

Sociological Perspective to Nigerian Education System in Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has constituted the greatest global health crisis since World War 2. Due to the fact that its spread is fueled by public social places such as the education and school system, the need to curb its spread made nations and governments of nations to adopt a short term strategy by locking down public centres such as the school system. However, the long term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the temporary school lockdown were not put into consideration. This inability of Nigerian government to have a foresight of the long term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak could increase students, resources and educational problems in the post- COVID-19 pandemic era. This may further affect the Nigerian education system, due to government's failure to provide strategies for sustainable education in the COVID-19 pandemic era. This may further lead to a high rate of poverty and unemployment, hence, a higher rate of school dropout. To this end, there is a need for a shift from the traditional class education system to maximizing technology to provide virtual classrooms and to embrace public-private partnership in the Nigerian education system, so as to cushion the long term effect of the pandemic in the post- COVID-19 pandemic era.

Keywords: Education System, Sociological Perspective, Lockdown

Introduction

The recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is a global health crisis and the greatest challenge faced since World War 2 (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). There is no doubt that it has posed negative short term effects on global development system such as the health system, business development, education development, community development, national development, among others. However, many nations and sectors of nations have not put into consideration its long term effects. The immediate need for the total shutdown of public centres brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak did not allow people, businesses and nations to prepare for the occurrence. Hence, many businesses, sectors and nations were closed down to contain the spread of the pandemic. This lockdown may further pose a significant long term effects on people, community, businesses, nations and their economy.

According to Igoe and Chadwick (2020), many people, businesses, organizations, communities, nations have suffered huge economic losses in the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Also, the high cost of goods and services such as resources used for production in communities and nations cannot be denied. Hence, there has been an elastic inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic started. This could deepen the divide between developed and developing countries. There may also be a ground breaking technological innovation due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak such as those deployed to enhance health, education, and other sectors so as to help contain similar pandemics in the future. A major focus of this study is to provide a sociological perspective to Nigerian education system in post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

The global education system has been halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In trying to fight the pandemic, few countries like China, Germany and others have reopened their education system. However, the Nigerian governments have directed that other business entities can be reopened but with maximum level of caution to prevent the spread of the Corona Virus but the schools are yet to be reopened. According to Abidoye (2020), there have been necessary steps put in place to reopen the business activities such as the Nigeria education

system and also to cushion the long run effect of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the economy and the sectors of the economy. According to United Nations Development Programme (2020), the significant effect of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak would be felt more on developing economies than the developed economies; it could create more devastating social, economic and political crises that will leave deep scars which could transcend the long term effect on people, communities and nations and their sectors. Its effects on the education system cannot be overemphasized.

For example, before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the federal government had been in a long fight. There was a comprehensive and indefinite strike action by ASUU which came up after a review of the two-week warning strike of March 9, 2020 and the National Executive Council (NEC) consideration of the proposals made by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) of March 21, 2020. However, within the strike, the COVID-19 pandemic started. Attention was then shifted from this fight by the two opposing forces (ASUU and federal government) to containment of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two salient problems in Nigeria. The federal government has not been able to attend to ASUU again hence, this becomes a suspended and silenced fight within the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. A statement by the ASUU president addressed this:

...paying the lecturers was not a favour,...members worked in February and we were still working in March before this coronavirus pandemic broke. It is expected that a labourer is paid his wages. Even as we are talking, people are supposed to be prepared to get their April salary (Nigerian Scholars, 2020)

This implies that, even when the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak will be eventually over, the ASUU strike will continue. Hence, the Nigerian tertiary education system is affected. In general, the Nigerian education system is grossly underfunded by the government. It is not a fallacy to note that, the education system may suffer more losses even in the post COVID-19 pandemic era, except there are available funds that could be used to support and cushion these losses in the Nigerian education system. Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) noted that the recent global lockdown of the education system and institutions is going to create an unequal interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative.

