

The Covid-19 Era: An Examination of the 5G Conspiracy Theory and the Challenges of Educating Children in Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

Children are special gifts to parents from God. They were entrusted to their parents and guardians for training and sponsorship into successful adult life. Thus, this study examined the challenges faced by Nigerian children in the era of Covid 19 that ravaged the world. The study used qualitative methodology of secondary data analysis and the 5G Conspiracy Theory to explain how the Covid 19 affected the education of children in the Nigerian setting within the COVID-19 period. It found that parents who aligned themselves with the social conspiracies and social constructivism of the Covid 19, avoided e-forms of educational training for their children and that negatively affected the child-learners as they lost time and necessary intellectual empowerment within that period. It recommends increased use of e-learning platforms to teach children in all government and private teaching establishments in Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Education has remained a traditional culture of man throughout all civilizations. In traditional African societies, parents, titled men and age grades taught their citizenry using different mediums. Etymologically, the term education is derived from two Latin words, *educare*, meaning to form or train and *educere*, meaning to lead out. The two Latin words are believed to be the roots of the term, education. Plato defined education as “that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of pleasure and pain.”¹ Adiele described education as a process that leads to a desirable change in human behaviour.² Leonard maintained that “to learn is to change. Education is, therefore, a progress that changes the learner.”³ On his part, Ukeje posited that education occurs whenever any influence produces a change in the physical or mental behaviour of man.⁴

Children are a special creature to the heart of man and the Almighty Being. The fact that a child today becomes an adult tomorrow has made it imperative for individuals, groups, agencies, governments and international organizations to promote issues that affect the interests of children. This is because the president or any successful man/ woman was once a child. Children are conceptualized in this study as

¹ H. Schefield, *The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction* (London: Allan and Unwin, 1972). 35.

² M.C. Adiele, “Educational Psychology in School Management,” *The Educationist*, April 1972.

³ George Leonard, *Education and Ecstasy: With "The Great School Reform Hoax"* (North Atlantic Books, 1987).1.

⁴ B. O. Ukeje, “The School and the Society,” in *An Address Delivered on the Occasion of the 1973 Graduation Ceremony at the Advanced Teacher Training College, Owerri*, 1973.

those between the ages of 1-18 years.⁵ Akpuru-Aja showed that Chapter 12 of the International Law on “Child Protection since 1996, particularly the *Optional Protocol* to the Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits the participation of children under the age of 18 in armed conflict.⁶ Ani has argued that contrary to the United Nations Special Resolutions on the protection of minors, children between the age brackets of 1-18 years were conscripted as child soldiers in different parts of the globe and that prevented them from the opportunity to develop their lives and talent.⁷ The Convention on the Rights of the Child included ‘the inherent right to life’ (Article 6) the right to form his or her views (Article 12) etc. Ponle showed that children under 15 years of age account for 45 per cent of the country’s population.⁸ The Nigerian Criminal Code Act CAP 77 Laws of the Federation, Schedule 30 showed that a person under the age of seven years is not criminally responsible while a male person under the age of twelve is presumed to be incapable of having carnal knowledge.⁹ The above provisions of legal instruments clearly tried to capture the age ranges that children fall into.

Children are moral beings who live a normative lifestyle. Salaudeen Bola has argued that “children are neither the possessions of parents nor of the state nor are they mere people in the making.”¹⁰ There are things that children do and things that they don’t do. There are things the society, especially in traditional Africa did for them and the ones the children were expected to do for the society. Children are remarkably different from adults in their way of life. At the same time, children are different from adult human beings and it seems reasonable to think that there are things children may not do that adults are permitted to do. In the majority of jurisdictions, for instance, children are not allowed to vote or to marry.¹¹

The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the world and the lives of children in different ways, especially those living in third-world countries.¹² Many children were killed in many parts of the world while other children developed different forms of complications due to the reactions to the COVID-19 vaccination. However, the period of the lockdown that went with the era of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the total closure of schools almost across the whole globe and that undermined the quality and nature of learning that was received by child learners across the globe.¹³ This study primarily focuses on the multiple challenges that Covid 19, and the 5 G conspiracy created in the Nigerian teaching and learning environment for child learners. The study is divided into five sections. The first part of the study is the introduction. This is followed by the conceptual clarification on Covid 19 and the 5 G conspiracy. The third section is the literature review, which assesses the idea of education. The fourth section presents the challenges of educating children in the Covid era within Nigeria and lastly is the conclusion of the study.

