

**PERCEPTION ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A SOCIAL STRAIN ON SOCIETY:
IMPACT ON EDUCATION, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS TO LEARN**

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Abstract

The disease COVID-19 was so named by the international committee on taxonomy of viruses (ICTV). The disease is of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Corona Virus-2 Strain (SARS-COV-2) which causes dysfunction of the immune system of an infected person. Anybody can be infected by this disease. Most affected are people with diagnosed health conditions such as; disease of the lung and diabetes. Symptom of COVID-19 is known to appear 2-14 days after exposure to the disease. COVID-19 is known as novel because of its virulence and unprecedented speed of transfer from one person to another and the rapid spread in the entire world killing in thousands. The positivity of the negative impact from COVID-19 on society and humanity led to the declaration of the disease at a public health emergency. Sadly COVID-19 and its delta variance in recent time has remained a canker worm eating off the fabric of society. COVID-19 pandemic era and post COVID-19 era has proven to be a social strain on society in all aspect of the economy globally and locally as in the case in Nigeria. This paper shares the researcher's perception on COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on education. Some psychosocial consequences, challenges and lessons to learn are also enumerated. It is concluded that COVID-19 pandemic impacted the society to an extent that it is regarded by the researcher as a social strain.

Keyword: Perception, Covid-19 Pandemic, Social Strain on Society, Impact on Education, Challenges and Lessons to Learn.

Introduction

At a global level and at any point in time, historically, the world continues to grapple with consequences of a named threat or the other. Some of these threats usually appear in form of natural disaster (such as flood, hurricane, storm, landslides, earthquake, virulence eruption, etc.). Some threats occur in form of social vices (such as murder, kidnapping, rape, terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, drugs abuse, counterfeiting, money laundering, piracy, etc.). Also civil unrest like workers strike, labour union strike and violent protests are also forms of threats. Some of these social unrests occur in form of war, economic depression, and power tussle. Still some threats appear in form of ravaging infectious diseases outbreaks like the Human Immune virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDs), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Ebola and the most current SARS cov-2 virus infection (COVID-19). Covid-19 pandemic is the most current disease outbreak amid many known killer diseases like Cancer, Diabetes, Malaria to mention but few that have held humans captive in recent times.

In the world today, threats due to disease outbreak whether epidemic or pandemic leaves society in difficulties and subsequent economic losses. Some researchers have noted that despite material prosperity in some countries that each year millions of children die especially those living in impoverished areas. Also billions of people live without access to adequate sanitation and hundreds of millions have no access to safe water (Awake, No. 2, 2020). In the COVID-19 pandemic era, these populations (described above) become susceptible to the impact of the disease.

Covid-19 pandemic is a recognized threat and as such it is a social strain which impact adversely on the survival functions of many countries and Nigeria inclusive. Records from World Health Organization (WHO) show that almost all the nations have cases of Covid-19 [WHO, 2020]. In Nigeria, information from Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) notes that there are corona virus cases in almost all Nigerian States. The agency has debunked the misinformation that COVID-19 is a traveler's disease. The NCDC informed the Nigerian public that even those who have not travelled can be affected; hence people must adhere to prescribed preventive measures for their safety and those of their families.

A clinical explanation of strain as it relate to injury show a clearer explanation for readers in line with the writer's perception of COVID-19 as a social strain on society. In clinical practice, a strain refers to injury to muscle or the band of tissue that attaches a muscle to a bone. When this happens, there are varying levels of discomfort experienced by the sufferer due to the severity of the strain. Until a remedy is received in form of medicine or therapy, the sufferer may face varying levels of pain and discomfort and in unbearable cases a patient, may out of fear of unknown seek or resort to self-help. Sometimes, self-help could aggravate the condition resulting to dire consequences as in the case in the use of hot drink, spicy food, alligator pepper, concoctions of variety of leaves to prevent COVID-19 infection in Nigeria.

The various severity of a strain and how long a treatment could last in providing needed remedy can be compared to COVID-19 pandemic situation regarding preventive measures and adjustment to the 'new normal'. In respect to the clinical strain, a mild strain could take three to six weeks treatment for the patient to return to normal activities. While a severe strain may take several months of treatment involving both surgical repair and physical therapy for the patient to fully recover (<https://www.healthline.com>>health line).

Using the strain analogy above, the appearance of COVID-19 pandemic in the society today may be explained from this line of thought. From information on news update from different nations it can be concluded that COVID-19 as a strain has affected societies in varying severity. Some mild, severe, while others very severe. President Muhammadu Buhari expressing joy over the level of severity of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the president noted that the doomsday scenario predicted for Nigeria never came even as the delta variant continue to spread in the country. Nevertheless, the president advised that Nigerians should not take COVID-19 lightly but should adhere to public health and social measures to prevent infection and spread (Independence Day Speech, 1st October, 2021). And of course the responses to mitigating the impact can be likened to the treatment required to ameliorate a mild or severe or very severe strain. The implication is that severity and consequences of COVID-19 varied among nations with Nigeria's experience mostly shared in this write up.

