

REPORT

"RE-ENGAGING STUDENTS: THE URGENCY FOR COST-EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES"

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students (*World Economic Forum, 2020*). A UNICEF report states that 10.5 million of Nigerian children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6 to 11-year-olds regularly attend primary school. Before the disruption caused by COVID-19, there was an ongoing effort to ensure young children stay in school and have access to proper education, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the total global out-of-school population.

The pandemic has unmasked substantial inequities in the education sector though private and non-governmental sectors are working tirelessly to salvage the situation. Notwithstanding, one major issue that has stemmed from this inequality is that public primary pupils and secondary school students cannot keep up with their peers because of inaccessibility to digital tools due to their disadvantaged state may never catch up and will continue to feel the effect of this gap even beyond the pandemic.

Despite the current economic realities and state of Education across Nigeria, there is a great need to strategize and plan towards Post-COVID-19, when schools are scheduled to resume. To this end, Ovie Brume Foundation, Youth Empowerment Foundation, Development Communications Network (DEVCOMS), and Barack Obama American Corner, (BOAC) partnered to host a webinar themed "**Re-engaging Students: The Urgency for Cost-Effective Strategies**" on 18th June 2020. The Webinar was aimed at iterating how to effectively engage pupils particularly in the public sector in continuous education during this period when schools remain closed and current cases of COVID-19 remains high.

The session which had forty-three (43) participants in attendance on Zoom with 153 people reached on Facebook was moderated by Mrs. Iwalola Akin-Jimoh, Executive Secretary, Youth Empowerment Foundation, and the speakers were Dr. Muyiwa Bamgbose, Chief Strategic Officer, Educational Advancement Centre, Mr. Dayo Israel, Permanent Board Member, Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board and Mrs. Adeola Awogbemi, Executive Director, Ovie Brume Foundation. Among the participants who participated in the session were Mrs. Fola Richie-Adewusi, former Commissioner of Education, Ekiti State, Commissioner of Education, Lagos State, Mrs. Folashade Adefisayo, Dr. Emah Fakinya, Public Health Expert, Mr. Samuel Eytayo, Director, American Center, and Dr. Francis Aminu, Director, Health and Nutrition, Aliko Dangote Foundation.

To commence the session, the moderator, Iwalola Akin-Jimoh welcomed all participants and gave a brief background about the speakers. She thereafter introduced the first speaker, Dr. Muyiwa Bamgbose, whose

presentation was centered on the theme “Re-Engaging Students: The Urgency for Cost-Effective Strategies” with emphasis on how COVID-19 introduced a different dimension to life, especially, Learning.

The highlights of his presentation were:

- ❖ COVID-19 has made what was presumed impossible possible, particularly in the education sector.
- ❖ Parents who never bothered to know how their kids’ study are now forced to be a part of their children’s learning process with parents playing different roles.
- ❖ Many schools have resorted to online learning with ZOOM being the most widely used.
- ❖ What used to happen in school was simply replicated at home through several online platforms.
- ❖ Despite migrating learning online, learning became one-sided as there was no dialogue between teachers and the children making it boring and unproductive for learners.
- ❖ As children continue to study using their devices, data is being consumed. However, the cost of data, poses an economic challenge to parents, making eLearning unsustainable, hence, the need for cost-effective strategies.
- ❖ For learning to be effective, there must be engagement.
- ❖ In the era of online learning, learning method is assessed by how engaging the session is with the students.
- ❖ There are different ways and strategies of keeping children engaged in distance learning which we are yet to get right in Nigeria.
- ❖ A major challenge of distance learning is atrophy with people falling out and easily get discouraged/demotivated.
- ❖ One way of engagement with children is through games such as Kahoot, which sustains students interested in the learning process.
- ❖ Learning has to be made attractive either in traditional learning or new media.
- ❖ Another effective way of engaging students is to get them off the screen into projects. They should be tasked with doing an assignment/survey/projects based on what they have learnt.
- ❖ Another effective way of learning is to “flip” learning by turning traditional learning upside down. By doing this, children watch lessons and do assignments thereafter.
- ❖ A major recommended for parents is to download an app known as “Lesson Teacher” which grants students access to simulated real-time learning.
- ❖ An effective alternative also, is to save learning video sessions and exercises on memory sticks such that students are able to access them offline without dependence on internet data.
- ❖ COVID-19 pandemic is a great pain, however, it presents an opportunity to correct and address the ills in Nigeria’s education system leading to gains rather than pains.

The moderator introduced the second speaker, **Dayo Israel** whose presentation focused more on activities of the government, specifically through the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LASUBEB) in response to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ❖ As stakeholders in the Education sector, everyone was caught unaware by the pandemic. However, it is important to rise to the occasion in ensuring that young people keep learning seamless while

they are at home and restricted from going to school or other traditional means of acquiring knowledge.