METHODOLOGY

This study was developed using secondary data and primary sources that were collected through randomly selected respondent opinions on COVID-19 and the 5 G conspiracy effects on children's education which were administered in Nigeria. About a dozen journal articles were sourced and interpreted and the contents were used thematically in necessary parts of the study to develop the message of this study. Book chapters and edited books as well as other online sources on the them of the study were utilised in the development of the research.

⁵ Kelechi Johnmary Ani, “Kidnapping and Children’s Plight in Nigerian Nation Building Process,” in *A Paper Presented at the 55th Congress of Historical Society of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, October 25-27th*, 2010, 5–6.

⁶ Aja Akpuru-Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution:(Nigerian-African Conflict Case Studies)* (Keny & Brothers Ent.(Nig), 2007).

⁷ Ani, “Kidnapping and Children’s Plight in Nigerian Nation Building Process.”

⁸ B. Ponle, “Saving Children From Kidnappers’ Clutches ,” *The Nation, Saturday*, October 2, 2010.

⁹ K. J. Ani, “National Insecurity in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges for Human Capital Development,” in *A Paper Presented at the Annual Lit Conference Organised by Ladies of the Ivory Tower, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu From 11th – 15th October*, 2010, 6.

¹⁰ Salaudeen Nusirat Bola, “UNICEF and the Rights of Children: Nigeria’s Perspective” (Ahmadu Bello University, 2005).1.

¹¹ Bola, “UNICEF and the Rights of Children: Nigeria’s Perspective.”

¹² Chukwuemeka E Etodike et al., “Covid-19 Fatality Rate in Third World Countries: A Review of Environmental Challenges and Impacts on Public Health and Human Security,” *Journal of Intellectual Disability-Diagnosis and Treatment* 9, no. 1 (2021): 39–44.

¹³ Vincent Okwudiba Anyika, Ijeoma Genevieve Anikelechi, and T D Thobejane, “The Impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Education System,” *Journal of Intellectual Disability-Diagnosis and Treatment* 9, no. 2 (2021): 222–27.

Conceptualising Covid-19 and 5G Conspiracy Theory

It should be noted that with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the full implementation and operations of 5G technology were violently challenged across the world.¹⁴ Thus, the pandemic-COVID-19 had a terrible toll on millions of lives. It devastated the human population and weakened the world's health services, collapsed economies and altered the cultures of nations. The pandemic arrived with an “infodemic” which refers to a wealth of knowledge and disinformation that makes it impossible for citizens to access accurate information and take measures to defend their wellbeing and societies against an epidemic.¹⁵ The pandemic impacted countries negatively in terms of economic dynamics and healthcare, which had diverse consequences in different continents of the globe.¹⁶ In a moment where individuals have been more emotionally distant than ever and have access to the globe on their mobile phones, the accelerated proliferation and distribution of knowledge as well as disinformation online brought a new layer to the already thickened global infodemic crises. Thus, such infodemic proliferation was capable of causing great damage to the wellbeing of human society, if people continued to act on incorrect health information. However, if more people do not obey the recommended guidelines for safety, the pandemic may have extended and become more difficult to tackle.

For many nations across the globe being on a shutdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the effect of the pandemic generated multiple actions, reactions and effects, one of which was the 5G link with the pandemic. Theorists of paranoia believed 5G could adversely impact the immune system, enhancing the pandemic and that Wuhan city was the first city to receive 5G in China. This idea was spread extensively over Facebook, generating an anti-5G e-community with a strong presence of over 27,000 people, who shared videos and updates often associating coronavirus transmission with the rise of 5G technology.¹⁷ In late January, another article alleging 5G technology originated from Wuhan, the city where the virus was discovered, was further circulated online. The publishers also later warned that the information had already been refuted by an independent fact-checking charity.¹⁸ There was no confirmative fact from the charity organization that Wuhan might have been the first 5G city to gain service, saying it was only one of the towns to have 5G trials with the network already served in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in October 2019. It was also firmly refuted that 5G could be detrimental to the immune system in that era of the pandemic. The charity group maintained that the assertion was absolutely not justifiable. It should be noted that the 5G technology is the latest cellular network infrastructure for the next generation.¹⁹ 5G telephone communication is transmitted on electromagnetic waves, just as the 4G, 3G and 2G that have been in the previous operation and is therefore linked to a small portion of the electromagnet spectrum with microwave, and visible radiation light,²⁰ hence disinformation to state that it was a driver of Covid 19.

