

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TEACHER EDUCATOR'S PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is the backbone and the foundation of any great nation. Competent and proficient teachers are the secret behind the success of education. No nation can progress beyond the level of education and educational echelon of her teachers. This emphasizes the importance of teacher educators in nurturing and producing qualified teachers needed for the progress of any society. Unfortunately, the emergence of COVID-19 has brought unprecedented changes to the smooth educational system of Nigeria. Closure of face-to-face activities of educational institutions to prevent the spread of the virus has affected the teacher educator's productivity. Using the method of critical analysis, the researcher finds out that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant impacts and demands on the proficiency of teacher educators and that the only strategy for the survival and continuity of teacher education in a COVID-19 prone society is e - teaching and learning.

Keywords: Teacher Educator, Teacher Education, Teacher, COVID-19

Introduction

Every nation strives towards the provision of quality education for its citizens because of the realization that education is necessary to engineer and consolidate any nation's developmental process. The increasing awareness of the importance of education for the upliftment of the individual and societal standards has awakened in people and nations a conscious effort at devoting resources to acquiring qualitative education. Balogun (2010) opined that education is the light, without which, the whole world would be in darkness. It is the basis of scientific and technological breakthrough and the basis of modernity, which has made all nations of the world accord immense priority to it, even though, the levels of priority range from one country to another (Onebunne (2018). Education develops a country's economy and society; therefore, it is the milestone of a nation's development. The quality and strength of a nation's development depends largely on the quality of education attainable in that nation. To this end, education greatly reflects the key that unlocks the development of personal and national potential and all kinds of rights and powers (Akindutire, & Ekundayo, 2012). The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in the National Policy on Education gave credence to this, when it asserted that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Hence, there is the need to always appraise the nation's system of teacher education with a view to ensuring adequate supply of quality teachers, in the right mix, to man the various levels of the educational system in the country Onebunne (2018).

It is sensible to reassert that what makes a good system of education depends on the quality of teachers available in the system and this is greatly determined by the quality of teacher education. Parraton, Creed and Robinson (2002) assert that the teacher quality is an issue in most countries especially those with limited access to education. Many teachers in these countries are untrained or under-qualified or teaching subjects in which they are neither qualified nor trained for. Teachers are the major pillars in the teaching and learning process. Without an appropriate focus on teachers' access, quality and equity of education for all is not feasible. There are clear indications that provision of quality education tends to have a greater impact on the most vulnerable or deprived students and thus providing quality teachers/educators to all levels of education is one important way to address the problem of inequity. As new and more complex roles are ascribed to teachers, coherent and adequate selection, preparation and continuous professional development strategies must be in place to endow those entrusted with teaching the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for effective teaching and for retaining them in the profession.

Teacher education refers to the policies, procedures and provisions designed to equip (prospective) teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. Those professionals who engage in this activity are called teacher educators (or, in some contexts, teacher trainers). The term teacher educators commonly refer to both those who educate prospective teachers and those who educate practicing teachers. He or she is a person tasked with educating future or practicing teachers. That is, those who initiate, guide and support teacher learners across the nation. Teacher educators work in schools (school-based teacher educators), colleges and universities. The scope of tasks and responsibilities of teacher educators is broad. Teacher educators teach a variety of subjects. They are responsible for the education of future teachers at both undergraduate and post graduate level. The quality of teacher educators has been found to explain significant differences in learning outcomes Parraton, Creed and Robinson (2002). Equitable deployment of qualified teachers/educators also has a significant bearing on the distribution of learning outcomes and thus equity. Being a competent and an efficient teacher is one of the most important resources in any educational institution.

