

Developing Online Resources for Primary School Teachers: A Necessary Support System During COVID-19 Era in Nigeria

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it social, economic and educational changes which had a grave effect on the type and quality of teaching and learning process primary school pupils were exposed to during the lockdown. The basic form of delivery at this period was online teaching. Some pupils could benefit from these alternative modes of teaching put in place while others could not. Various barriers to benefiting range from lack of technological know-how and dearth of on-line teaching and learning resources, parental scaffolding and involvement, to lack of financial resources to access Android phones, data and electricity amongst others. The need for a decisive intervention and creation of certain support system becomes imperative. A necessary support system needed especially during COVID-19 era in Nigeria is the development of on-line resources. Having on-line resources would help primary school teachers in their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. Having on-line class remains a novel in Nigeria at the primary school level. It also poses a staggering problem to teachers who are not computer literate and who may not be able to develop the resources by themselves. This is indeed a major challenge. There is the need for higher levels of technological competency and proficiency on top of teachers' regular academic workload to achieve the needed learning outcomes. This paper therefore calls for the attention of experts in the field of early childhood Education to see the need to develop ready-made sources and downloadable hand-on for effective online teaching at this period. It demands a cooperative effort with computer software experts to help in creating software and other resources to bridge the gap of lack of teaching and learning resources to make for effective learning experiences in the classroom. There must be a major collaborative effort if there would be appreciable form of solution to these developing problem at this level of education. This paper therefore explores COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 pandemic and primary education, teachers and online teaching, hindrances to online teaching and the support system needed.

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Introduction

Wuhan the capital of Hubei in Central China had been identified as the starting point of a new pandemic (UNESCO, 2021) commonly referred to as COVID-19. It began in December 2019. It is a coronavirus type characterized by symptoms associated with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COV-2). The transmission is mainly by social relationship between people and surfaces. COVID-19 is highly contagious and easily kills. The virus destroys vital organs in few days which often results to death. To prevent and control the spread, all the governments of the affected countries had to put in place different measures such as social distancing, minimal number of people in an enclosure, hand sanitizing, frequency of washing of hands, use of face mask as few of the precautionary measures (Sanchez Amete, Luque de la Rosa, Gutierrez & Varga Serramo 2021). There was total lockdown with time when the spread could not be controlled. Pupils in schools were losing precious time and school days with no end in sight. It was at the time

when it was obvious that pupils would be losing a complete school year that the idea of having online classes was birth. This is a distance form of teaching and learning used majorly in the higher institutions of learning internationally. But the Covid-19 pandemic has brought it to be even at the early childhood and primary education. Primary schools too were transited from face-to-face education to distance education, where certain methodological adaptation was adopted within a very short period. This left us with online institutional model. But it was hurriedly set up and made compulsories for all schools both public and private. Perhaps the major cause of concerns is would the teachers, the parents and the pupils be involved enough to be able to still maintain quality in the pandemic era? How would the teachers and the management as well as the education authorities overcome fundamental aspects such as the development and use of technological resources, training teachers in the use and the adaptation of pupils to this new form of education (Condor, O 2020)? COVID-19 pandemic has

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opened the opportunity for the introduction of digital learning (Dhawan, 2020). But are we really ready for it in terms of teacher preparation, online resources, parental involvement and financial support.

Teachers and Online Teaching Resources

Ability to maximize the use of online or digital teaching and learning rests majorly on teachers use of teacher made or developed, or free online downloadable. Ability to develop or even navigate online resources to access useful materials may demand that teachers in primary schools be trained. Thus, the introduction and acquisition of new measure by teachers depends significantly on teacher preparation and training (Cotonieto, Martinez, Rodriguez, 2021). The skill acquired in their previous training, emotions and attitude they feel when working with information and communication technologies (ICT) may be quite different. Some of them might not have handled computer desktops before and may not have the confidence to even try their hands on it. Some teachers must depend on their colleagues to help. Some would not even mind having to wait on ends

to receive help after the colleague might have finished their own. Some teachers express fear of failure. While some do not attach much importance to it, they could not stress and stretch themselves more than what they could do. This is indeed a new work scenario. Some public-school teachers do not even see the relevance of the incorporation of ICT in their work environment. This is because not all their pupils may benefit from the classes given what they cannot afford what it entails. This is in line with the assertion that different family and cultural context of the pupils as well as their family socioeconomic level may either help or hinder the way they can cope with changes imposed by the new teaching methodology (Echeita, 2020)

Also, the educational need of each child differs due to their learning styles. The facts is that it keeps changing and unique to each child. Also, the need to cater for special education need children must be considered since they have behavioural problems and maturation delay so they need special attention so that no child is left behind. Online teaching stands as an alternative educational system and needs different assessment strategies

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since it is digital learning, it must also be assessed digitally (Pokhel et al, 2021). But how do you assess a child that has not been trained how to handle computers because he/she does not have access. Or the one that has access but not regularly due to financial constraints, or the teachers that have not been given suitable and relevant pedagogy as online educators. One may depend on the expertise and exposure to ICT for both the educators and learners. Or better still have digital experts to collaborate with early childhood experts for a good job to be done.