5G networks, like any other wireless network, are made up of parts of cells which transmit data via radio waves. A wired or wireless link connects each cell to a base station. 5G will pass data using wireless fidelity also known as Wi-Fi unlicensed frequencies. It ensures that the network is intelligent, quicker and more efficient. The 5G network offers considerably higher speed at higher volume and even less delay per segment than 4G. The cell is segmented into micro and peak cells in order to maximize network performance.²¹ However, the 5G network promises to be a new communication innovation as gigabit-per-second service speeds are proposed to be offered anytime and wherever. Each cell phone has

¹⁴ Wasim Ahmed et al., “COVID-19 and the 5G Conspiracy Theory: Social Network Analysis of Twitter Data,” *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 22, no. 5 (2020): e19458.

¹⁵ Victor Onyilor Achem and Kelechi Johnmary Ani, “Systemic Crisis of Infodemic in a Pandemic: COVID-19, 5G Network, Society and Symbolic Interactionism,” *Journal of African Films and Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 4 (2022): 29.

¹⁶ Gerard George, Karim Lakhani, and Phanish Puranam, “What Has Changed? The Impact of Covid Pandemic on the Technology and Innovation Management Research Agenda,” *Journal of Management Studies*, 2020.

¹⁷ Johannes Langguth et al., “COVID-19 and 5G Conspiracy Theories: Long Term Observation of a Digital Wildfire,” *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics* 15, no. 3 (2023): 329–46.

¹⁸ United Kingdom’s Independent Fact Checking Charity, “The Wuhan Coronavirus Has Nothing to Do with 5G,” 2019, <https://fullfact.org/online/wuhan-5g-coronavirus/>.

¹⁹ S. Shanapinda, “The Conversation, No, 5G Radiation Doesn’t Cause or Spread the Coronavirus. Saying It Does Is Destructive,” 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/uppng7w>.

²⁰ H. Georgina, “5G,” *Briefing Paper, House of Commons Library*, September 6, 2019.

²¹ Reshma S Sapakal and Sonali S Kadam, “5G Mobile Technology,” *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Engineering & Technology (IJARCET)* 2, no. 2 (2013): 568–71.

a unique identifier (IP) on a 5G wireless network according to the location or network it uses. 5G network uses the worldwide wireless Web (www) user-centered network concept rather than operator-centered concept just as found in 3G and the service-centered concept as obtained within the 4G service.²²

Such electromagnetic waves do not ionize, which means that they do not harm the inner cells of the DNA although X-rays, gamma rays and UV rays are capable of doing so. Unfortunately, it was globally stated that 5G is a threat and promoter of COVID-19. As a result of this infodemic, Public Health England affirmed that there was no convincing evidence that the 5G technology could lead to negative health consequences related to exposure to non-ionizing radio waves.²³ The modern global broadband and communication networks have reduced space and time. The world is open to instant information and communication, rendering the globe into a smaller community. The audience will sit and enter the world through satellite internet sources from their various homes and offices. The contraction in time adds to uncertainty about the actual nature of recurring events and the complex dynamics of social change. Information and signals are sent out with only shorter sound bites.

In spite of these developments, mainstream and internet conspiracy theorists have speculated that the connection between the coronavirus and 5G mobile networks is directly triggered by electromagnetic waves and 5G wireless technology. Some conspiracy theories have also suggested that the epidemic of coronavirus was a cover-up for the 5G health lapses.²⁴ The information was inaccurate, but the perceived interpretation maintains the emotional resonance of the encounter. The concern about urgency contributes to a prevalence of short but intense, nebulous symbols that are incapable of sustaining a consistent organizational structure to offer meaning in the long run. In March 2020, however, Thomas Cowan, who is a doctor and works on supervision with the California Medical Board, stated that 5G was causing COVID-19 because African countries were not greatly affected by the virus outbreak and that Africa was not even a 5G region. Cowan had wrongly claimed that the virus was part of a cell waste contaminated by radio waves and the recent viral pandemic coincided with major radio technology advancements.²⁵

