

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VIRTUAL LEARNING:
A SAGACIOUS PEDAGOGIC PERSPECTIVE
BY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed Covid-19 Pandemic and virtual learning as its aftermath in some parts of the world especially Nigeria. Although correspondence learning which virtual learning part is of has been in existence for a long time, the presence of Covid-19 brought it to the fore. The thrust of this paper is how lecturers were able to communicate with their students through virtual learning in this pandemic period. Four forms of virtual learning platforms were explicated. The google classroom, Telegram, WhatsApp and Zoom. The theoretical framework for this study is Bruner's constructivism of (1960) which stipulates that a learner should be active and not passive in a teaching and learning process, two thousand (2000) students from the school of languages of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri were reach across board in their various levels and courses but only four hundred (400) students were visible in the internet. Power failure, and internet reach were among the major obstacles observed. We therefore recommend that there should be improvement in energy supply and network spread from the internet providers among other things.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, Virtual Learning, Google-classroom, WhatsApp.

Introduction

Epidemic is an outbreak of a disease/infection affecting many people, communities, states, nation, simultaneously at the same time and taking many lives. The health sector names these types of infections pandemics. Globally, several individuals or geographical locations have experienced such outbreak of infectious diseases which are transmitted from person to person through touch, air, water, food or several other modes. Infectious diseases like cholera, chicken pox, Ebola, small pox, HIV/AIDs, SARS to mention a few have attacked many nations or individuals taking many lives.

The on-going or current pandemic COVID-19 which is taking place in many countries in the world has taken many lives and continues to take. It is corona virus Disease but captioned

Covid-19 because of the year of the outbreak, in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, where it first blew out. It is an acute respiratory disease just like SARS. SARS-severe Acute Respiratory syndrome of (2002),<https://www.who.int/health-topics> also first identified in China which took many lives worldwide. SARS was a virus transmitted through droplets that enter the air when the carrier sneezes, coughs or talks but the virus was quickly checked, COVID-19 has similar characteristics with SARS as they are all air borne disease, that attack the respiratory system, but more deadly than SARS. Its modes of transmission are; droplets from coughs or sneezes, touching contaminated surfaces, materials, doorknobs, skin to skin contact, through saliva by kissing or sharing cups/drinks. Infected persons are quarantined by isolating the patient in isolation centres or units specially mapped out for such.

COVID-19 is such a very serious disease that has shaken the world globally instilling fear in the people. Emergency health arrangements are made by governments to protect the lives of citizens. On January 30,2020, the international health organization-World Health Organization held emergency meeting and declared the disease a pandemic.

In that meeting, the World Health Organization (WHO) expressed serious health concern about the virus which made the organization to declare the disease a pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020. The COVID-19 disease is described as one of the most deadly disease ever. Its severity and high rate of transmission, caused worship centres, schools, offices, markets, hospitality industries, companies and public gatherings such as weddings and burials to beshut down for months. Government offices were run skeletally selecting some officials in some cadres to go to work while others stay at home to minimize crowdedness and contamination. Some workers attended to their jobs from home using the computer/net.

Considering the severity of the pandemic several health measures were invented to avoid one contacting the disease. Such measures are hand washing non-shaking of hands, wearing of nose masks, use of hand sanitizers, isolation, social distancing, ventilation and air filtering, coughing or sneezing into one's elbow and the like. All these preventive measures were recommended to ameliorate rate of infection. Notwithstanding all the health sensitization and preventive measures undertaken, the pandemic as serious as it is has taken millions of lives globally with its lingering effects or backdrop on world economy, commerce Agriculture/food scarcity, productivity, education, companies' shutdown etc to mention this few. Even currently, another type of COVID called COVID DELTA has developed in Lagos and some other states.

To manage the situation, each sector of the economy globally invents one measure or the other to get going because as the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. In the education sector, extended or virtual learning which is a form of learning through correspondence is put in place to create ground for teachers to teach their students for continuity and yet avoid physical contact since schools were shutdown. It is a known fact that learning by correspondence whereby the teacher teaches his students without physical contact did not start today after all Chikobi and his likes studied by correspondence. As Agwawuonye (2015:94) postulates, a teacher is a person who provides education for his students, and his supreme art is to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge". It means that the job of the teacher is to make sure that his students are educated, knowledgeable and happy. For the learner, there is a gradual permanent change after a course of instruction hence Richards and

Schmidt (2012:298), opine that learning is the process by which change in behaviour, knowledge, skills etc come about through practice, instruction or experience and the result of such a process. The teacher and learner can meet at a point without using the traditional or orthodox classroom and learning takes place. As O'grady, Archibald and Kalamba (2011:429) state,

The pedagogic goal of teacher talk is crystal clear: make sure the students know what is being talked about by providing comprehensive input, though teachers must guard against simplifying too much, which might give the appearance of patronizing the learners or talking to them as if they are stupid rather than on the way to becoming bilinguals.

