

Sustaining Teacher Education in Nigeria in the 'New Normal' Era

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Abstract

Covid-19 that started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 that almost every sectors including education. The pandemic did not only disrupt commercial and economic activities. Its' also affect education. To ensure that the pandemic did not claim total paralysis of education lead to the adaptation of teaching and learning in the period and tagging the process as new normal of teaching and learning. Students and teachers and distancing themselves from each other, face-to-face teaching was reduced to barest minimum and schools and colleges were under key and locked. This paper therefore explored sustaining teacher education in Nigeria in the new normal era with considerations for deficits in quality of education and provisions for it and sustenance in the new normal and project the nexus between the new normal and teacher education sustainability in Nigeria. Some of the challenges beclouding teacher education were explained and finally the paper proffer what should be done and recommendations.

Keywords: Teachers' Education, Newnormal Era, Nigeria Situation, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

The world was disconcerted by the rude shock of the Covid-19 in the last quarter of year 2019! Its devastation stretched its tentacles from the little fishing town of Wuhan, China in December 2019, owing to the negligence and lackadaisical attitude of the Chinese government despite a warning from one of their ophthalmologists, Dr. Li Wenliang [1]. This leads to chaos in all segment around the world. By January 2020, the whole world began to "lockdown" or rather fold up one after the other in order to stem the spread of the pandemic. In the field of education, this emergency has led to the massive closure of face-to-face activities of educational institutions in more than 190 countries in order to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact [2]. Nigeria was not left out of the last-minute face-saving lockdown² which started on 27th March 2020.

One of the measures adopted by the Nigerian government to curb the spread of the diseases is the suspension of face-to-face teaching-learning activities at all level of the educational institutions. Despite the overwhelming consequences of the pandemic, this global crisis has also been an extraordinary time for learning. We are learning how adaptable and resilient educational systems, policy makers, teachers, students and families can be [3]. Two crucial factors have shifted due to the pandemic. First, pedagogical adaptations have proven to be pivotal as the traditional lecturing in-person models do not translate to a remote learning environment. No matter the type of channel used (radio, TV, mobile, online platforms) teachers need to adapt their practices and be creative

to keep students engaged as every household has become a classroom - more often than not - without an environment that supports learning. Second, the pandemic has recalibrated how teachers divide their time between teaching, engaging with students, and administrative tasks, [3].

At the peak period of the pandemic in Nigeria especially, almost the tertiary institutions adopted an unplanned activities to teaching called emergency remote teaching, a promising enterprise and promising aspect of distance education [4] as alternative solution to facilitate continued teaching and learning at every level of education across the country to deliver content online and teaching remotely. Emergency remote teaching ensures teachers separation from their students in time and distance in teaching activities but provide opportunity for them to remain connected and engaged with the content, while working from anywhere [4]. The emphasis with the adoption of emergency remote teaching were added together by [5] in 15 ways.

They are education cannot wait and learning must never stop due to schools closure, educational delivery can no longer be solely facilitated by the physical presence of the teacher in a brick and mortar building, learners do not necessarily need to be physically present as a group in a brick and mortar building, widespread use of technology for continuity of learning of learning, online delivery of lessons by teachers among others. Therefore, emergency remote teaching (ERT), entails delivery curriculum contents, instructional material or educational resources to the

target learning audience physically away from the centre or institution of learning [6]. The ERT delivery due to crisis circumstances [7]. It provides situations for institutions or education that could otherwise be delivered face-to-face which is not possible because of a crisis. Its special feature is an unplanned proactive with no option than to use any kind of offline and/or online resources that may be at hand [8]. The essence of ERT is not to recreate a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and institutional supports in a manner that is reliably available, contextually more feasible and quick to set up during an emergency, crisis, conflict or violent [9].

Any nation that desire development cannot afford to toil with the education of her teaching force, this is because no nation can rise above the quality of if its teacher [10] and this to a large extent, depends on the quality and importance attached to teacher education. The United Nations believed that to meet the target of the Sustainable Development Goals (Education For All, [EFA]) in education, it requires a strong and virile teacher education. As teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing quality education, teachers and educators should be empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, motivated, professionally qualified and supported within-well resourced, efficient and effectively governed system.