The world has changed over a short period of time with the rise and spread of the deadly Corona Virus disease. Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by a novel corona virus called severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS- CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV). It was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases (Hui DS, 2020). The first transmission to human was in Wuhan, China. Since then, the virus has mostly spread through person-person contact. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Health on 27th February. This was the case of an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria. Since then, the number of confirmed cases of infection kept rising both in Nigeria and around the globe. The disease spreads from person to person through infected air droplets that are projected during sneezing or coughing. It can also be transmitted when humans have contacts with hands and surfaces that contain the virus and touch their eyes, nose, or mouth with the contaminated hands. (AL-Samarrai, Gangwar & Gala 2020; United Nation, 2020). The pandemic caused a scar by the quick deaths following its outbreak. As a result of that schools got locked down together with churches, markets and other places that occasion the coming together of people. The economy of nations crumbled and social life ceased to be. Attaining some restraint over the rapid spread of the virus made life to return to human activities but highly restricted. Physical contact is discouraged and this poses a lot of problems to several human endeavours that require physical interaction.

The sudden emergence of this pandemic affected all disciplines including the field of education. Schools have resumed in Nigeria but education must be conducted under very strict procedures. The class must not be crowded, facilities for washing properly with soap and water must be provided, nose masks must be used both by teachers and learners, touching of persons, surfaces and objects are prohibited. Touching of eyes, nose and mouth by persons is also objected to in order to prevent prevention. At least a social distance of one meter must be observed. These conditions made educational activities very tedious in this COVID -19 era. schools are labouring under the difficult conditions which have impacts on achievement of learners and the productivity of teachers.COVID-19 has impacts on the productivity of teacher educators in Nigeria. Therefore, there is need to provide a remedy (which is e- teaching and learning) since the pandemic is still prevailing and has tendencies of returning back.

Teacher Education in Nigeria

Every nation strives towards the provision of quality education for its citizens, because of the realization that education is necessary for any nation's developmental process. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) asserts that no nation can achieve economic, social and technological progress and self – sufficiency without a good system of education to sustain its achievement. It is also a fact that a system of education depends on the quality of teachers available in the system.

Teacher education is described as the professional training that teachers receive to be classified as professionals. It is a form of education which is planned and systematically tailored and applied for the cultivation of those who teach or will teach, particularly but not exclusively, in primary and post primary levels of schooling. It revolves around the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behaviour and skills required in the performance of effective duties in the classrooms and in other social gatherings including churches (Nakpodia&Urien, 2011).

As a training arm of the teaching profession, teacher education is charged with the task of developing knowledge and skills as basis for practice, with preparing personnel entry into the teaching profession(pre-service) and with contributing to the on-going development of practicing professionals (in-service). Teacher education is therefore to function by equipping teachers with the wherewithal; both ethical/intellectual competencies,skills and dispositions that will enable them develop and imbue in their students the requisite educational and societal dispositions (Nakpodia, &Urien, 2011).Furthermore, UNESCO (2005) opines that teacher education addresses environmental, social, and economic contexts to create locally relevant and culturally appropriate teacher education programmes for both pre-service and in-service teachers. It further explains that teacher education generally includes four elements:

improving the general educational background of the trainee teachers;

increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach;

pedagogy and understanding of children and learning;

and the development of practical skills and competences.

There is no doubt that teacher education is a veritable tool towards educational development. This fact was given credence by the National Policy on Education when it stated that teacher education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all educational planning, because no education system can

rise above the quality of its teachers. The balance between these four elements varies widely (Perraton, 2010). Teacher education is divided into three stages namely:

- Initial Teacher Training
- The induction process involving the training and support of the trainees during the 1st few years of teaching or the 1st year in a particular school
- Teacher development or continuing performing development and intensive process for practicing teachers

All of which must be attained by a supposed teacher to be professionally equipped and for the maintenance of relevance in the field of teaching. The policy emphasized that all teachers in the nation's educational institutions from pre-primary to university level would be professionally trained and that the purpose of teacher education should be:

- To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system.
- To encourage further, the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives;
- To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation, not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world; and
- To enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession (FRN, 2004).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and on Teacher Educator's Productivity

The pandemic virtually affected everything including teacher education. It has disastrously hampered the smooth flow of teacher education programme in Nigeria. Students missed learning interactions for eight months. At the reopening of schools many pre-pandemic-in-school-students fail to return. According to UNICEF (2020) about 35.9 million primary and secondary school learners are currently out-of-school as a consequence of school closures. The sudden closure of schools has affected the entire school system including the curriculum. This affects teacher educators in several ways. First, the trainee teachers were on teaching practice before the lock down. On coming back after the closure, schools where they were practising teaching were no longer eager to accommodate them for fear of infection. Even when they were accepted the term was over in a few weeks for a new term to begin. The number of teaching load they had was not finished nor the educational activities they were to carry out. The skills and competences to be acquired by them were not sufficiently exposed to them. The fact is glaring that the educators in the practice schools are handicapped and could not do much after COVID because of lack of educational contact during the lock down.

