

# NIGERIAN EDUCATION IN FOCUS



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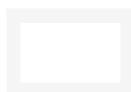
## RECENT HAPPENINGS

### GPE announces US\$250 million for developing countries battling COVID-19

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) will provide US\$250 million to help developing countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term disruptions to education being caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigeria is one of 67 countries eligible for this funding [Read more](#)

### COVID-19: Lagos partners First Bank to provide one million e-learning tools for students

Lagos State Commissioner for Education says the state government is currently engaged in talks with First Bank of Nigeria Limited and private sector organizations to provide one million digital devices to aid the teaching of students in the state. [Read more](#)



## Nigerian higher institutions not prepared for virtual learning, say experts

The uncertainty surrounding the end Coronavirus pandemic has led the Minister of Education Mallam Adamu Adamu to direct Vice-chancellors, Rectors and Provosts to reopen tertiary institutions using virtual learning. However, experts have argued that the nation's education sector is not prepared digitally prepared. [Read more](#)

## Zamfara to integrate Quranic schools into basic education

In a bid to ensure that every child has access to free education, Zamfara State Universal Basic Education Board (ZSUBEB) plans to integrate 282 Quranic schools into the Zamfara Basic Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) programme. [Read more](#)

## Featured Article

### COVID-19: Counting the Costs of COVID-19 in Nigeria

The past few weeks have ushered in a range of government sanctioned and structure-shifting risk-control directives across Nigeria and the Globe, in an attempt to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus disease-COVID-19. From international airport closures, to a nationwide closure of all schools, and now, a two-week lockdown of three major states - Lagos, Abuja and Ogun, the ramifications from the slowdown/shutdown of economic activity are poised to be severe for Nigeria. It is especially critical, because in the backdrop of COVID-19, the global economic crisis and the recent slump in oil prices are further expected to intensify the impending economic crises, and create sharp shocks that will reshape the economy in the near term.

For some sectors, the immediate ramifications are evident. One such sector is the basic education sector, the impact of which has been largely felt by students. The nationwide school closures have disrupted learning and access to vital school-provided services for a record number of students in Nigeria. According to UNESCO, almost 40 million learners have been affected by the nationwide school closures in Nigeria, of which over 91 percent are primary and secondary school learners. In a short time, COVID-19 has disrupted the landscape of learning in Nigeria by limiting how students can access learning across the country.

For an already fragile education system, the COVID-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenges on the government, students, and parents, that will highlight and could amplify some of the cracks in the system. As the nation begins to grapple with these challenges, a key question arises: Is the Nigerian education system designed to adapt rapidly to the changing world? Given the state of affairs in the world today, the nation's ability to ensure continuation of learning will depend largely on their ability to swiftly harness available technology, provide adequate infrastructure, and mobilize stakeholders to prepare alternative learning programs.

We at the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) are looking at some of the immediate and long-term impacts of the closures, and proffering suggestions for how the government can mitigate these consequences.



# How has education been impacted? A crisis within a crisis

## 1. Missed learning for the majority of pre-pandemic in-school-students:

According to UNESCO, about 35.9 million primary and secondary school learners are currently out-of-school as a result of the school closures. For primary schools, this number totals approximately 25.6 million students, of which about 87 percent (23.5 million) are students enrolled in public schools. The numbers are just as stark for secondary school learners. Of the roughly 10.3 million secondary school students who are out-of-school as a result of the closures, approximately 81 percent (8.4 million) of them are public school students.

In Nigeria, school opportunity is correlated to income level, and public schools differ from private schools in the populations they serve. While private schools serve learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds who are willing and able to pay more to access the better resources offered by private schools, public schools which are usually free, comprise students from lower socio-economic households and low-income areas. In instances where distance learning opportunities are available, uptake will be low from the students in the public schools category, as a result of poor infrastructure such as no electricity, or poor/no internet connectivity, etc.

Opportunities to learn within the homes are also limited, given that a parent's ability to provide education support to their children will be shaped by their own level of educational attainment, general literacy level, and other commitments. Given the significant relationship between educational attainment and income level, and the correlation between parents income level and school choice, we can infer that the literacy level of parents in public schools in Nigeria might be lower than their private school counterparts. In instances where the parents are educated, investing the time in training their children during this time might be a luxury.

For Nigeria, the reality is simple - while the school closures are necessary to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 virus, until the ban on movement is lifted and schools are reopened, the majority of students will not be learning.

## 2. Loss of access to vital school-provided services:

Beyond the missed learning opportunities, students in Nigeria are also losing access to the daily meals made available by the federally funded school feeding programs. Nigeria has one of the largest school feeding programs in the world, with the World Food Programme estimating that in 2019, Nigeria's Homegrown Schools Feeding Initiative provided access to daily meals to over 9 million children in over 40,000 public schools.

The benefits of school feeding programs extend beyond the immediate education benefits of the meals provided, such as encouraging enrollment in schools, and boosting learning. School feeding programs yield larger socio-economic benefits for children, their families, and society at large, two of which are especially pertinent to children of low socioeconomic groups: boosting health and nutrition and providing social protection and safety nets.