In addition, the lack of good healthcare system in the schools has also constituted one of the major challenges that have led to the inability of the state and federal governments of Nigeria to reopen schools in the COVID-19 pandemic era. Developed nations such as China, Germany, among others have reopened their schools and deploy several technologies. These technologies such as the use of preventive technology could curtail the spread of the pandemic while receiving lectures in class coupled with the use of various online strategies to teach students at home during the lockdown period. Although some schools in Nigeria have been deploying the online strategies, it is mainly applied by higher level private schools. This implies that the public schools in Nigeria are actually lagging behind in the provision of resources and technology that could help ensure the sustainability of Nigerian education system during future challenges such as pandemic outbreaks.

Moreover, an important thing that could also attract attention of the education system in Nigeria and other developing countries is that the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has challenged the traditional pattern of running business activities and also running administrative activities in sectors and the national economy. For example, the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has put global activities on hold. It is only the nations with advanced and alternative technologies to run their social, economic and political activities that may not be grossly affected. A major social activity that it has challenged seriously is the use of the traditional education system of receiving lectures in classrooms, which is a phenomenon of the face-to-face education system. Due to the lockdown, there are no avenues for teachers and students to meet in classrooms. This has distorted the traditional means of providing education to the learners in many countries such as Nigeria.

However, Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) noted that many schools such as those in the developed economies are moving to and deploying the online platform to provide lectures for their students. This is because the interruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the education system will not just be a short-term issue, but have also posed a long-term consequence for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase unequally among states and also between developed and developing countries. For example, after the COVID-19 pandemic, many families and sponsors may not be able to provide the resources needed for their children and those who benefits from their support to go back to school or to pay for school fees, and this could further lead to increased school dropout especially among the poor families. There could be increase in poverty and unemployment in the long run, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. In addition, many students would have stayed home very long and forgotten what they have been taught and this may constitute another stress for the teacher after school reopened in trying to make sure that students come back to their learning mode in schools. This was why Mundy and Hares (2020) advised that schools and nations should continue school learning processes and activities by adopting various online technology platforms.

Kenya adopted the radio broadcast method effectively to continue the education system in their country (Mundy and Hares, 2020). Also, teachers and upper-level students can hold virtual lectures or lessons by using the simple SMS platforms or even WhatsApp or Facebook platform to experience and enhance the effectiveness of online and broadcast programs by school systems. In addition, parents and siblings can support the learning exercises during the COVID-19 pandemic but research evidence suggests that relying on parents will not be enough but getting the teachers and school heads to do the virtual lecture delivery will be very essential (Mundy and Hares, 2020). This is why Mineo (2020) suggested that the global lockdown of schools calls for the need for nations and school systems to have a backup of online learning system. However, the economy of Nigeria lacks many of these strategies by the governments and school systems during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak because all educational and school activities were placed on hold during this period hence, there is further need to provide strategies to cushion the long term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the education and school system in Nigeria. The major objective of this study is to approach such strategies from a sociological perspective to cushion the long term effects of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the Nigeria education system.

From a sociological perspective, social problems such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak are approached from three primary theoretical perspectives in sociology: the symbolic interactionist perspective; the functionalist perspective; and the conflict perspective. According to Mooney, Knox, and Schacht (2007), the level of analysis for the symbolic interactionist perspective is at the micro level, and focuses on how individuals interpret the meanings of the situations in which they find themselves. With regard to this, the action of the communities and states towards the Nigeria education and school system is to shut the system down during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to curtail the spread. The level of analysis for the functionalism is at the macro level, and assumes that the society is held together by social consensus, or cohesion, which members of the society agree upon, and work together to achieve what is best for society as a whole. To this end, the societies such as the education societies and the states should come together to agree on a consensus to provide remedies to cushion the long term effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on the Nigerian education system. The conflict perspective focuses on how social institutions such as the education and political system could assist to bridge the problem of inequality in the competition for scarce resources which could be posed by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak with respect to the different culture, ethnic, social class, and other groups in the nation.