Not only this, the educators in the higher institutions could not assist the teacher trainees as much in this their initial teacher training programme. This was because of the rush of the school programme on resumption of schools. The curriculum was hastily concluded and examination taken. Many teacher educators yet to supervise their teaching practice students abandoned them. Even project supervision was not effectively conducted. Teacher development or continuing education programme for practicing teachers were suspended because of COVID-19. This will cause the spending of much money and extension of the teacher development programme. And as the programme could not be

conducted from home, the added cost and time could cause their pupils/students to have a great setback in their academic endeavours. To the researcher's knowledge, the year 2020 was the most unproductive year as far as students and teacher educators are concerned.

In Nigeria, school opportunity is correlated to income level and the public schools differ from the private schools. The private schools serve learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds which are willing and able to pay more to access the better resources offered by the private schools. The public schools are usually comprised of students from lower socio-economic households and lower income areas. Therefore COVID-19 has affected mostly the students from public schools because of their lack of accessibility to distance learning opportunities. Opportunities to learn within their homes were limited given their parents inability to provide education support. It has disrupted learning across the country and restricted access to vital school-provided services. For teacher trainees teaching in private schools, they and their mentor teachers were engaged during COVID-19 because of online facilities provided by the practice schools as a result of patronage of the rich parents but it was not applicable for public school.

Furthermore, COVID-19 severely caused loss of access to vital school-provided services because of restriction of movement and association. It has caused general backwardness on the production of goods and services and increasing the hunger and hardship state of the people. This has indirectly, affected the government, the parents providing for the students and the teacher educators because there was reduction in the salary and even non payment of salary of educators in the private sector. In this instant, the public teacher educators were at advantage. (Thelma and Adedeji, 2020).

There is no doubt that the pandemic has led to the shortage of funds for the educational system, parents as well as are faced with the reality of having to pay extra cost on their children's academics. Many families in Nigeria are experiencing economic hardship as a result of the pandemic; some of the vulnerable families having their children under government free feeding scheme are being faced with the challenge of going in search of food for their children while they are with them at home. Teacher education institutions witness a reduction in after-COVID population of learners with many of the returned students not paying their fees as a result of parents inability to meet up.. This not only reduced the fund schools generate for work but also resulted to the lack of the necessary resources being provided by the institutions

Teacher Education through E-Learning

According to Aduwa-Ogiegbean, and Iyamu (2008) electronic learning is defined as a student-centred method of learning that offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of time and location. It has been the only method that is fit to rescue the global crisis from hard times of global pandemic. Online learning enables modification of procedures and processes based on the needs of the students. The anywhere-anytime feature of online education has a great advantage in times of crisis-like situations such as COVID-19. The closure of places and unsafe travelling by roads can create a lot of troubles but e-learning will not deprive students from getting education from their homes. Trends in educational issues indicate that online education will transform the education sector by improving the manual processes across schools and replacing them with modern and dynamic online digital learning which will create more collaborative and interactive learning environment for study. It offers access to updated contents and offers quick delivery of lessons.

Therefore, a learning system based on formalised teaching but with the help of electronic resources is known as E-learning. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the Internet forms the major component of E-learning. E-learning can also be termed as a network enabled transfer of skills and knowledge, and the delivery of education is made to a large number of recipients at the same or different times.

Importance of E- Learning to the Teacher Educators and the Student-Teacher if Fully Employed in Nigeria

E-learning is the one of the best technique employed for the efficiency of education and productivity of teacher educators in a COVID prone society due to its accessibility, flexibility, speed and effectiveness as discussed as follows.