Physically, socially and psychologically, COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on Nigeria. To understand the varied reactions and behaviors manifested by people and government response to society's needs during the COVID-19 era and post-COVID-19 era, strain theories propounded by sociologists and criminologists are reviewed as follows;

Theoretical Explanation:

Socio-cultural and strain Theories.

According to social cultural and strain theories, social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit crime (Hirschi, 1969). Similarly, Robert Agnew [1985] in his strain theory suggests that negative experiences lead to stress. To be stressed mean being under pressure, tensed, anxious, overwhelmed, or when one experiences more troublesome situation than they can deal with (Oboegbunam, 2007). Stress is also seen as a pressure condition causing hardship, tension and disquiet, resulting from problems in one's life (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English, 1998 Edition).

For the past Fifteen months, Nigeria has been pressured by COVID-19 pandemic (or strain). This strain has led to varied reactions (some good, some adverse) and response (some helpful, some unhelpful). However, government response has been in form of sensitization, enforcing public health guidelines on prevention and spread of COVID-19. Palliatives of varied forms have been extended to citizens especially those considered vulnerable and most affected by economic hardship. Fear of contacting COVID-19 and its variants (Delta variants) has become the fear in the "new normal" that must be adapted to. However, there are some people who do not have the fear for COVID-19 and maybe considered somewhat abnormal or weird.

Structural Strain Theory

Structural strain theory by Neil Smelser (1962) further helps to justify one pattern of reactions to COVID-19 strain among citizens and the government. Smelser argues that psychological factors are created and driven by social factors. Smelser assumes that collective behavior of participants maintain the ability to reason circumstances and social factors create a situation where illogical and irrational behavior seems logical and rational to those within the society experiencing the strain. While some Nigerians believed that COVID-19 is harmless because of their perceived black skin immunity syndrome and refuses to adhere to public health guidelines can be said to be an irrational behavior. The spread of fake news about COVID-19 cure, and the news making wave in the society that the vaccine is a genetic weapon of extermination of the human race are also irrational behaviour from a logical point of view. The various myths and misconceptions accepted by some Nigerians are

all outcome of COVID-19 distressful impact on lives and livelihood. Also, the rise in crime and corruption during this period of the pandemic can be associated to impact of COVID-19 as a consequence of strain and also as explained by Hirschi (1969) in his social cultural theory of crime and delinquency. Evidence of this was experienced in the society during the escalation of rape incidences, Boko Haram insurgences, Farmer-herder crisis and other civil unrest due to mass looting of palliative warehouses and END SARS protests.

The consequences of COVID-19 strain on Nigeria's society have been examined by other researchers in the health and economic sector. This present work dwells on impact felt in the education sector with particular interest in school operations and adjustment in the "new normal".

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Educational System in Nigeria

Schools provide the function of education, socialization and human capital development for society. The society depends on the educational system for the continuous transmission of its culture, ideals and values including the production of low, middle and high skilled labour for its workforce. This process was going on until the striking of COVID-19 brought about shutting down of schools and the economy in general. As a result, schools operations were disrupted and distorted for many leading to lamentation and cries from education stakeholders. To ease the fear that students were losing on learning time, some private schools that are ICT compliant per say embarked on online teaching and learning. The apprehension and fear and inequity about the imminent collapse of the school system grew among education stakeholders as the lockdown persisted during the COVID-19 era because government decline in reopening of schools for fear of an epidemic as were perceived not infrastructural prepared for resumption. Be that as it may, The Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and The World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for prevention and spread of COVID-19 set the pace for the 'new normal' behavior.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the already crisis-ridden Nigerian public education sector which experiences lack of basic infrastructure and social support from public. Since Nwagwu (2003) lamented on the poor state of the educational system in Nigeria, the situation has not changed. This is because observably, the public schools are still lacking in basic infrastructure for teaching and learning. With COVID-19 the deficiencies in the school system has become more exposed particularly as it relate to infrastructural space for healthy school operations and safety. Sadly, inadequacy has been a normal situation in many public schools in Nigeria and this has not helped in promoting effective teaching and learning. Therefore, the strain on the school system caused by COVID-19 pandemic has given a new narrative to be followed particularly as it relates to social interactions, personal hygiene and school health. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2006) most schools in Nigeria have not met the minimum safety standard that will amply ensure sustainable safe setting for proper academic activities as enumerated in the National School Health Policy.

Based on the above observation there is a deep gully between the state of health facilities in schools now and the Federal Ministry of Education guidelines for School operation, as it relates to availability of health facilities. There is need for social support from government and non-government agencies to foster suitable school environment for teaching and learning in post COVID-19 era.

