

ASSESSMENT OF PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC SCHOOL CLOSURE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN GWAGWALADA AREA COUNCIL, ABUJA

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Abstract

The Federal Government of Nigeria's overall strategy to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria on 27th February, 2020 has really caused serious harm to the educational system and other sectors of the economy. This paper therefore was anchored on assessment of parents' perception of the impact of covid-19 pandemic school closure on secondary school students in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The sample of the study comprised 450 parents who have children in secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. The sample was selected from ten (10) communities within the study area through simple random sampling technique. That is, 45 parents from each of the communities. The study used questionnaire as its instrument for data gathering from the respondents. The instrument (questionnaire) was designed in a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed as well as yes or no. A total of 450 questionnaires were administered to the respondents and 448 were validly filled, returned and used for data analysis. Mean and simple percentage were used for data analysis. Finding revealed that parents' perceived COVID-19 pandemic on school closure to have negative impact on secondary school students. It was also indicated that some children during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure were not being adequately engaged in learning activities. It also showed that some children were engaged in hawking instead of learning. In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that: i. Since school closure has negative impact on students, the government should leverage the cost of internet services so that children of low income parents can have access to the services in case of future sudden school closure. ii. Parents should ensure that their children/wards are constantly and continuously engaged in learning activities should there be sudden school closure in the nearest future.

Keywords: Assessment, Perception, Pandemic, Parents, COVID-19 and Students.

Introduction

The educational sector like any other sector has faced devastating experience as a result of corona virus which has impacted on its functionality, efficiency and effectiveness. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic across the globe has indeed caused far reaching negative effect on the educational sector and other sectors of the economy. Though, the

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pandemic was first reported in Wuhan City, China in December, 2019 but it gradually spread across countries of the world. In Nigerian context, the first case of COVID-19 was an Italian citizen who returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos State. This was reported and confirmed by the Federal Ministry of Health in conjunction with Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) on 27th February, 2020 in Lagos State. Because of the wide spread, gruesomeness and devastating nature of the corona virus pandemic, governments of the world over were compelled to come up with several strategies on how to curtail the spread of the pandemic. Thus, as part of the Federal Government of Nigeria's overall strategy to contain the spread of the virus, the Federal Ministry of Education on March 19th, 2020 issued a circular granting an approval for the closure of all schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities for a period of one (1) month commencing from Monday 23rd March, 2020. However, as a result of the increasing cases of corona virus cases in Nigeria, schools at all levels have remained closed for months (Nigeria Education in Emergency Working Group, 2020).

According to UNESCO (2020), the action of governments globally to temporary close educational institutions in order to contain the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic is no longer news and is most expected. The decision of school closure was prompted by the principle that large gathering of persons constitutes a serious risk to safeguarding public health during a pandemic. Though no one knows for sure how long the closure of schools is likely to last but one can easily anticipate that date will be extended until the pandemic subsides. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on school closure generally and secondary school student in specificity cannot be over accentuated. For the students, the most immediate impact has naturally been the temporary cessation of the face to face teaching and learning. The globally temporary cessation of face- to- face learning activities in schools has been a huge disruptor of the functions of the educational system. This disruption is highly variable and depends, first, on their ability to remain active in their academic activities and second, on their financial sustainability. In the event of a long duration of the cessation of face-to-face activities, it is most likely that there will be a decline in demand in the short term and a spike in the next academic year with fees non-existence or very affordable. As for those who are about to exit upper secondary and aspire to enter higher education, the situation is quite pathetic. They will have no clear idea of how long they will have to wait again.

Giving details on the percentage of schools affected globally as a result of COVID-19 pandemic on school closure, UNESCO (2020) as of March 3rd, released the first global numbers on school closures and affected students. It reports that 22 countries on three continents had enacted preventive measures including the temporary closure of schools and universities. This has impacted 290.5 million students around the world. Between 13-16 March, 2020, national governments in 49 countries announced school closure with 39 countries who closed schools nationwide and 22 countries with localized school closure. By 16 March, this figure increased to 73 countries. By 29 March, more than 1.5 billion children and students were affected by the nationwide school closure. Others were disrupted by localized closure. As of mid-April, a total of 1.725 billion students globally had been affected by the closure of schools and higher education institutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 7 June 2020, UNESCO reported that approximately 1.725 billion learners were affected due to school closure in response to the pandemic. In the same vein, UNICEF (2020) admits that 134 countries are currently implementing nationwide school closure and 38 are implementing local closure, impacting about 98.5 percent of the world's students' population while 39 countries' schools are currently opened.