Schools may need more resources to rebuild the loss in learning, once they open again in the post COVID-19 pandemic era; and for the new graduates, policies should also support their entry to the labour market to avoid longer unemployment periods due to the economic turndown in the period of COVID-19 pandemic (Burgess and Sievertsen, 2020). A sociological approach to Nigerian Education System in post-COVID-19 pandemics era can help cushion the long term effects of the COVID-19 pandemics in Nigeria. To this end, this paper focuses

on providing the strategies by adopting the sociological theories to cushion the salient issues that may emerge in the Nigerian education system in the post-COVID-19 pandemics era.

Theoretical Underpinning

In recent times, sociologists employ three primary theoretical perspectives to solve social problems. These three sociological theories are the symbolic interactionist perspective, the functionalist perspective, and the conflict perspective (Cliffs Notes study guides, 2020). Each theoretical perspective provides a unique way to analyse the society, social forces, and human behaviour within the society. According to Mooney, Knox, and Schacht (2007), these three sociological theories have different levels of analysis: symbolic interactionist perspective is analysed at the micro level; the functionalist perspective is analysed at the macro level; and the conflict perspective is also analysed at the macro level.

The symbolic interactionism focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. It also focuses on how individuals interpret the meanings of the situations in which they find themselves. Considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the lockdown in the social system such as the education system, various individuals, group of individuals in the communities and states have taken prompt actions towards curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic spread. This could best explain the symbolic interactionism in the education system with regard to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. However, this action best explains the strategy deployed to cushion the short term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; strategies with regard to the long term effects have not been considered. This is the major focus of this study.

Functionalism, also called structural-functional theory, assumes that the society consists of interrelated structural parts such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy which are designed to meet the biological and social needs of the people in that society. Also, functionalism assumes that the society is held together by social consensus or cohesion, which members of the society agree upon, and work together to achieve what is best for society as a whole. To this end, societies such as the education societies and the states from a global perspective have come to agree on using the stay at home strategy to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic spread. However, many societies have failed to consider the long term social effects COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian education system.

Conflict theory presupposes that the society competes for scarce resources. In other words, the society is made up of individuals and groups of individuals in different social classes who compete for the social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, among others. Available social institutions such as government, education, and religion may tend to reflect such high level of competition in their inherent inequalities and assist to maintain the unequal social structure. This is because, resources may be skewed, as some individuals, groups of individuals or organizations may be able to obtain and possess more resources than others. In addition, the conflict perspective focuses on how social institutions such as the governments, education and political system could assist to solve the problem of inequality in the competition for scarce educational resources which could be posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

The study took the form of a systematic review but harnessed information resources through data mining methods which cut across traditional and electronic journals and books, Web pages, among others. In addition, recent and relevant information resources related to topic of interest were obtained and used for this study. Information resources used covered the period of between 2000 and 2020. The study obtained information through various search engines and data mining methods and deployed systematic review of relevant articles in traditional and electronic journals and books, Web pages, with a focus on the objectives and themes of the study to drive relevant argument of the study. Arguments were directed to the following themes of the study:

- i. The COVID-19 pandemic effects on the Nigerian education system;
- ii. Sociological explanation of the lockdown of Nigerian education system to stop the spread of COVID-19 pandemic;

- iii. Sociological perspective to maintaining development in the Nigerian education system in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Results and Discussion

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian education system

As earlier stated, the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has constituted the greatest global health crisis since World War two (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is fueled by public social places such as the education and school system. Hence, to curb its spread, nations and governments adopt a short term strategy by locking down public centres such as the schools. Over a billion students worldwide are unable to go to school, due to measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 (McCarthy, 2020). In addition, the pandemic is expected to have a huge impact on global education system (McCarthy, 2020). With the coronavirus spreading rapidly across the globe, countries have taken swift and decisive actions to mitigate the spread of the pandemic. Such measures include closing down schools and universities and putting educational and classroom activities on hold (Tam and El-Azar, 2020).