COVID-19 impact on educational systems resulted to school closures and the need to adjust from face-to-face classroom interaction to technology driven learning classroom

became the next option for schools to remain in operation. This shift was hardly achieved by many public primary schools during the COVID-19 era and even in the post-COVID-19 era most classrooms are still operating on face-to-face level. Of course this is not far from the challenges of infrastructure and enabling ICT driven environment. For example to date, COVID-19 driven school closures have impacted over one billion students UNESCO [2020]. However, some authorities have noted that school closure does serve some purpose and these can be a lesson in mitigation operation in case of an outbreak of any kind of disease.

The report from health authorities note that the effectiveness of school closures as a measure to slow down the spread of contagion will depend on the exact length of the closures, the age structure of the population and the health of the closure (US-CDC, 2020).

Challenges of Educators in COVID-19 and POST COVID-19 ERA

1) Implementing the ‘new normal’.

A “new normal” can be said to be a state to which an economy, society, institution or a school environment adapt to safety measures following the aftermath of a sudden crisis for a profitable goal achievement. For example, experts say the “new normal” in 2025 will be far more technology driven presenting more big challenges [Anderson, Rainie and Vogels .2021]. The on hands task required of education stakeholders in school safety for example should be considered as a “new normal” now demanded in post COVID-19 era. Tiphin & Tuffin (2017) averred that schools have a responsibility to ensure that learners in their care are kept safe during and after this emerging effect of COVID-19. Olapegba, Iorfa, Kolawale, Oguntayo, Gandi, Ottu and Ayandele (2020) in a survey on COVID-19 related knowledge, perceived risk and precautionary behavior among a cross section of Nigerians observe that numerous personal precautionary behaviors were agreed upon as adjustment (‘new normal’) which could curb the menace of the pandemic.

Mbachu, Azubuike, Mbachu, Ndukwu, Ezeuko, Udigwe and Orji-Ifeanyi (2020) and Oyema, Nwafor, Obafemi, Sen, Atonye, Sharma and Alsayed (2020) focused their studies on challenges that could hinder the implementation of the ‘new normal’. Mbachu et al (2020) observed that workers attitude to work based on perception about COVID-19 is one of the challenges which could hinder the implementation of the ‘new normal’ in schools. These scholars showed that most of the workers had developed poor or indifferent dispositions mainly due to the fear of contacting the virus. The result of a parallel study (Oyema et al. 2020) revealed that lack of funds in Nigeria public university was a significant determining factor, which could hamper institutional support plan towards containing the challenges of adjustment to additional school routines like observing COVID-19 prevention protocols. This applies to other public primary and secondary schools in the country. As at today in post COVID-19 era, the attitude towards maintaining compliance to the public health directive of wearing face mask, social distancing and frequent hand washing have varied among individuals. While some persons are beginning to see the importance of compliance to these hygiene measures others have remained unperturbed doubting the efficacy of the prevention protocols including that of the COVID-19 vaccine in circulation. For example Orji, Ubi and Ebuta (2020) in a local survey of rural dwellers in Ikom educational zone of Cross River State found that substantial number of respondent (70%) believed that the reign of COVID-19 will seize just the same way Ebola disease disappeared. To these respondents, the guidelines are just government response to crises which are kept for the record. However, what is known today from the news media and other reliable local authorities shows that the world is still grappling with new cases and relapses resulting from COVID-19 and similar

contagious diseases. Hence, it will be in the best interest of every individual to protect themselves and others by adhering to the ‘new normal’. Also, organizations particularly schools, should provide necessary infrastructure that would enforce compliance to the “new normal” with ease. Since humans love to be controlled, hence deterrent measures should be employed as much as possible to help people comply with the COVID-19 prevention protocols or adapt the ‘new normal’.

2) Implementing Social Distancing and or Physical Distancing: Shifting to E-Learning Implication.