In the view of Lindzon (2020), educational institutions provide essential learning activities to the learners and when school activities are disrupted resulting in their closure, students are deprived opportunities of social, cognitive and psychomotor growth and development with the period affecting them even beyond the period of closure. Lindzon also admits that the closure of schools disrupts the well-planned and articulated academic calendar and activities which were supposed to have been covered within the specified period. Thus, the disruption results in delay in the graduation of students at all levels. Lindzon further states this there could decline the learning ability of students from poor homes; as their parents may not afford to provide them with lesson teachers or engage them in e-learning platform or strategy. Closing the school system can encourage students to take to gangsterism, crime and drugs. They could also keep bad companies as their parents may not have good monitoring approach on them. The accumulation of financial cost for parents may affect students from poor economic background because their parents may be unable to pay the accumulated fees and other levies thereby resulting in high rate of school dropout.

Corroborating the above, Victor (2020) maintains that the human brain functions more effectively when constantly engaged with activities. Hence, the closure of schools due to COVID-19 has the tendency to reduce the learning ability of students. In Victor's opinion, some students may not likely read their books as long as the school is not in operation. Some may be engaged by their parents in domestic/house chores, street hawking and other activities that may distract them from studying. In some cases, the children while constantly at home may engage in certain social vices such as stealing, keeping bad friends and indulging in drugs abusing activities. When schools are closed, parents are often asked to facilitate the learning of children at home and they often struggle to perform this task. This is especially true for parents with limited education and resources.

Students' drop-out rates tend to increase as an effect of school closure due to the challenge of ensuring all students return to school once school closure ends. This is especially true of protracted closure as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic. School closure has impact not only on students, teachers and families but has far-reaching economic and societal consequences (Baker, 2020). So, global home schooling will surely produce some inspirational moments, some angry moments, some fun moments and some frustrated moments. It seems very unlikely that it will replace the learning lost from school. But the bigger point is that, there will likely be substantial disparities between families in the extent to which they can help their children learn. Key differences include the amount of time available to devote to teaching, the non-cognitive skills of the parents, resources (not everyone will have the kit to access the best online material) and the amount of knowledge (it is hard for a parent to help a child learn something that he/she may not understand. Consequently, this episode will lead to an increase in the inequality of human capital growth for the affected cohorts.

Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) observe that going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness (from an economic point of view), the primary point of going to school is to increase a child's ability. Even a relatively short time in school or a relatively short period of time one misses school will have consequences for skill growth. The global lockdown of educational institutions has caused major interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative. Home schooling is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity but also to children's social life and learning. Students' assessments are also moving online with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments have simply been cancelled.

Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality.

The closure of schools, colleges and universities not only interrupts the teaching of students around the world but the closure also coincides with a key assessment period being postponed or cancelled. Internal assessments are perhaps thought to be less important and many have been simply cancelled. But their point is to give information about the child's progress to families and teachers. The loss of this information delays the recognition of both high potential and learning difficulties and can have harmful long-term consequences on the child (Burgess, et al 2020). According to Clement (2020), the lockdown of schools not only affects internal assessments but also affects external assessment in examinations such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), General Certificate on Education (GCE), National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB) and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

In the opinion of UNICEF (2020), school closure as a result of COVID-19 pandemic may push millions of children in developing countries into child labour. In the same vein, online source Wikipedia (n.d) posits that even when school closure is temporary, the impact is more severe for disadvantaged children and their families which include interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems and consequent economic cost to families who cannot work. School performance hinges critically on maintaining close relationships with teachers. This is particularly true for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not have the parental support needed to learn on their own. Localized school closure places burdens on schools as parents and officials redirect children to schools that are opened. Though some may argue that e-learning can be used to make the school closure have less impact on the students, lack of access to technology or fast, reliable internet access can prevent students in rural areas and from disadvantaged families from acquiring the desired knowledge. Lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity is therefore an obstacle to continued learning, especially for students from disadvantaged families.