The mantra of the above is on achieving the aim of teaching and learning where both the teacher and the student have parts to play to achieve a common goal. Krashen in Finegan (2012) maintains that in language teaching and learning, the student is faced with not just the task of acquiring new information but rather acquiring symbolic elements of a different linguistic community...The student is not just expected to learn them but required to acquire them and make them part of his own linguistic/language reservoir. The teacher helps the student to achieve such feat. There are various media of learning through correspondence such as radio, television, telegram, letter writing, virtual learning and so on. This paper is set out to investigate virtual learning which makes use of computer and cell phones to reach out to the students in the school of languages, in teaching their various courses in languages and literature in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education (A.I.F.C.E.) Owerri for short during the COVID-19 lockdown. Denham and Lobeck (2010:516) assert that language learning is the process of gaining conscious knowledge though instruction such took place through virtual learning in the school of languages of A.I.F.C.E. Owerri and so many Education Institutions in Nigeria and beyond. The theory that will anchor this study is Bruner's theory of constructivism.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Bruner's constructivism as its theoretical basis. Constructivism by Bruner, J. (1960) is a theory of child development and language learning. The trust of this theory is that learning is an active process whereby a learner should construct new ideas or concepts based on his past or current knowledge. The major argument of this theory stipulates active participation of the learner in the learning process. It stresses that the learner does not take information passively but rather be active and be involved in constructive knowledge by reflecting on the experience, incorporate information, ask and answer questions and build his own presentations into the pre-existing knowledge. This theory founds its background from cognitive theory where the rider is the cognitive and linguistic development of the child that renders the learner passive while the teacher actively does most of the job. This theory is found suitable for this study as both the lecturer and students though miles away will be actively involved in virtual teaching and learning process. The lecturer is at his own end performing his own activity while the students are also performing their own activity at their own end. Chisunum and Ejie (2018), elucidate that, learning for some students is rather boring when the teacher does most of the talking. Young learners in particular prefer a learning situation

where they can take part, be free to think, to create, to set goals for themselves and work towards achieving these goals (P.35).

The above explains the reason why constructivism is the suitable theory that offer activity on the students' parts is found more appropriate than cognitive theory for this study.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs) as mentioned before is one of the correspondence learning space that came into being in the Nigerian institutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of institutions. A lot of institutions like Alvan, FUTO, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, UNILAG to mention a few adopted it to reach out to their students. Even some private primary and secondary schools in Imo State and beyond such as Madonna primary and secondary schools, Alvana primary and secondary schools, OAK primary and secondary school and others engaged in virtual learning during the lockdown.

Unity schools were not left out in the virtual learning exercise. To cue into it, orientations were given to the instructors (teachers and lecturers by their various institutions and even the students, for proper and smooth running of the exercise.

Virtual learning is a technological medium and web-based platform for undertaking courses digitally using computer and cell phones. Weller (2007) notes, that it is a web-based platform for digital aspects of courses of study usually within Educational Institutions. They present resources, activities and interactions within a course structure and provide for the different stages of assessment (P.4). The point to underscore here is that a learning platform that is digitalized, using computer and cell phones to bring the teachers and learners together where they interact and yet keep their distances is available. Aguirre (2021) states that,

teaching classes through the internet, producing digital content, using an educational platform, holding virtual school events are all activities that requires skills which leaves the teacher with the role of planning, research and production, implementing feedback and motivation, and evaluation tasks.

The thrust of the above remains that teachers have enormous roles to play in a virtual learning environment. Simonson and Schlosser(2006) aver that virtual learning is learning that can functionally and effectively occur in the absence of traditional classroom environment". The rider in the above is that virtual learning can occur in a situation such as COVID-19 and insecurity where the traditional classroom is impossible. Virtual learning is an interactive learning platform that is closer to the orthodox classroom that give students immediate opportunity to ask and answer questions from their teachers and even chat with their fellow classmates unlike on-line learning where the students can join or complete assignments on their own pace. This makes virtual learning more functional and effective. (LMS Data-Edutechnica 23 September, (2014). Shows that virtual learning Environments (VLEs) have been adopted by almost all higher education institutions in the English-speaking countries. This means that (VLEs) has been on-going, though it was introduced to us here in Nigeria especially in many educational institutions.COVID-19 lockdown is a credit to Educational Institutions.

There are various platforms available for virtual learning such as google classroom, WhatsApp, Telegram and Zoom.

Explanation of the Apps

Google Classroom: Wikipedia free dictionary defines Google classroom as a free blended learning platform developed by Google for schools that aim to simplifying, creating, distributing and grading assignments. The primary purpose of Google classroom is to streamline the processes of sharing files between teachers and students.