In Nigeria, on March 19th, 2020, a circular from the Federal Ministry of Education approved the closure of all schools for a period of one month commencing from Monday, 23rd March, 2020 to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). This closure has been extended beyond this period. The closure of the schools has affected close to 46 million students throughout the country, and the most vulnerable groups of children are likely to be impacted the most (Nigeria Education in Emergency working Group, 2020; Tamrat and Teferra, 2020). Due to this closure, various forms of learning in the communities will be affected by the stoppage of learning activities; and planned activities for the first and second quarter of 2020 in the education system will not be completed as planned. There was an impasse between the stakeholders of the Nigeria tertiary education system and the federal government before the coronavirus pandemic. This could connote a double jeopardy in the education system and the national economy.

However, the Nigerian Education in Emergency Working Group (2020) presented some vital objectives that remain salient in the closure of schools in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. These include:

- 1) To reduce morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 among school learners, teachers and schools stakeholders in North East Nigeria,
- 2) Mitigate the school closure negative impact on children learning and teacher wellbeing and
- 3) Ensure effective, inclusive and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, among others.

However, less has been achieved in these objectives as the Nigerian education system has been devastated by the effects of COVID-19 pandemics. There are high rates of spread of the virus; learning has stopped and children from poor families are bearing the burden of it (Ladipo & Adebore, 2020). There have not been clear plans for safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, among others in the Nigeria education system.

However, in some countries such as China, South Korea, Italy, Iran, among others, several schools have deployed the home-schooling methods where educational activities are provided to students at homes through the internet or other electronic means. But in many developing countries, these strategies cannot be executed due to the scarce educational resources provided by the governments and other stakeholders in the educational system. There seems to be a continued total lockdown of the Nigeria education system. This could have a drastic effect on the Nigerian education system in the short and long run. Thus, the Nigerian education system may suffer loss both during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post COVID-19 pandemics era.

Nigerian Education lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic: A Sociological Explanation

The global closure of schools and other public centres could be explained through the sociological theory for solving social problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak using the three sociological theories such as the symbolic interactionist perspective; the functionalist perspective; and the conflict perspective. As earlier stated, the symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals interpret and act to the situations they find themselves such as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. From a global perspective, Tam and El-Azar (2020) and McCarthy (2020) noted that in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, nations and governments

worldwide adopt a short term strategy by locking down public centres such as the schools affecting over a billion of students worldwide. This choice best explains the adoption and application of the symbolic interactionism in trying to curb the recent social problem of COVID-19 outbreak through the closure of education system.

However, adapting the functionalism or structural-functional theory, the governments, education system, among others have failed to design strategies to meet the biological and social needs of the people in the society during this lockdown period. Many families are left to suffer in poverty during this lockdown due to suspension of business activities (Ladipo & Adebore, 2020). This could further increase the rate of poverty and unemployment as many Nigerians are already losing their jobs and experiencing drop in salary (Olurounbi, 2020; Echenim, 2020). Although, there are rumours of the Federal and State governments in Nigeria adapting these strategies to meet the social needs of the people in the society during the lockdown, but there is a wide inequality in the resource availability and distributions. This leads us to the conflict theory approaches. The conflict theory stipulates that there are scarce resources for the society. There is a high level of the social competition and inequality. This high level of inequality and competition in the COVID-19 pandemic era could pose a significant social problem where the less privileged could be denied major social and biological opportunities. This can increase the divide in the nation; poverty, unemployment, inflation and among others social problem would emerge both in the COVID-19 pandemic era and the post- COVID-19 pandemic era.

The Nigerian Education in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemics Era: A Sociological Perspective

The pandemic is expected to have enormous economic consequences and it is also having a devastating impact on global education in the short and long run. According to McCarthy (2020), over a billion students around the world are not able to attend school since March 23, 2020. It has been hypothesized that the COVID-19 pandemic could affect the global education system in three ways in the post- COVID-19 pandemics era (Tam and El-Azar, 2020):

- J The coronavirus pandemic period would change how millions around the globe receive and would be receiving education.
- J There would be new innovative solutions for education and this could bring much needed innovation to the education sector.
- J Given the high digital divide, the new shifts in education approaches could help widen equality gaps.