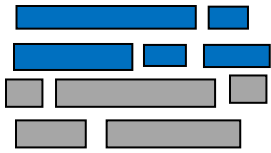
- **Health and Nutrition** - For some students, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, the daily meals provided at schools are their primary source of healthy and nutritious meals. With schools closed, the over 9 million public school students are currently being deprived of this benefit. Beyond feeding, Nigeria's feeding program also offers health services, including deworming and immunizations for students in public schools across 17 states. This closure would unfortunately also affect access to some basic health services for poorer children.
- **Social Protection and Social Safety Nets** - Over 50 percent of students accessing free meals fall into first and second wealth quintiles, representing the poorest 40 percent of the population, in a country where over 50 percent of the country live below the poverty line. As empirical evidence has revealed, people living below the poverty line usually spend between half and three-quarters of their income on food, representing a significant proportion of a poor household income. For each individual meal provided, the value can represent up to 10 percent of a family's income; for families with more than one child in school, this small figure can represent significant savings for families. The school feeding program can provide safety nets by boosting income for households. The absence of these daily meals is likely causing posing potential challenges for households, especially at this time where there has been a shut-down/slowdown in economic activities across the country.

### 3. Leaving more kids behind

A longer-term impact of these school closures would be deepened educational inequality. While some international development partners (UNESCO, for example) have put together and provided access to ICT-based resources to foster learning, uptake will depend largely on the level and quality of digital and internet access, and language accessibility (as most programs are available in English or other non-native Nigerian languages).

According to the Digital 2020 Global Overview Report published in January 2020, about 60 percent of Nigerians are not connected to the internet. The statistics for mobile phones, which could also be used as a learning medium, are more hopeful. According to the report, around 169.2 million people - 83 percent of Nigerians have access to mobile phone connections; however, of these, 50 percent - around 84.5 million people, reside in urban areas. For the population with access, the proportion would be skewed toward high socio-economic households and urban households; an overwhelming majority of whom are private school students who already have a learning advantage over their public school peers. For children from poorer backgrounds who tend to have less access to internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and who reside in rural areas where local languages take dominance over English, ICT-learning uptake will be limited. The inequity in access to ICT-based learning has the adverse effect of further intensifying the existing disparities in learning outcomes along socio-economic lines, and the urban-rural divide. Given that the school closures are currently indefinite, these students would continue to fall further behind. For students with learning disabilities, and those living in fragile and conflict-affected regions, the outlook is even more bleak.

This raises a major challenge around educational inequality - given the technological landscape and income driven digital-divide, how do we harness available technology to support already marginalized students during these closures? If this is unaddressed, the gap in education quality, and inadvertently socio-economic equality could become more extreme as a result of the school closures.



# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic poses several challenges around the likely impacts on education. While the world has not experienced a pandemic of this scale in decades, we can draw insights from previous epidemics/pandemic to proffer on the possible effects on the Nigerian education sector.

- In 1916, the United States of America (USA) experienced a Polio epidemic. It was estimated that over 23,000 cases of Polio were diagnosed during that period, which prompted the government to take measures to halt the spread of the disease. As with this COVID-19 pandemic, drastic measures were taken, including forced quarantines and short-term school closures. In 2017, Keith Meyers and Melissa A. Thomasson conducted a study leveraging the 1916 epidemic in the United States as a natural experiment to test whether short-term school closures reduced educational attainment as an adult. The authors found that children within the legal working age bracket (14-17 years) during the epidemic experienced lower educational attainment as adults, as compared to their older and younger cohorts. This suggests that older children of legal working age may have opted to drop out of school and join the workforce after the prolonged closure, thus acquiring a lower level of educational attainment. Policy in Nigeria specifically targeted at preventing similar age cohorts from dropping out of school, will be crucial post-Covid-19 crisis. Check out the full findings of this study [here](#).
- Between 2014 and 2016 the Ebola virus hit the Western part of Africa. It took a heavy toll on Sierra Leone in particular, killing over 11,000 in the country. This resulted in the halt of social and economic activities and the banning of social gatherings to curtail the spread of the epidemic. Across Sierra Leone, schools were closed for eight months; to make up for the loss in learning, the government of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with donor parties, leveraged ICT to design and provide distance learning to students during that time. Shawn Powers and Kaliopé Azzi-Huck (2016), conducted an assessment of the effectiveness of these intervention programmes by engaging in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with students, parents, teachers and school committee members in both rural and urban areas. One of the interventions was an emergency education radio programme. While it was found to be a poor substitute for schools, it still enabled students to maintain a close link to learning during the crisis, especially with strong adult supervision. The study also highlighted a number of challenges in deploying ICT for mass learning. For example, lack of radios or poor radio signals in rural areas, and language/accents barriers which posed comprehension problems. Find out more strategies designed by the government [here](#) to mitigate losses from school closures, and how effective they were.