Also Edward (2021) states that google classroom is a suite of online tools that allows teachers to set assignments, home work submitted by students, to mark and to return graded papers. It effectively was created as a way to rid off paper in classes and to make digital learning possible. This is a power point platform where lectures/lessons are presented in slides after raising the code for a particular course/lesson. The teacher/admin invites team members in the case of team teaching by typing in their E-mails/ phone numbers and also invites the students to come into the class on stated lecture/lesson times/dates. The invites perform their own operation from their own ends and both parties (teachers and learners) are in the classroom at the same time.

This platform avails the lecturer the opportunity of using; i-recorder which gives audio to the text or lesson to the students. The platform is very interactive as both the teacher and students interact as if it is in a traditional classroom.

The only thing is that the class members do not see each other physically and it seems a little difficult for some to manage.

WhatsApp Platform

This outlet is used to extend learning electronically. In this platform, the teacher/admin opens a platform for a particular group or class and use it to post his lessons to the students. Minhas, Ahmed and Ulla (2016) state that, WhatsApp messenger is a proprietary, cross-platform instant messaging subscription service for smart phones and selected feature phones that use the internet for communication. In addition to text messaging, users can send messages, images, video and audio media as well as their locations. WhatsApp Inc. was founded by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009. This platform allows texts and pictures and highly interactive. It is simpler and easier to manage but cannot be used for classes that are larger than (250) students because (250) population is its limit.

Telegram Platform

This platform is similar to WhatsApp. It is faster and capable of taking up to 20,000 persons. In this platform, just like WhatsApp, audio messages, pictures, voice notes, documents can also be sent unlike WhatsApp, this platform allows a new invite access to previous post that were there before the person joined. This Application consumes more data and sometimes not very easy to navigate.

Zoom Platform

This is an audio-visual platform that is majorly created for video calls and conferences. Antonelli (2020) defines zoom as a cloud-based video communication app that allows you to

set up virtual video conferencing, webinars, live charts, screen-sharing, and other collaborative capabilities. The admin/teacher creates the code which is given to the invites to join at a particular time. This platform ousts out the other applications above. It is audio-visual which makes it easy for you to see your participants and materials for easy assimilation. It enable the participants to be more focused, active and with quality visual and reliable connectivity. It is user friendly but takes a lot of data, but poor network always disrupt the class flow.

The school of language of A.I.F.C E Owerri adopted the google classroom for their virtual learning for a population of not less than 2,000 students across levels during the virtual learning period out of which less than 400 students came on board for interaction. Virtual learning was seen as a potent force to fight COVID-19 because using it, social distancing was maintained, it did not involve the wearing of mask or hand washing yet it provided adequate protection and education. It had zero rate of infection of the interlocutors. The pharmaceutical don'ts/rules were avoided as distance took care of them. Students could assess their lectures, from the comfort of their homes without being contaminated. Even as we speak, some universities like UNILAG, are still doing virtual learning because of the new COVID-DELTA on ground. Many institutions are now resorting to virtual presentation of their dissertations and conference papers.

Findings

Not quite a good number of students came to class, because of the following reasons; cost of data, network connectivity/fluctuation, inadequate knowledge of entering the classroom, lack of smart-phones to enable the operation/exercise to take place. The lecturers also faced similar problems.

For the reason of poor attendance to class by the students, there was difficulty in evaluation, the lessons were repeated in the normal conditional classroom and evaluation was given.

Summary

This paper X-rayed COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant effect on different works of life especially on the education sector in Nigeria taking instance from school of languages, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri where virtual learning was resorted to as the last resort to teach their students. The constructivism theory was explicated as a good match for virtual learning various topics or courses in language were taught. This conforms to the argument of pedagogical linguistics which is the application of linguistic theories, methods and descriptive findings adopted to the study of the teaching/learning native language in both spoken and written forms in schools or other educational settings by Crystal (2008). Various aspects of language and literature courses were taught during the virtual learning. The various platforms were also explained and even the findings and recommendations were given.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study; the following suggestions were given by the researchers;

- There should be improvement on power for virtual learning to take place.

- Network service providers should expand their scope so that students from rural areas can enjoin in the class.
- Data should be made available both to the students and lecturers/teachers.
- The administrators should design good ways of examining the students after classes and not resorting back to the classroom.

Conclusion

Virtual learning was invented to check COVID-19 infection as it kept the teachers and learners at a distance while they interacted. It is a better learning platform to by-pass insecurity and danger COVID-19 forced people into. Virtual learning is a supplement for orthodox classroom teaching and learning but cannot substitute it because orthodox is still better, more efficient and reliable.

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