Limitations and exceptions to copyright can also have an impact on the ability of students to access the textbooks and materials they need to study. School closure puts a strain on parents and guardians to provide childcare and manage distance learning while children are out of school. In the absence of alternative options, working class parents often leave children alone when schools close and this can lead to risky behaviours, including increased influence of peer pressure and substance abuse. School closure leads to malnutrition especially among learners who are provided school meal by the school feeding programme. This is because nutrition plays a critical role in cognitive development and academic performance for children. Many children worldwide rely on free or discounted meals at schools. When schools close, nutrition is especially compromised for children in schools where food is provided (Wikipedia, 2020).

School closure negatively has impact on students learning outcomes. Though schooling provides essential learning but when schools close, children and youths are deprived opportunities for growth and development. The disadvantages are disproportionate for under-privileged learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities beyond school. When schools close, parents are often asked to facilitate the learning of children at home and can struggle to perform this task. This is true for parents with limited education and resources. Students gain slower during school closure than in a business-as-usual academic year. Kindergarten children will loss 67% of their literacy ability during the COVID-19 school closures (Bao, Qu, Zhang & Hogan, 2020).

Student drop-out rates tend to increase as an effect of school closure due to the challenge of ensuring all students return to school once school closure ends. This is especially true of protracted closure. Disadvantaged, at-risk or homeless children are more likely not to return to school after the closure end, and the effect will often be a life-long disadvantage from lost opportunities. UNESCO (2020) observes that schools are also hubs of social activities and human interaction. When schools are closed, many children and youths miss out of social contact that is essential to learning and development.

Statement of the Problem

When schools are in session, students tend to be constantly engaged in learning activities and enjoy face to face interaction with their teachers and fellow students; thereby developing their cognitive, affective and psycho-motive domains. However, as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, schools have been temporarily closed for months disrupting teaching and learning in schools. This disruption may force some students to take to bad company, indulge in drugs taking and reduce the tendency to actively engage in learning. Non-engagement of students in active learning will be more pronounced among children whose parents have limited resources to get lesson teachers or enroll them in e-learning. Some children may be forced by their parents into child labour. Victor (2020) states that students themselves are faced with isolation, anxiety about a deadly virus and uncertainty about the future. Students are likely to enter school with more variability in their academic skills than under normal circumstances. Many students may face greater food insecurity, loss of family income, loss of family members to the coronavirus, and fear of catching the virus themselves.

Objectives of the Study

The following specific objectives guided the study:

- i. To determine the perception of parents on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closure on secondary school students.
- ii. To find out how parents engaged their children/wards in activities within the COVID-19 pandemic school closure.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of the study, two research questions were formulated as seen thus:

- i. What is the perception of parents on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closure on secondary school students?
- ii. How do parents engage their children/wards in activities within the COVID-19 pandemic school closure?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This was chosen because data were collected from respondents considered to be the representative sample of the larger population. The sample of the study comprised 450 parents who have children in secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. The sample was selected from ten (10) communities within the study area through simple random sampling technique. That is, 45 parents from each of the communities. The study used questionnaire as its instrument for data gathering from the respondents. The instrument (questionnaire) was designed in a yes or no format as well as 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed. A total of 450

questionnaires were administered to the respondents and 448 were validly filled, returned and used for data analysis. Mean and simple percentage were used for data analysis. This was because the study was descriptive in nature and has no hypothesis to be tested. The decision rule for accepting or rejecting an item for the mean was 2.5.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Perception of parents on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closure on secondary school students

As a parent what is your perception about the impact of COVID-19 school closure on your child/children?