The question of sustainability of teacher education towards achieving the sustainable development in education seems to be what Nigeria has been struggling with because the state of educational sector did not suggest that the country is prepared for this. For this instance, the budget of Nigeria in the past few years fell below the benchmark set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The 2021 budget for education which has been said to be the worst in Nigeria history stands at 6.3 percent which is far below the UNESCO's 26 percent benchmark. This allocation of funds to education sector is unarguably one of the problems facing the development of educator sector and this consequently affects teacher education in the country.

The Deficit in Quality Education

The deficit in quality education for teachers based on the above was what the country was battling with in the area of facilities, welfare and capacity building when Covid-19 broke out. This further posed greater challenges to teacher education with problems that are already on ground which include:

1. **Predilection for some courses above Education:** For decades, most students who seek admission into higher institutions of learning do not prefer to make education courses in universities their first choice or

choosing Colleges of Education as their first choice. To some of the students, teaching is considered as a second fiddle because of the attitude of the government and the society toward teaching profession. The students typically preferred to make Medicine, Law, Economics, Pharmacy, Accountancy and other courses presumed to be more dignifying their foremost selection. Therefore, getting students for admission for the teaching profession is challenging and this no doubt makes Colleges of Education and other Teacher's Institute appear a dumping ground.

2. **Paltry Funding of Teacher Education in Nigeria:** As earlier mentioned, the budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria is abysmally low. Adequate funds are hardly released to provide facilities and investment, thus making capacity building unattainable. This automatically affects teacher education in a negative way. That Teacher Education is discounted in Nigeria may be demonstrated by the attitude of government towards legitimate demands of the teaching force. For instance, when Colleges of Education Academic Staff and other sister Unions in Colleges of Education are compelled to make agitations or demands for changes regarding certain conditions, the response of the government is always lethargic when compared to the swift response to the demands of the Academic Staff Union of Universities.
3. **Paying Lip Service to Sustainable Policies on Teacher Education:** Apart from the lack of adequate funding teacher education, policies summersault is another challenge this sub sector of education has always faced in the country. Each government comes with different policies which would ostensibly sustain such policies in the interest of the system. Lack of sustainable policies has been a bane on the development of teacher education in Nigeria. In the same vein, when policies are made, to implement such policies on teacher education becomes a problem. Few years back, Nigeria government promised to give stipends to all education students in the country; it is unfortunate to remark that this statement ended with its pronouncement. Up till now, not many students have benefitted from this pronouncement.
4. **Disruption of Academic Calendar:** Disruption of academic calendar is another factor considered as one challenges facing the teacher education in Nigeria. Industrial actions by the Unions in Colleges of Education often affect the teacher education

programme and consequently affect the turning out of qualified teachers for placement in various levels of primary and secondary education in the country. The implication of this is that, when qualified teachers are not available, quack teachers become the alternative which is not good for the education system.

5. **Brain Drain:** Part of the challenges that affect the quality of teacher education in Nigeria is the brain drain. This has led to the drifting of well-trained teachers and lecturers to foreign countries for better environment that is friendly to teaching. This is in terms of welfare packages that are available and social infrastructure available in these countries. In Nigeria, government owned salaries, there is very poor working environment and lack of incentives which, no doubt, affects teacher education in the country.

Sustaining Teacher Education in Nigeria in New Normal

Teacher education is no doubt important as earlier mentioned because other field of education depends on it as its foundation. This is why United Nations strongly believed that this field is sacrosanct to the development of quality education by 2030. Therefore, sustaining teacher education before, during and after pandemic experience is extremely important. For this to happen, certain things need to be done:

1. **Step Up Funding:** The successful running of teacher Education programme in Nigeria depends greatly on funding. For any achievement to be made, the government must make available enough money to this sub sector of education for greater gains if the country and the stakeholders are serious about meeting up the Sustainable Development Goals as targeted by 2030. The implication of this is that the lip service government pays to teacher education will not get the country anywhere except radical financial inclusion is considered for teacher education in Nigeria.
2. **Increase in Manpower:** Another way to sustain teacher education in Nigeria is recruitment into teacher education sub sector to adequately take care of the academic needs of students. Shortage of personnel is impeding the functionality of this programme. Recruitment into this sector especially by state owned teacher education institutions will go a long way to add value and reduce the stress on the existing lecturers for optimum service delivery among the teachers
3. **Teacher's Welfare:** The sustainability of teacher education also depends on the

attitude of the government to teacher's welfare for productivity. The horrendous disposition of government to the welfare of teachers has no doubt led to the low social status of teachers in Nigeria.

