldwide school closures, impacting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled learners. Students as were deprived of learning. Accordingly, a UNICEF (2018) report indicated that, the out of school children in Nigeria had increased from 10.5 million to 13.3 million. Although the wealthy families enrolled their children for online lessons but the less privileged families had no means to keep their children studying (UNESCO, 2020). It also worthy to note that some external examinations such as Cambridge IGCSE and A level were suspended while the West African Senior School Examination (WASSCE) was postponed (MuthuLakshmi & Archana, 2020). This development forced university students especially the starters to lose almost an academic year (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). The introduction of online schooling system which comes with extra cost of data availability, connectivity and power is to facilitate the continuity of students' education. Many children did not have this advantage of online and radio lesson interaction.

Furthermore, families are equally put under pressure to fill up the gaps of teachers in monitoring their wards' school work. Parents who could not register their children for online lessons were subjected to the bear unnecessary burden of taking care of their children. Some got themselves relieved of their jobs while some experienced wages loss (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). In addition, teachers especially private school teachers who were not paid during the time schools were locked up were unable to provide adequate needs for their families (Bao *et al.*, 2020).

### **Preventive Strategies Against Covid-19**

Table 1 presents World Health Organization recommended strategies to be practised in schools to prevent the spread Covid-19.

**Table 1**

Preventive measures against Covid-19 in learning environment.

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School level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administrative policies: setting attendance and entry rules; cohorting (keeping students and teachers in small groups that do not mix, also referred to as bubble, capsule, circle, safe squad); staggering the start of school, breaks, bathroom, meal and end times; alternate physical presence (e.g. alternate days, alternate shifts).</li></ul>
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- Infrastructure: Reorganization of the physical space or its use, identifying entry/exits and marking direction of walking, hand-washing facilities, building environmental design clues (“nudging”) to facilitate appropriate use of space.
- Maintaining clean environment: frequent cleaning of surfaces and shared objects.
- Ensuring adequate and appropriate ventilation with priority for increasing fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors, where feasible, as well as encouraging outdoor activities, as appropriate.
- The age-appropriate use of masks where physical distancing cannot be maintained; this includes ensuring the availability of masks.
- Symptom screening by parents and teachers, testing and isolation of suspected cases, as per national procedures; stay-at-home when sick policies.
- Reorganization of school transportation and arrival/departure times.
- Clear accessible sharing of information and feedback mechanisms established with parents, students and teachers.
- Continuation of essential school-based services such as mental health and psychosocial support, school feeding and nutrition programmes, immunization and other services.

- Classroom level
- Physical distancing where appropriate
  - Wearing of masks, where recommended
  - Frequent hand hygiene
  - Respiratory etiquette
  - Cleaning and disinfection
  - Adequate ventilation
  - Spacing of desks or grouping of children if require

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Source: WHO (2020)

The new cultures are definitely meant to be learnt and practised by the teachers, students and other stakeholders associated with the school.

### **Challenges of Implementing the Preventive Measures of Covid-19 in Primary Schools**

The decision to reopen schools at all levels from basic education to higher institutions has brought about many challenges. The following challenges have been identified by the author.

1. Little understanding of the need to effectively use the facemasks
2. Anxiety
3. Loss of manpower
4. Scarcity of safe water
5. Increase in the rate of school dropout
6. Frequent transfer of pupils/students from one school to another
7. Funding/limited supplies of hygiene products

The use of facemask is approved to curb droplets of Covid-19 virus from being transmitted from one person to another. According to World Health Organization (2020), Covid-19 virus is primarily transmitted by coughing and sneezing, especially when someone in close proximity breathes in the resulting droplets. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) of the United States equally supported the wearing of face covering cloth or mask in situation when it is difficult or impossible to maintain a distance of six feet between other persons. There is a challenge of effective handling of facemasks associated with the primary students due to low level of understanding of the concept which can be tied to their age limitation. This age group apparently considers facemasks as additional toys to them.

Some will even remove and exchange their facemasks with one another. It is advisable to inscribe pupils name on them for easy identification. More so, there are pupils or students with underlying medical challenges. There is need for medical advice and recommendation of suitable face masks for them to avoid implicating the school. Likewise, staff with underlying medical condition should not allow any pupils or students to have contact with his or her face mask and medical advice to seek for such teachers to be in classroom. The prolong curtailment period has resulted into worries and source of anxiety for pupils, staff and parents.

Anxiety is a reaction to a response, be it internal or external threat to peace of mind. Merriam - Webster dictionary defined anxiety as a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill. The fear of possible chances of contracting Covid-19 either from teachers or the students places both parties at the level of anxiety during classroom interaction. It impacts students' active participations in school and level of productivity.

Another challenge is loss of man power especially the aged teachers. This is so because World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) posited that Covid-19 is often more severe in people who

are older than 60 years or who have health conditions like lung or heart disease, diabetes or conditions that affect their immune system. Most school administrators and experienced teachers fall between the given age range.

### **Scarcity of Safe Water**

Safe water is hygienic water for drinking and cleaning. UNICEF (2021) stated that about 86 percent of Nigerians are lacking access to safe water of which 29 percent were said to be children. There are many contributing factors to water scarcity in Nigeria especially in school environments. They include inadequate water facilities overdependence on only one water source which is common to rural environment with a single source of water, and lack of constant electricity supply (Oyebode & Oyegoke, 2015). One of the major preventive measures to the spread of covid-19 is frequent washing of hands but in many Nigerian schools there is scarcity of safe water. This development is another challenge faced when schools reopened.