S/N	ITEM	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	Total	\bar{X}	Decision Rule
1	School closure due to COVID-19 interrupted students' learning.	311	137	0	0	1655	3.7	Accepted
2	Many students may live in greater fear of catching the virus even after school resumption; thereby distracting them emotionally and psychologically from learning.	273	89	67	19	1512	3.4	Accepted
3	When the pandemic subsides, some students may return to school with lower achievement because of discontinuity in learning at home.	199	244	0	5	1533	3.4	Accepted
4	Staying at home during the COVID-19 school closure increases the number of illiterates among secondary school students.	210	179	33	26	1469	3.3	Accepted
5	School closure due to COVID-19 increases the rate of school dropouts.	325	96	17	10	1632	3.6	Accepted
6	Students from parents with limited financial resources gain slower during school closures than in a business-as-usual academic year because there may be no private lessons.	397	33	16	2	1721	3.8	Accepted
7	School closure due to COVID-19 makes working class parents to leave their children alone and this can lead to risky behaviours, including increased influence of peer pressure and substance abuse.	288	135	25	0	1607	3.6	Accepted
8	School closure leads to malnutrition especially among learners who are provided school meal by the school feeding programme.	317	99	23	9	1620	3.6	Accepted
9	School closure as a result of COVID-19 pandemic may push millions of children in developing countries into child labour.	330	103	11	4	1655	3.7	Accepted
10	School closure as a result of COVID-19 pandemic has affected public assessment; thereby resulting in the cancellation of public exams such WAEC, NABTE etc.	375	73	0	0	1719	3.8	Accepted

Sectional Mean=3.59

Items in table 1 were structured to determine the perception of parents about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closure on their children/wards in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. Mean statistical tool was used for data analysis with a cut-off mean score of 2.5 as the decision rule for accepting an item. Thus, any item that has a mean score of 2.5 and above is accepted and vice versa. From the analysis, finding revealed that all the 10 items had mean scores of 2.5 and above with a sectional mean of 3.59. Thus, it can be deduced that parents believed that COVID-19 pandemic school closure has negative impact on students; as it interrupts students' learning, increases the rate of school dropouts, may push millions of children in developing countries into child labour, makes working class parents to leave their children alone and this can lead to risky behaviours, including increased influence of peer pressure and substance abuse as well as makes students live in greater fear of catching the virus even after school resumption; thereby distracting them emotionally and psychologically from learning.

Table 2: How parents engaged their children/wards in activities within the COVID-19 pandemic school closure

Tick the options below to indicate how you engaged your children/wards during the temporary COVID-19 school closure?

S/N	ITEM	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
1	Private lesson	192	42.9	256	57.1	448	100
2	e-learning strategy	144	32.1	304	67.9	448	100
3	Hawking	99	22.1	349	77.9	448	100
4	Constant house chores	297	66.3	151	33.7	448	100
5	Personally teaching the child/children	87	19.4	361	80.6	448	100
6	Learning a skill	62	13.8	386	86.2	448	100
7	Allowing children go out freely	154	34.4	294	65.6	448	100
8	Giving the children daily homework	174	38.8	274	61.2	448	100

Items in table 2 above were structured to find out how parents engaged their children/wards in activities within the COVID-19 pandemic school closure. Item 1 shows that 192 respondents represented by 42.9% agreed that they engaged their children in private lessons while 256 respondents represented by 57.1% disagreed. Item 2 indicated that 144 respondents represented by 32.1% agreed that they engaged their children in e-learning while 308 respondents represented by 67.9% disagreed. Item 3 reveals that 99 respondents represented by 22.1% agreed that they engaged their children in hawking while 349 respondents represented by 77.9% disagreed. In item 4, it was discovered that 297 respondents represented by 66.3% agreed that their children were constantly engaged in house chores while 151 respondents represented by 33.7% disagreed. Item 5 revealed that 87 respondents represented by 19.4% agreed that they personally teach their children while 361 respondents represented by 80.6% disagreed. In item 6, it shows that 62 respondents represented by 13.8% agreed that they engaged their children in learning skills while 386 respondents represented by 86.2% disagreed. Item 7 indicates that 154 respondents represented by 34.4% agreed

that they allowed their children go out freely while 294 (65.6%) respondents disagreed. In item 8, data showed that 174 respondents represented by 38.8% agreed that they give their children daily homework to engage them while 274 respondents represented by 61.2% disagreed.