E-learning has been introduced in a COVID prone society to empower student-teacher to get basic education and enhance teaching and learning skills. Also, they can obtain a degree certificate, without actually attending school or university or any other institution. For teacher educators, it is a great source of earning, wherein they can teach from anywhere in their preferred time. Applying e-learning to all levels of schooling helped to ensure that student-teachers grasp the lessons adequately at a faster pace. E-learning will help in bringing different student-teachers, educators, experts, practitioners to one place. Thus, there is a good practice of knowledge sharing followed through different online platforms. This is important in current times as competition is rising and the world is also growing. Hence, quick information helps in the better growth of an individual. Online Learning can accommodate everyone's needs. Classes can be taken from any place and at the time which students and their educators prefer. It offers access to exclusive, prolific, and updated content and accessibility is open, secure, and uninterrupted.

It ensures quick delivery of lessons. Traditional classrooms at times delay. E-learning provides expeditious and exclusive delivery of lessons. There is no procrastination in e-learning. It is a quick way of learning. The method is made available at much-reduced costs. The importance of E-Learning education is that it is quick and does not require much cost. The effectiveness of the transferred or imparted knowledge and learning is high and powerful. The Audio-Visuals help in remembering knowledge for a longer time. Mobility assured is a very comfortable and affordable option. Taking revision and getting hands-on different courses is not that simple in traditional classes. Contrary to that, missed lessons can be always taken again online. This makes it easier for teacher educators to impart the right information. It promotes a self-paced learning process.

Unlike the traditional method of teaching with board and chalk, E-learning is achieved with the online mode of learning as the students can learn at their pace and comfort.

Kinds of E-Learning Applications that can be Used by Teacher Educators

Google Classroom is a free web service that is developed by Google for schools that aims to simplifying, creating, distributing and grading assignments in a paperless way with the purpose of streamlining the process of sharing files between teacher educators and student.

WhatsApp which is freeware, cross-platform, messaging and voice over IP service.

Face book: This allows users to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls and share images, documents, user location and other media.

Zoom is a video communication that provides video telephone and online chat services through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform that is used for distance education and social media.

Blog is an online journal or information website used in displaying information in a reversed chronological order with the latest posts appearing first. It is a platform where a writer shares his/her view on many concepts. All these will maintain the social distancing rules, help the teacher to teach, reach out to learners through voice, written words or even video conversation.

E-Drills: With the Internet-based drill software's, it is aimed to create an effective and productive studying atmosphere for students. As students access these activities on the Internet, they could study on the units through interactive multimedia software's and reinforce their knowledge by examining numerous examples. Internet-based drill software's with animations and intensive student-computer interaction could be in service within this program. Students enrolled in the distance learning system, could study on the software's with or without sound effects.

E-Counselling: The one-to-one academic counselling provided to the students could also be provided in a similar format on the Internet. Parallel to the research software's, students are allowed to ask questions to their academic counsellors related to their course contents.

E-Sound Book: The E-sound book application, which enables especially the visually retarded students to listen to the course book contents, could be provided on the Internet. Therefore, visually retarded students and the students with screen reading difficulties could access their course books from their offices or from an Internet-café. They could listen to the contents of the course book by downloading the sound files on their computers.

E-Examination: In this application, students are administered many proof exams in the internet environment before the formal exams, which enables them to determine their approximate levels. These proof exams, which enable the students to determine their approximate readiness levels, are the most facilitated e-learning services.

Conclusion

Teachers form the hub of the education process. It is in this context that teacher education becomes a matter of great concern. Teachers are an extremely important facet of any society for a number of reasons and their role in society is both significant and valuable. Teachers play an extraordinary part in the lives of children for the formative years of their development and the importance of teachers is something that cannot be understated. A great person once said, "Teaching is a profession that teaches all other professions. Despite the waves of the pandemic in education system, it is requisite that teacher educators' be assisted through access to e-learning by provision of free or cheap data and physical resources to impart knowledge thereby increasing their productivity which has been greatly reduced by COVID-19.

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