The impacts of Covid-19 are felt on the economy, family, businesses, politics and education. Many families lost their family breadwinners to covid-19, making it a difficult for their dependants to survive. The children from low economic background found it difficult to go back to school immediately the ban on public gatherings was lifted and schools opened. Many students found it difficult to pay school fees and acquire basic school materials.

Furthermore, students identified as slow learners and found to lack interest in school could leverage on the lockdown to put their schooling on hold. This has the capacity of increasing the already alarming rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria which was reported by UNICEF 2018 at 13.2 million. This challenge of out-of-school students is not particular to Nigeria. In Latin America and the Caribbean, over 154 million children (95 percent) of the enrolled are temporarily out of school due to the Covid-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2020) .

Schools with adequate teaching and learning activities as well as effective Covid-19 preventive measures will witness high enrolment rate as parents/guardians. Many parents will transfer their wards from schools that refused to comply with government preventive guidelines and safety measures such as making water available for constant washing of hands, soaps, availability of temperature screening equipment, distancing seating arrangement in schools and safety of school buses services. Frequent transfer disrupts smooth academic progression and performance of students. According to Ascher (1991), mobility has an effect on academic achievement; some parents will transfer their children to another school due to their current

economic realities resulting from Covid-19 impact. Scammon and Eckerling (cited in Wing 2008) stated that, mobility has a disruptive influence on achievement of students.

The reopening of schools witnessed immense pressure on school expenses as a lot of money was required by school administrators to fulfil Covid-19 prevention guidelines.

The Federal, State and Local Governments in Nigeria are aware of the immense challenges facing educational system in the country, ranging from paucity of infrastructural facilities and rates of out-of-school students. According to UNESCO (2020) report captured in CSEA (2020), 35.9 million primary and secondary school pupils were out of school as a result of the school closures. More so, the government was clear on the negative impact of corona virus on the economy and household incomes.

Covid-19 led to many job losses and salary cuts. Government demonstrated commitment to address the challenges by rolling out programmes like National Social Register of Poor and Vulnerable Households by Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, giving out twenty thousand naira (₦20, 000) to needing families (Human Right Report, 2020). There is need for private support to assist schools to overcome some of the challenges at this crucial period. The prices of basic hygiene products (soap, screening temperature) are high. It will be practically impossible for schools to meet up without adequate support from government. Private and public schools are expected to clean up surfaces of door handles, clean desk surface, tables, libraries, school buses, playground equipment, toys, toilets etc. There is need for mutual cooperation from all school stakeholders to address the challenges with funds and expertise.

### **Teachers/Parents Responsibilities**

With new a culture coming into the school system due to the emergence of Covid-19, the scope of teaching and learning activities will definitely change from the traditional approach and methods. The outbreak of Covid-19 has impacted old culture of teaching, learning and interpersonal relationship among students and parents (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). Teachers need to be more cautious in dealing with students from different cultural backgrounds and exposure. Many parents or homes are yet to come to terms with the reality of preventive measures and many have also shown high level of disregards and responsibilities to the preventive measures. Some others have care-free attitude towards the true existence of the virus. This and other factors such as socio-distancing and avoiding crowded place are serious challenges to both parents and classroom teachers.

### **Emergent Role of Teachers and Stakeholders**

The emergent role of teachers and stakeholders implies new ideas and responsibilities that are carefully and strategically taken to address new issues such as Covid-19. In a clearer view, Louise (1998) stated that the role of leadership in relation to school's culture is central. Leaders are the culture founders (teachers and stakeholders inclusive) whose responsibility is to ensure proper effectiveness of the school through creation and management of cultures. Also, Chantarath and Natheeporn (2014) agreed that in order to better understand the school cultures, teachers' perception should be examined. This ascertains that the roles of teachers and stakeholders in building school cultures are paramount. The new culture of wearing of facemasks, frequent washing of hands with water and sanitizer, checking temperature and so on is to be taken with all seriousness firstly by the teachers and other stakeholders to make pupils comply with preventive instructions.

### **Conclusion**

The realities of Covid-19 are not contentious and its impact ravaging all human activities and endeavours. The rapid spread of covid-19 virus necessitated total closure of schools all over the world. The outbreak of Covid-19 has led to developing of new school cultures to ensure effective running of school activities. The use of facemasks, constant washing of hands, checking of temperature and social distancing have been added to the normal day-to-day activities of the school. Students, staff and parents need to adjust to new ways of doing things. Although this development of this new culture comes with its challenges, administrators should work hand-in-hand to follow all preventive measures outlined to curb the spread of Covid-19 in learning environments.

### **Recommendations**

To curtail the spread of covid-19 in schools it is therefore recommended that:

1. Schools should seek possible support from parents in areas of expertise, experiences and resources.
2. Schools should review their Covid-19 measures constantly to ascertain if they are meeting the proposed set objectives in line with best practices and practicability.
3. School administrators should be more proactive to improve and update medical record of students/staff. Many parents will be willing to support the school initiative to stem the virus.
4. Schools and all stakeholders should maintain an active channel of communication in providing constant solution to the pandemic.



5. School administrations should embrace the new school culture as an alternative means to safety in the face of contemporary public health crisis.
6. Government at all levels should partner with the private sector to set up school support fund to address Covid-19 in schools.
7. The Ministry of Education should continually organize capacity workshop in collaboration with Ministry of Health on new guidelines to curb Covid-19 as it affects the education system.
8. Ministry of Education should infuse covid-19 safety guidelines into music to capture the attention of people at early childhood educational level.

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