4. **Public and Private Partnership:** For the attainment of sustainable development goals by 2030 on education in Nigeria, there is need for public and private partnership especially by the non-governmental organisations to bring to life teacher education. The UN emphasizes partnership between public and private sector for Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved. Therefore, partnership between these two will be greater as far as teacher education is concerned.
5. **Training and Retraining of Teachers:** Training and retraining of teachers to sustain the teacher education in Nigeria is important. There should be capacity building, workshop and conferences sponsored by the government with collaboration with Teacher's Associations such as: Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU), Nigeria Union of Teacher (NUT) among others. The training will keep teachers and students abreast of development in the area of teacher education around the world.
6. **Professionalization of Teaching:** Nigeria has been battling with professionalization of teaching over the years because of influx of quacks or unqualified teachers teaching in public and private schools. The regulating bodies of teacher education should make sure that certificated teachers are recruited and engaged as part of the process of achieving sustainable development goals in Nigeria.
7. **Investment in Technological Infrastructure:** The outbreak of Covid-19 virus in Nigeria as it was in other countries of the world exposed the deficit in technological infrastructure.
8. **Provision of open and unrestricted teaching:** It envisages intellectual autonomy with far-reaching implications on the social-economic, physical and institutional developments for both students and teachers [11].
9. **Reduction of financial burden of hostel accommodation:** It reduces cost-related expenditure of maintenance, provision, transportation for students. It also reduces teachers and administrative costs for higher education institutions
10. Promotion of healthy academic competition among students with no social or physical

cost by placing students in control of their studies with academic and professional destiny in their own hands.

The New Normal and Teacher Education Sustainability

In order to deal with the sudden closures of educational institution and the transition from wholly face-to-face to remote and/or hybrid teaching, the government devised a number of initiatives to meet up with students' needs. However, in coping with the lingering effects of the pandemic; and the clime of Nigeria poses a big task to the effectiveness of digital teaching and learning which was one of the survival tactics of the new 'normal'. To meet up with globalization of knowledge in education in Nigeria, there must be regular supply of electricity for digital learning to take place. The knowledge and use of computer is important for sustainable development goals to be achieved in education by 2030. Teacher's need to be trained in Information Technology for this purpose. Since digital learning has come to stay as part of instructional processes, government should partner with communication companies to supply data or make them affordable to student and supply computers to students and teachers.

The clime of Nigeria poses a very big task in the effectiveness of digital teaching and learning which was one of the survival tactics of the 'new normal'. The challenges that stare Teacher Education at the face include but not limited to;

- ❖ Epileptic power supply: For any digitalized learning to take place, there must be constant power supply. Nigeria cannot boast of this luxury.
- ❖ Availability of free Wi-Fi: There are not many places where a student can access internet connectivity in most institutions of higher learning free in places where they are provided at relatively cheap cost. They are not perpetually available, and this will make digitalization of learning more daunting.
- ❖ Technical know-how: there are still many teachers or lecturers who are not IT compliant and so they cannot give what they do not have to their students in training. Majority of adults of the pre-millennia era shy away from anything IT and digitalization, thus they are afraid to teach in any high-tech profile institutions.
- ❖ Cost of purchasing data: Getting data for connectivity through the internet service provider is not a mean thing.
- ❖ Cost of android, apple phones and computer: This is not within the reach of an average or indigent-students, who cannot feed properly and get basis necessities in school.

In order to checkmate this and still be abreast with world best practice in Teacher Education, the government must be willing and committed to supporting Teacher Education. Be part of the global world, effective and efficient internet facilities and efficiency at little or no cost as it applied in the digitalized world. This will in no normal way give an edge to Teacher Education and provision of manpower to sustain the developmental goal of Quality Education for all and achievable.

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