Similarly, the application of 5G technology in some parts of the world has been firmly opposed due to the impression created by media bias and conspiracy. Many cell towers in the UK were reported to have been set ablaze and engineers were attacked by the fast circulation of the conspiracy which connected the 5G technology with the pandemic of coronavirus. British Vodafone and EE providers said that their cell phone masts were targeted. In a Twitter video, a woman threatening telecommunication technicians laying 5G cables was reported by the service provider. The attacks are interspersed with online conspiracies that related 5G installations to the COVID-19 outbreak and later got the government interest of the United Kingdom called the social media authorities to order.²⁶ Mobile UK, the trade body which represents network providers, said it was concerned that certain groups were using the COVID-19 pandemic to spread false rumours and theories about the safety of 5G technologies. The top four UK mobile operators also issued a joint statement asking for help to stop people from burning 5G towers. Most individuals were disturbed, without any doubt, by certain matters and by most complications with media interpretations, many were enabled to use their own experience together with common insight to make sense of unfolding events. The consequence is that information passed across to society through media creates sensations that make it challenging for individuals to observe associations across various issues or even track the progress of a specific problem in the long run.

The World Health Organization, which has held COVID-19 to be a respiratory illness, dismissed the misconception that the virus can move through radio waves or cell networks. The WHO affirmed that COVID-19 is transmitted by air when an individual is mostly coughing, sneezing and speaking.²⁷ To a very large extent, the effect of the “infodemic” was demonstrated in the dynamics of rejection exhibited

²² Georgina, “5G. .”

²³ Guidance, “5G Technologies: Radio Waves and Health,” Public Health England, October 3, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health>.

²⁴ Rory Cellan-Jones, “Coronavirus: Fake News Is Spreading Fast,” *BBC News*, 2020.

²⁵ K. Nicholson, J. Ho, and J. Yates, “Viral Video Claiming 5G Caused Pandemic Easily Debunked,” Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, March 23, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/fact-check-viral-video-corona-virus-1.5506595>.

²⁶ Stephanie Brown, “Perinatal Mental Health and the <sc>COVID</Sc> -19 Pandemic,” *World Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (October 15, 2020): 333–34, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20779>.

²⁷ World Health Organisation (WHO), “Coronavirus Mythbusters: 5G Mobile Networks DO NOT Spread COVID-19,” July 3, 2020.

by most communities through violence and destruction. Yet media polarization and its rise in discrepancies continue to be very compelling as a mechanism that leads to a violent reaction. However, in Birmingham or Liverpool, there is no doubt that if the media publicity of related events in Belfast, people would not have thought of confronting network engineers working on 5G structures aggressively. The same applies to Liverpool's and Nigerian "Mast attack."

Regrettably, the aggressive perpetrators had no excuse to dress and act like them, most of them just joined because they saw news of previous incidents and several videos purporting to show 5G fire towers and shared on a Facebook page, urging others to do the same. Furthermore, while the media could depict specific types of wrongdoing conspiracy and conflicts; media coverage could facilitate compliance and the lawful public use and necessary peacebuilding.²⁸ However, in this case of 5G and the conspiracy that went with COVID-19, children suffered by extension, as they were dependent on the decision of elderly relatives to make a decision or align themselves and their behaviours.

Review of Existing Literature

This section of the study will review existing works especially as it affects the education of children in Nigeria. It should be noted that none of the existing literature discussed the COVID-19 pandemic in light of the 5G conspiracy and how it affected the education of children in Nigeria. Omole, M. A., in his book titled, *Survey on Out of School Children and Youth, 1997*, affirmed that the problem of school dropouts seems to have defied all solutions in spite of the efforts of the government and school authorities to provide for and encourage basic education for all in the country.²⁹ To him, it has been impossible to find out solution because accurate data of Out of School Children and Youth (OSCY) has not been available. His study also revealed that most of the OSCY live with their parents (72.7%) as against the assumption that OSCY are products of either single parentage or divorce or widowhood, it was also revealed that 53% of the OSCY are children whose parents are married and are staying either together or in separate locations as a result of the employment which is complimentary to this research.³⁰