It may however be relevant here to note some apps that may be beneficial to teachers in primary schools. Various online platforms that are noted for unified communication and collaboration such as Microsoft Teams Google Classroom Canvas, Blackboard, which allow teachers to create educational courses, training and skill development programmes (Petrie, 2020) may come in handy. Basic useful features include workplace chats, video meeting, file storage that keep classes organized and easy to work. They allow or support the sharing of variety of content like words, PDF,

Excel file audio and video. They also allowed the tracking of pupils learning and assessment by using quizzes, the rubrics-based assessment of submitted assignment.

Also, the flipped classroom is a simple strategy for providing learning resources such as articles, pre-recorded videos, YouTube links that may be accessed before the class and assignments given after class. Furthermore, there must be room for discussions. This may be done using virtual classroom platforms. Discussions develop and encourage various lifelong useful skills such as problem-solving critical thinking and self-directed learning. The virtual classroom platforms like video conferencing, Google hangout, Meet, Zoom, Slack, Cisco and Webex.

A teacher may also use the customizable cloud based learning management such Elias, Moodle, Big Blue Button and Skype. However, some on-line platforms are friendly, accessible and convenient and majority of people are quite familiar with. They had been found to have cemented a stronger bond between teachers and parents (Gillet-Swan, 2017). The use of online

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platforms such as Google classroom, Zoom, virtual learning environment and social media and various group forum like Telegram, Messenger, WhatsApp and WeChat are user friendly and easy to explore. They can be easily use to hold online classes. Their classroom use is quite innovative, interactive and engaging. The snag however is that teachers are in a dilemma of which to adopt of all the available online tools (Gillet-Swan, 2017).

Hindrances to On-line Quality Teaching

As many as there are online tools so are the learning styles of pupils in primary school. It has been observed that teaching with technology is not a one-size-fits all approaches as it depends on the type of technology in use at the time and the curriculum contents being taught (Orlando and Attar, 2015). Much as technology can enhance learning (Kirkwood and Price, 2014). It is assumed that technological incorporation, learning environment and pupils' engagement are mutually and inextricably linked. Creating individually tailored differentiated instructions for each learner within and across each cohort, places additional workload pressure on those seeking to engage with

the online environment (Gillet-Swan, 2017). The use online learning has been found not to take into consideration the right to education. A child may have the right to education but when he does not have access to education due to the mode of delivery and financial constraint, the child becomes helpless. Hence, online education also promotes existing social inequalities.

The weaknesses of online teaching are diverse. It includes online teaching infrastructure, limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, non-conductive environment for learning at home, equity and academic excellence in learning. There is also the problem of the availability of eLearning tools which is perhaps the major problem. It is also believed that some learners already have a fixed mindset and will find it difficult to adapt and adjust to the new mode. There are also the learners with growth mindset who may quickly adapt to the new learning environment (Polchrel et al, 2021). Similarly, the fact that different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online teaching also constitute another bigger problem (Doucel et al,

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2020). That is why Petrie (2020) notes that the best practices for online homeschooling are yet to be explored. Murgatroid (2020) declared that both educators and learners feel the challenges of accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong learning and educational policy. This is because there no reliable internet connection and access to digital devices. The poor are unable to afford online learning devices. There is also the risk of exposure of primary school pupils to increase screen time. This may foster addiction to watching screen as against spending time with their books. This may be detrimental to future academic achievement. Parental guidance both parents working and self-employed parents became an issue. Physical workplace of teachers were not conducive to different ways of learning. Pupils' mode of assessments carried out online came with a lot of trial and error (Brako and Essel, 2020). There were uncertainty and confusion with fear of failure amongst teachers, parents and pupils. Largely, a high percentage of pupils do not have access to smartphone or television at home not to talk about internet connectivity There was hardly income generated during the lockdown by individuals and

parents. The data package were on the high side and does not last. Video classes and YouTube consumes more data although they may be more interactive.

Needed Support System

To achieve an effective learning outcome, a support system must be put in place. Perhaps the solution to addiction or increase in screen time is to have downloadable for keeps and later use for parents which this paper is advocating. Since not all teachers may be versed at developing offline activities and self-exploratory based learning tools, experts in the field of early childhood who are adept in computer too may take it up as a field of endeavours to master and mass produce for a minimal or at affordable prices. Similarly, some computer experts may have to go through diploma training in the field of Early Childhood Education to learning how children at this level grow and learn to develop the exact materials suitable for use at this level. Again, curriculum and instruction experts may need to design curriculum for online learning at this period The best method of assessment of online learning must also be

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designed. This may really call for the review of the National Policy on Education of the country. The government may need to increase her budget for education.

Conclusion

Exploring online lessons during the pandemic might be a saving grace, but it quite obvious that it is not devoid of its germane problems at the initial implementation. It calls for more information on adopting and developing both human and material resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may not be out of place if online teaching and learning must be adopted at the primary level of education. Teachers should develop more resources. Teachers should collaborate actively with one another to improve online teaching methods. Government should seize the opportunities offered by educational organizations for free help tools as solutions to support online teaching and learning. Our National Policy on Education may need to be reviewed to incorporate online learning at the

primary school level. Effective pedagogy for online teaching and learning must be put in place. Need to develop tools for authentic assessments and timely feedback is crucial. tool may be customized and produced for large community. Professional development for teachers on ICT and effective pedagogy is necessary.

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