From the analysis, it can be implied that some children during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure were not being adequately engaged in learning activities; as only 42.9% as against 57.1%, 32.1% as against 57.1%, 19.4% as against 80.6% as well as 38.8% as against 61.2% agreed that their children were engaged in private lessons, e-learning strategy, personal teaching of their children and gave their children daily homework respectively. Thus, the level of active engagement of children in learning was inadequate.

Discussion

Items in table 1 determined the perception of parents about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic school closure on their children/wards in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. From the analysis, finding revealed that parents perceived COVID-19 pandemic school closure to have negative impact on secondary school students.

The above result is in line with the view of Lindzon (2020) who states that when school activities are disrupted resulting in their closure, students are deprived opportunities of social, cognitive and psychomotor growth and development within the period which may affect them even beyond the period of closure. Lindzon further adds that the closure of schools disrupts the well-planned and articulated academic calendar and activities which were supposed to have been covered within the specified period. Thus, the disruption results in delay in the graduation of students at all levels. Lindzon also posits that there could be decline in the learning ability of students from poor homes; as their parents may not afford to provide them with lesson teachers or engage them in e-learning platform or strategy. Closing the school system can encourage students to take to gangsterism, crime and drugs. They could also keep bad companies as their parents may not have good monitoring on the. The accumulation of financial cost for parents may affect students from poor economic background as their parents may be unable to pay the accumulated fees and other levies thereby resulting in high rate of school dropouts.

In the same vein, Victor (2020) maintains that the human brain functions more effectively when constantly engaged with activities. Hence, the closure of schools due to COVID-19 has the tendency to reduce the learning ability of students. In Victor's opinion, some students may not have access to reading their books as long as the school is not in operation. Some may be engaged by their parents in domestic/house chores, street hawking and other activities that may distract them from studying. In some cases, the children while constantly at home may engage in certain social vices such as stealing, keeping bad friends and indulging in drugs. When schools are closed, parents are often asked to facilitate the learning of children at home and they struggle to perform this task. This is especially true for parents with limited education and resources.

Students' drop-out rates tend to increase because of effect of school closure and the challenge of ensuring all students return to school once school closure ends. This is especially true of protracted closure as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic. School closure has impact not only on students, teachers and families but it has far-reaching economic and societal consequences (Baker, 2020). So, while global home schooling will surely

produce some inspirational moments, some angry moments, some fun moments and some frustrated moments, it seems very unlikely that it will on average replace the learning lost from school. But the bigger point is this: there will likely be substantial disparities between families in the extent to which they can help their children learn. Key differences include the amount of time available to devote to teaching, the non-cognitive skills of the parents, resources (not everyone will have the kit to access the best online material) and the amount of knowledge (it is hard for a parent to help a child learn something that he/she may not understand. Consequently, this episode will lead to an increase in the inequality of human capital growth for the affected cohorts.

Items in table 2 were structured to find out how parents engaged their children/wards in activities within the COVID-19 pandemic school closure. Result indicated that some children during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure are not being adequately engaged in learning activities. It also showed that some children are engaged in hawking instead of learning. The result conforms with the view of Victor (2020) who observes that the closure of schools due to COVID-19 makes some parents to engage their children in domestic/house chores, street hawking and other activities that may distract them from studying. In some cases, the children while constantly at home may engage in certain social vices such as stealing, keeping bad friends and indulging in drugs. UNICEF (2020) maintains that school closure as a result of COVID-19 pandemic may push millions of children in developing countries into child labour. Wikipedia (2020) opines that in the absence of alternative options for students during school closure, working class parents often leave children alone when schools close and this can lead to risky behaviours, increased influence of peer pressure and substance abuse.

Conclusion

The school system is established in order to provide functional learning activities to the learners thereby imparting in the learners knowledge, skills and experience that will better their lives and that of the society at large. However, the disruption of learning activities by way of school closure goes a long way in impacting negatively on the learners by removing face-face interaction between students and teachers, reducing students' active engagement in learning activities, promoting illiteracy and school dropout, child labour and taking to crime and drugs.

Recommendations

In line with findings of the study, it was recommended that: i. Since school closure has negative impact on students, the government should leverage the cost of internet services so that children of low income parents can access in case of future sudden school closure. ii. Parents should ensure that their children/wards are constantly and continuously engaged in learning activities should there be sudden school closure in the nearest future.

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