Also, Sani in his book titled *Non Enrolment, Attendance And Dropout Of School Children*, maintains that dropout by children in any society constitutes a waste of its human potential, a bad omen for its economy, a social and political catastrophe, and a waste of the nation's scarce resources. Unfortunately, this is presently the case in Nigeria.³¹ The 1991 national population census showed that 49.3% of adults are estimated to be illiterate, women form about 49% of the nation's population but 60.5% of them are stark illiterates as compared with 37.7% of illiteracy among men. He further observed that the out-of-school children and youths are scattered throughout families and communities.³² Again, Babs Fafunwa in his book titled *History of Education in Nigeria* did a detailed analysis of how education has developed in Africa from traditional or indigenous educational system which existed before the arrival of Islam and Christianity to Islamic education and finally to Western education. He wrote on the traditional African education which he says in old African society, the purpose of education was clear: functionalism was the main guiding principle. African society regarded education as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.³³ He talked about Muslim education in Nigeria, which has contributed to the world's civilization and culture, the coming of missionaries which contributed to the development of Western education, the beginning of modern education, educational expansion, the era of self-determination in education, i.e. 1951 -1970, the Nigerian educational system etc.

Furthermore, Adeniyi Adarategbe in his edited book *A Philosophy for Nigerian Education* stressed the need for primary education by saying that the purpose of primary education can't be divorced from the country's philosophy of education. The whole range of education (primary, secondary and higher

²⁸ Kelechi Johnmary Ani and Victor Ojajorotu, "Oral History: Path to Unravel Traditional Crime Control Strategies for Nigerian Security Management," *African Renaissance* 15, no. 4 (2018): 193–208; Kelechi Johnmary Ani, "The Impact of Religious Conflicts on Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria," in *Boko Haram and Terrorism: Religious Conflicts and Dialogue Initiatives in Nigeria*, ed. S. O. Anyanwu and I. U. Nwanaju (Enugu: Snaap, 2012), 156–72.

²⁹ Omole M.A., "Survey on Out of School Children and Youth, River State Nigeria," *UNICEF EFA National Monetary Report*, 1997.

³⁰ Omole M.A., "Survey on Out of School Children and Youth, River State Nigeria."

³¹ A. Sani, "Non Enrolment, Attendance and Dropout of School Children in Nigeria," 1997.

³² Sani, "Non Enrolment, Attendance and Dropout of School Children in Nigeria."

³³ A Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (Routledge, 2018).

education) can be compared with the building of a house (foundation, walls, and roof).³⁴ Unfortunately, the whole process of building sustainable education structures in the country has been marred by challenges. Education as an instrument of stability and change in society, was also properly documented.³⁵ Jakande in his work, *The Problems and Prospects of Free Education for All* wrote intensively on educational development, in Nigeria, the central issue in the development of education in Nigeria, the modern system of formal education as practised in Nigeria today, the number of primary schools in Northern and southern Nigeria and their strengths, the expansion of primary, secondary schools, the law which brought about universal free basic education in Nigeria and the argument of the objectors of the cost of free education for all at all levels.³⁶ Adesina in his work, *The Development of Modern Education in Nigeria* attempted a major explanation of modern education in Nigeria. How modern education came about in Nigeria. He documented the place of foreign aid to education, educational programmes and development plans in the country, Nigeria.³⁷

Equally, Promila Sharma in his book, *The Aims of Education* discussed the critical issues in educational philosophy, the fundamental aims of education, as well as values in life and education.³⁸ It discussed the improvement in people's lives in society as a result of the involvement of young people and individuals in community development programmes. Also, worthy of reviewing is the edited work of Mark Bray and Kevin Lillis titled *Community Financing of Education: Issues and Policy Implication in Less Developed Countries*. The work discussed community bodies that engage in fund-raising on behalf of schools in order to finance and raise educational standards in third-world countries.³⁹ Some of these bodies according to the book are general village organizations, development organizations, to more narrowly oriented parent teachers' associations. Ivor Morrish in his book *Aspect of Educational Change* talks about the development in the educational sector over the years, types and degrees of change, planning educational change, why schools change so slowly, trials and functions of innovative institutions, some current educational innovations etc.⁴⁰ Jan Kaayk in his book *Education Estrangement and Adjustment* also discussed the problem of adopting primary education to local circumstances in developing countries, the extent to which education could operate as an important instrument of change, educational adjustment, social expectation and local development in society.⁴¹