Social distancing or physical distancing is a COVID-19 prevention protocol and a ‘new normal’ behavior which require people to stay at a safe distance from others in public places in a crowd or in one’s home. Shifting from traditional face to face teaching method towards e-learning pedagogy would mean that educators are responding to the prevention measure or the ‘new normal’ behavior of social distancing. The necessity to keep distance apart has favored the integration of e-learning in some schools in Nigeria. However, despite that this response would bring about needed development in the use of e-learning technologies in teaching and learning there are many teaching challenges that the education stakeholders will have to collaborate to address. The foremost challenge that can hinder the progress of utilizing technologies in public schools in Nigeria is lack of infrastructures bedeviling schools. Other factors are varying degree of preparedness of the institution, paucity of funds and policy issues in the Nigeria education sector (Obododike & Okekeokosisi 2020). Challenges limiting the progress of successful implementation of e-learning in the era of COVID-19 in public schools(example tertiary institution) include; lack of documented e-learning policy, inadequate funding, low ICT literacy level (Sani, Oseji & Agunsoye, 2021). Similarly as observed by the present researcher in public, primary and secondary schools challenges include; lack of reading and learning aids [instructional material], lack of untrained teachers and students, poor funding, lack of electricity, lack of access to internet for both teachers and student, non-possession of electronic gadget such as; smart phones, laptops and computers, inadequate learning environment such as; uncondusive classrooms. Orji [2019], Conducted a survey on Classroom Condition and Principal Perception of Factors Responsible for Students’ Dropout in Public Secondary Schools in Calabar Education Zone, in Cross River, Nigeria. Through a non-probability sampling, the principals and their deputies in the eighty one public schools in the study area constituted both the population and the sample. Out of two hundred and forty three principals and deputies, one hundred and ninety three who were accessible constituted the sample of the study. A valid instrument titled “*Factors Responsible for Students’ Dropout Questionnaire*” [FRF-SDQ] was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square statistical tool. Result showed that there is a significant association on perception of the principals and their deputies on class size and availability of seats and desks as factors responsible for students drop out in the school in the study areas. The above mentioned challenges may affect the utilization of e-learning in some public schools in Nigeria.

Lessons to Learn from COVID-19 pandemic on Education and Prospect

Among many lessons to learn from the impact of COVID-19 on the adjustment of school operation, Utilization of e-learning in teaching, learning and assessment stands out as a prospective enduring tool in post COVID-19 era as there is no going back on the “new normal” as it pertain to classroom operation in the 21st century. E-Learning platform for teaching and learning has come to stay in the education sector as a ‘new normal’ and the prospect for this form of classroom teaching in post COVID-19 era is inevitably probable and may continue to be fully developed as the world continue to be digitalized and

globalized. This learning platform is supported by World Health Organization and European Commission E-learning action (2005) as a veritable means to reach out to learners remotely to limit the gap in learning in a time of disruption of normal school as it were before COVID-19 pandemic.

E-learning makes the use of new multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration (European Commission E-learning Action, 2005). E-learning involves the delivery of teaching and assessment materials via electronic media such as internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasting, Audio/video tape, interactive TV, board and CD ROM. (Sani, Oseji & Agunsoye, 2021). According to Sani et al., e-learning has the ability to offer and share materials in all kinds of formats as e-mails, slide shows, videos, pdf. It is also used for conducting webinars (live online class), communication with teachers and chat forum like zoom.

The lesson here is that despite the inherent and foreseen challenges, E-learning prospect will be more advantageous because it will reposition educational institution to look inward for alternatives classroom like e-learning platform. Embracing e-learning platform has been associated with advantages which should be optimized in post COVID-19 era for sustainable educational development and production of 21st century technology driven labour force. These advantages are enumerated as follows;

- I. Promoting distant education and lifelong learning,
- II. Awareness of the need for development of digital literacy among educational stakeholders like students' and teachers' will improve quality of education in a technological driven economy.
- III. Improvement in quality of education will be sustainable through appreciation of e-learning technology as teaching aid.
- IV. Empowerment of learners with technological devices.
- V. Promotion of creative and innovative teaching and learning for greater adjustment to the 21st century classroom demands.
- VI. Global outlook would be improved through the improvement of quality education provided through e- Learning.
- VII. Promoting of a new generation of professional work force and fulfilled citizens who will help in managing knowledge transfer and contribute to practitioner knowledge in all its form (Obododike & Okekeokosisi).
- VIII. Promote psychological wellbeing of learners in terms of increased intrinsic motivation and interest to be actively involved in e-learning (Kajetanowetz & Wierzejewski, 2015).
- IX. Promotion of self-study cum frequent testing such as formative evaluation which engender proper monitoring of educational progress and periodical achievement.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has left an unforgettable landmark in the economy of nations. Particularly in Nigeria, it has strained the educational sector and this is perceived by the researcher as a **severe** social strain. This is to the extent that it has exposed the lapses in lack of infrastructure, funding, inability to shift from face to face classroom online teaching due to ill-equipped structure for online education in the public school system which is to a large extent a positive outcome. This has made it difficult for the school community to adapt to the new normal during this post COVID-19 era. Therefore to achieve a sustainable educational

growth all hands must be on deck and no stone left unturned in managing the aftermath of this pandemic.

Hopefully lessons have been learnt to direct our educational endeavors in the post COVID-19 era to all sectors of the economy (political, social and economic) helping all stakeholders to curb all forms of frivolities and learn from more develop countries, suitable measures on how to adapt and adjust to its effect.

Suggestions

- 1.) Government should provide enabling infrastructure for integration and utilization of e-learning in schools for achievement of education in post COVID-19 era.
- 2.) Government should organize awareness program to sensitize education stakeholders on the need of computer literacy in learning in the post COVID-19 era.

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