If developing nations such as Nigeria do not keep abreast of these innovations, education system in such nations could have a setback. To this end, since the recent lockdown of the education system has been explained by the sociological theories, it is deemed fit to use these theories to explain the necessary strategies that could be needed to enhance the propensity of the Nigeria education system to cushion the social problems that may be encountered in the post-COVID-19 era.

From the symbolic interactionism, how individuals would interpret the social problem in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era may take a nose dive from those exhibited during the COVID-19 pandemic. To explain this, it is important to note that while there is a consensus in the aspect of the total lock down, actions in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era may take different pattern across communities, societies and nation. This is because of the effect of different cultural background as explained by the symbolic interactionism theory. Hence, communities, societies, nations and governments worldwide would take different forms of approach to cushion and fight the prevailing social problems common with their communities and societies during the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. In Nigeria, there may be challenging situations because the nation and the stakeholders such as federal and state governments, educational system, among others do not prepare for the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. To further explain the need for what to prepare for and how to prepare for it, to cushion the problem in the education system during the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, the functionalism and conflict theories are useful.

As earlier stated, with regard to the functionalism theory, there seems to be failure from the Nigeria governments, the education system, among others to design and provide strategies that could provide succor to the society during this lockdown period. Ladipo and Adebore (2020) noted that many families are suffering due to their inability to meet their personal and family needs during the lockdown. In the long run, this may further

exacerbate the level of poverty and unemployment in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Nigerians. Hence, there are two major problems for the Nigeria government, education system, and other important stakeholders that would show up in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. The first is that, according to Olurounbi (2020) and Echenim (2020), there are high rate of job loss and reduction in salary during the period of COVID-19 era in Nigeria due to the inability of business to survive hence, a level of unemployment would emerge in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Second, due to the financial crisis in the COVID-19 pandemic period, poverty among households tend to increase hence, there would be a high level of poverty in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. These two problems could influence the education and school system in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era because many families would be unable to provide the needed resources to support their children in schools hence, there may be another problem- school dropout may increase. Hence, the government and the education system and the stakeholders of the education system would need to braze up to provide strategies that would first solve the problems that the COVID-19 pandemic era have caused in the education system and the Nigeria economy before trying to provide the necessary strategies to cushion the long term effect that may occur in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Adapting the conflict theory, there would be scarce resources for the society. There would be a high level of the social competition and inequality in the community which could also lead to inequality in access to education. This level of inequality may be higher among the less privileged due to the high rate of competition, they may be denied access to major social opportunities such as education. This may further lead to a higher level of divide in the nation thus, in the long run, there could be a wide and higher rate of poverty, unemployment, inflation and among others during the post-COVID-19 pandemic era in Nigeria. To this end, the various stakeholders of the education system and the federal and state government should proffer solution that could be put in place during the rest period of the COVID-19 pandemic and also that could lead to its utilization in the post- COVID-19 pandemic era to be able to cushion the social problem that may emanate in the post- COVID-19 pandemic era.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The sociological perspective to Nigerian education system in post-COVID-19 pandemic era could help cushion both the short and long term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system and national development. However, it seems that government and the education system have failed to effectively and efficiently handled the short term effects in trying to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence, there is need for a call for attention and to action to provide necessary solution to bridge the lack of accurate actions by the government and education system to maximize available technology for sustainable development as deployed in countries such as China, South Korea, Italy, Iran, among others. In addition, there is also the need for necessary actions to be put in place to cushion the long term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. To this end, the study recommends that:

- i. There is need for a shift from the traditional class education system to maximizing technology to provide virtual classrooms to cushion the long term effect of the pandemic during the post- COVID-19 pandemic era. This can even begin in the recent COVID-19 pandemics period.
- ii. There should be provision of resources such as cut across the human, material and financial resources to assist the Nigeria education system to meet the necessary standard and cover the gap that was posed during the COVID-19 pandemic era towards maximizing the opportunities available in the post- COVID-19 pandemic era.
- iii. There is also the need for an increase public-private educational partnership so as to be able to provide the resources needed to support the Nigeria education system especially the public education system in Nigeria.

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