Chinyere in her book titled *Education in Nigeria: Early Learning and Related Critical Issues* said early childhood care and education is the number one item of the global agenda on education for all (EFA). The author gives this topic a comprehensive treatment by espousing its basic principles, doing an enlightened critique of current practices in Nigeria, emphasising the need for parental and community ownership of early learning programmes.⁴² Mukherji and O'Dea in their book titled *Understanding Children's Language and Literacy*, combined an exploration of theoretical issues that students on lower level courses, early years and teaching degrees find useful. It contains practical suggestions that all child-care students, including those studying for a certificate in childcare and education, will find valuable.⁴³ Pai Obanya in his book titled *African Education in the EFA Decade*, focused on the African struggle to join the World Education League through the pursuit of EFA (Education For All). This is linked to Africa's desire for a renaissance and for full, competitive membership in today's knowledge-driven global economy.⁴⁴ The role of education in bringing Africa's new world about is discussed in simple language in chapter one of the book (originally delivered to secondary school students). It is then taken up in different forms all through the book.

³⁴ A Philosophy for Nigerian Education, "Aderategbe, A .," in *Proceedings of the Nigerian National Curriculum Conference, 8-12 September, 1969* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1972).

³⁵ A Philosophy for Nigerian Education, "Aderategbe, A ."

³⁶ L.K. Jakande, *The Problems and Prospects of Free Education for All* (Ikeja: John West Publishers Ltd, 1987).

³⁷ Segun Adesina, "The Development of Modern Education in Nigeria," (*No Title*), 1988.

³⁸ Sharma Promila, "The Aims of Education" (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2005).

³⁹ Mark Bray and Kevin Lillis, *Community Financing of Education: Issues and Policy Implications in Less Developed Countries*, (Oxford, New York: Pargaman Press, 1988).

⁴⁰ Ivor Morrish, *Aspects of Educational Change* (Routledge, 2013).

⁴¹ Jan Kaayk, *Education, Estrangement and Adjustment: A Study among Pupils and School Leavers in Bukumbi, a Rural Community in Tanzania*, vol. 8 (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2020).

⁴² N. A. Chinyere, *Education in Nigeria: Early Learning and Related Critical Issues* (Owerri, Nigeria: Tait Publication, 2003).

⁴³ Penny Mukherji and Teresa O'Dea, *Understanding Children's Language and Literacy* (Nelson Thornes, 2000).

⁴⁴ O. Pai, "African Education in the Education For All (EFA) Decade" (Ibadan, Nigeria: Mosuzo Publisher, 2007).

The Challenges of Educating Children in the COVID Era in Nigeria

It is strongly believed that “all men are created equal, and endowed with certain inalienable rights. Among these rights include right to life, liberty, education, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁴⁵ The right to education has remained a mirage for millions of global citizens. William advances that the need for education is fundamental in the life of man.⁴⁶ However, this right is more pressing for children, whose lives are being progressively shaped by the adult population. UNICEF remains a global organisation that works in many parts of the globe to promote education for all children but the dream of educating all children remains a mirage. However, Ayo Oni argued that with the ever-increasing human population, demand for education with existing discriminatory academic entry qualifications, financial constraints, and shortage of human and material facilitators; the formal school is far from being able to adequately provide education for all.⁴⁷ Yet the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights gave prominence to “education for all”. It would be recalled that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1989 outlined “minimum standards that governments must meet in providing health care, education and legal as well as social services to children in their countries.”⁴⁸

In the Nigerian state prior to the pandemic, the learners faced multiple forms of educational problems. Ani showed that people are kidnapped in schools in F.C.T. and across the country.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Ukpong and Esu wrote that “in Nigeria, it is obvious to know that we are faced with the challenges of development and security, because of the lack of peace, resulting in kidnapping and killings.”⁵⁰ Onyeka, equally showed that most primary schools have problems of infrastructural decay, the nonchalant attitude of some of the staff because of lack of motivation and poor salaries.⁵¹ Many of them spend more time outside the classrooms trying to eke out extra money.

The era of COVID-19 in Nigeria revealed the lack of readiness amongst most educational institutions to manage emergency situations in the country. Firstly, COVID-19 came with a lot of stereotypes and perception issues across different parts of the country. Management of primary schools where most of the children were attending as well as the junior secondary schools, otherwise called the basic education level were working hard to communicate the reality of the pandemic properly to their pupils and their staff. Journalists across the country also faced the same burden and challenges explaining the COVID-19 web to the wider Nigerian audience.⁵² Immediately it became obvious that COVID-19 was a pandemic, the primary and secondary schools were among the earliest institutions that were shut down. It was a proactive way of ensuring that the lives of the future generation were not wiped away by the pandemic.

Some schools quickly called for a Parents Teachers Association meeting, where they tried to eke out a new path for the teaching of their children. There were schools that immediately increased the school fees of their children in order to fund visual education while others closed down their schools completely. The increment of school fees within the period of the pandemic, when parents were struggling to make ends meet economically forced many parents to withdraw their children from the schools where fees were increased during the pandemic. It is also noteworthy that there were an insignificant number of private schools that did not collect fees from their pupils during the era of the pandemic due to the excruciating hardship of that time. Similarly, some private schools did not pay their staff on the grounds that money was not made during the pandemic, while others paid their staff to the fullest. The culture of right-sizing, downsizing and other forms of labour management policies was

⁴⁵ A V Oyajobi, “Human Rights and Social Justice in Nigeria: Issues, Dilemma and Challenges,” *Human Rights Law and Practice*, 1993, 8.

⁴⁶ T. O. William, *The Demand for Education* in *Education and Nation Building in the Third World* (Ibadan: Oniboje Press and Book Industries, 1973).

⁴⁷ Ayo Oni, “Sociological Foundations of Adult Education,” in *Policy Issues in Adult and Community Education*, ed. Ayodele Fajonyomi and Idowu Biao (Maiduguri: Dibal-Sauki Press, 2008), 21.

⁴⁸ Bola, “UNICEF and the Rights of Children: Nigeria’s Perspective.”1.

⁴⁹ Ani, “Kidnapping and Children’s Plight in Nigerian Nation Building Process.”

⁵⁰ S J Ukpong and A E O Esu, “Curriculum and Peace Education: Imperative for Basic Education in Nigeria,” *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies* 17, no. 2 (2010): 244–51.

⁵¹ Obetta Catherine Onyeka, “Application of Indigenous Knowledge to Sustainable Agricultural Production in Enugu State: Constraints and Enhancement Strategies” (University of Nigeria, 2010).

⁵² Chijioke Odii, Kelechi Johnmary Ani, and Victor Ojajorotu, “Journalism in COVID-19 Web: Assessing the Gains, Pains, and Perils of Nigerian Journalists in Coronavirus Containment,” *Journal of Intellectual Disability-Diagnosis and Treatment* 9, no. 2 (2021): 213–21.

implemented across different government and privately owned schools in the Nigerian education system.⁵³

Furthermore, there was the problem of educating the learners or the children on the use of the e-media to learn. Many of the children began to learn the new method of teaching and learning. Other children who had poor parents could not even learn the use of these media for teaching and learning because their parents were poor and could not afford the necessary resources or gadgets needed for e-teaching and learning.⁵⁴ Thus they were disenfranchised from being educated in the COVID-19 era. There was also the multiplier effect of the Nigerian national lockdown policy on the children. The policy threw millions of Nigerians into unplanned hunger, fasting and starvation. There was no prior notice of the lockdown hence, many families did not make earlier preparations in the form of stocking their homes with food. Thus when the pandemic hit them badly, due to the lockdown policy and the economic meltdown that went with it, many parents could not feed their families, especially those parents who survived on menial or daily paid-wage work. Consequently, their children at home were malnourished. Unfortunately, when these children were hungry, they had no time for any form of learning because a hungry person is naturally not in the best state of mind to learn let alone a child.

The era of the pandemic and the lockdown that went with it also caused the death of many Nigerian school children. The effect of the pandemic on human security remained serious.⁵⁵ There were also the children that lost their parents and guardians within the era of the pandemic and they were forced out of school. Some were taken as maids by relatives while others were sent to other places to learn skills even at an early age. The pandemic also intensified the discrimination against the girl child in terms of access to quality education.⁵⁶ The issue of training the girl child has remained a normative issue in the Nigerian socio-cultural space. Unfortunately, the lack of resources to fund education by parents then forced many to drop their female children from school while allowing the male children to continue with their studies.

It should be noted that the above challenges faced by the learners in the Nigerian education sector undermined both the quality of teaching and learning as well as the overall educational outputs in Nigeria during the COVID-19 era. This has left a strong knowledge gap in society especially for those affected educationally in different ways by the pandemic.

This place of children in the real world order cannot be neglected because they are the hope of the future development of all societies. However, from one country to another, children face different kinds of challenges. In the Nigerian state, children have faced the challenges of kidnapping, poverty and forced labour.⁵⁷ This study focused on the challenges faced by children in the era of COVID-19. Amongst all the challenges at that time, the problem of advancing the education of children in the face of the pandemic remained a huge challenge to parents, school owners and policymakers. This study focused on how the pandemic affected children's education in the Nigerian state at that time. It used the theory of the 5G conspiracy to document the misrepresentation of the facts during the COVID-19 era worldwide by arguing that the 5 G network was advancing COVID-19.⁵⁸

Summary

The study has traced the multiple problems that undermined the education of children in the Nigerian state. It has revealed the huge challenge of funding in the Nigerian education sector. It has also presented the challenges faced by basic schools which include the lack of internet and computer technologies in the country. Unfortunately, the rise of covid 19 and its pandemic implications sent the biggest threat to the lives and future of the learners which forced Nigerian parents to keep their children at home and monitor the changing dynamics of their health. The study has further revealed how the teaching and learning by

⁵³ Anyika, Anikelechi, and Thobejane, "The Impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Education System."

⁵⁴ Anyika, Anikelechi, and Thobejane, "The Impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Education System."

⁵⁵ Ifunanya Ani et al., "Covid 19, Human Security and Pandemic Management: Unravelling The Social Perception in Nigeria," *Gender and Behaviour* 20, no. 1 (2022): 18964–72.

⁵⁶ Chinedu Hilary Joseph et al., "COVID-19, Norms, and Discrimination against Female Gender in Nigeria: Focus on Implications for Mental Health Counselling," *Journal of Intellectual Disability-Diagnosis and Treatment* 9, no. 1 (2021): 21–28.

⁵⁷ Kelechi Johnmary Ani and Eugene Ndubuisi Nweke, "Curbing Kidnapping in Nigeria: An Exploration of Strategic Peace Building Tools," *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review* 2, no. 1 (2014): 111–33.

⁵⁸ Achem and Ani, "Systemic Crisis of Infodemic in a Pandemic: COVID-19, 5G Network, Society and Symbolic Interactionism."

children across Nigerian schools were affected by the lockdown and the economic meltdown as well as the deaths that went with the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The era of the COVID-19 pandemic was characterised by multiple problems that affected the education culture of the country at that time. The pandemic brought to bear amongst many other challenges the weak presence of e-teaching and e-learning culture in Nigerian schools, hence the need to act speedily in bridging that gap. Consequently, the study recommends the promotion of e-teaching and learning facilities in government and privately owned schools within Nigeria by both state and non-state actors locally and internationally. That will help in promoting the culture of blended learning that is necessary for sustaining teaching and learning whenever there is any challenge that undermines physical teaching and learning.

Again, the Nigerian government needs to change its current culture of poor funding of the education sector of the country. Stakeholders need to increase the amount of national and state budgets that are released to the education sector of the country. This has become imperative due to the huge economic crisis that currently affects the parents in the country, thereby reducing their chances of supporting community school projects as well as the funding of other educational projects within their environment.

CONCLUSION

This study has presented the challenges currently undermining the education sector of the Nigerian state. It specifically focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic undermined the teaching and learning of Nigerian children. The study was rooted in the theory of the 5G conspiracy, which wrongly propagated that the 5G internet network was a major driver of the covid 19 pandemic. It clearly documented how this 5 G misinformation also led to the withdrawal of children from school. Furthermore, the study used secondary data from journals and books to reveal how the covid 19 pandemic undermined the education sector of the country. It found that many school children were locked down at home due to government policy at that time and schools were closed in order to manage the spread of the pandemic. The study concluded by documenting a number of strategies that could be used to prevent the future negative effects of an epidemic or pandemic on the education of children in the Nigerian state. These strategies the author believes if implemented, would improve the state of basic education in Nigeria.

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