- ❖ Prior to the pandemic, the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LASUBEB) had initiated the adaptation of technology in school learning.
- ❖ In 2019, Eko Excel (Excellence in Child Education and Learning), an education reform programme to develop highly skilled teachers through training, supporting and motivating existing government teachers to succeed in their classrooms was launched by the Babajide Sanwaolu's administration.
- ❖ EKOEXCEL seeks to increase confidence in the state's public education system by developing more skilled teachers through training, supporting and motivating them to succeed in their classrooms.
- ❖ The EKOEXCEL initiative is also expected to have a positive effect on pupils' performance.
- ❖ The launch of the initiative followed a two-week intensive training of over 4,000 teachers from various schools and education districts across the state who will be the main drivers of the new initiative to reposition service delivery in public primary schools with special focus on learning outcomes for pupils.
- ❖ As part of the programme, over 14,000 head teachers and teachers will be moved from analogue to digital teaching, using tablets and updated curriculum.
- ❖ Over 3,000 primary school teachers from 300 public primary schools have been captured under the pilot scheme.
- ❖ Among other benefits, the EKOEXCEL Programme is expected to empower teachers to deliver at the same level as their counterparts around the world; provide strong continuous support that will encourage improvement in teachers and pupils; Lagos children can accelerate reading and literacy skills to compete with their peers globally; Lagos teachers will become more professional and technologically savvy in their work.
- ❖ In addition, the initiative will also enable teachers become more skillful in helping children learn in a positive environment; increase pupils' enrolment across the state; increase participation and enthusiasm among teachers and pupils; increase efficiency of head teachers in their work using technology to support teachers; and adequate data support to SUBEB and other governing bodies to carry out necessary academic adjustments and infrastructural development across schools.
- ❖ In response to COVID-19, electronic learning was adapted leveraging on Television and Radio due to perceived ease of accessibility across various economic level.
- ❖ The "Classroom from Home Program" disseminates learnings to pupils daily via Lagos Television (LTV 8) at different timings. The different timings were put in place to ensure that the pupils can learn with their parents or guardians at the later part of the day when they are available to guide them in learning.
- ❖ Furthermore, the educational programs on radio engages pupils at the lowest level of learning and ensures that no one misses out from the educational contents provided.
- ❖ The Interactive Radio Instruction program, Kokoka program (Language Based) and the web version of the Eko Excel programs and Social Media contents are some of the initiatives that have been used to bridge the learning gap during this pandemic.
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives is also important, the Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (LASUBEB) currently works with Civil Society organizations such

as Bunmi Adedayo Foundation to ensure that the quality of learning and pupils' participation is standard.

To usher in the next speaker, Iwalola Akin Jimoh shared the result of an opinion poll conducted by Ovie Brume Foundation and Youth Empowerment Foundation. The poll showed the extent of awareness and involvement of pupils and their parents in online learning platforms.

The next speaker, Adeola Awogbemi, Executive Director, Ovie Brume Foundation during her presentation shared with the audience the activities of the Ovie Brume Foundation with regards to online learning and challenges NGOs have been facing during this period. The highlights of her presentations were:

- ❖ The pandemic has facilitated the disruption of the status quo with regards to usage of mobile phones and technological devices among students. Prior to COVID-19, schools discouraged the use of mobile phones, but this has changed due to the pandemic.
- ❖ The Ovie Brume Foundation initiated her eLearning activities in April 2020, this has helped the members of the Foundation to continue learning from the comfort of their homes. Though, home schooling and eLearning which has been a foreign concept overtime has been adapted to ensure that learning continues.
- ❖ The Ovie Brume Foundation also conducted an opinion poll to ascertain the level of awareness amongst school children about the virtual and eLearning programs available to them during this period. The poll also measured the level of participation and engagement of the pupils with the programs. The feedback showed that attention span of the students is very low, more that 50% of participants indicated that access to the programs was limited due to poor electricity and low income.
- ❖ To mitigate the effect, the Foundation followed up with parents of beneficiaries at the Niger Delta Initiative (NDI) Unit to ensure the participation of their wards in the radio programs.
- ❖ The Foundation also provides an enabling environment for beneficiaries of the Ovie Brume Foundation's scholarship award, an opportunity to benefit for their school's eLearning programs. The students make use of the Foundation's internet access and computers to connect with the school's activities.
- ❖ The Education unit of the Foundation created intervention programs at Kosofe Local Government and Victoria Island, Lagos to ensure that students who do not have access to eLearning platforms are not excluded from learning during this period. The Foundation conducted a door-to-door survey of 106 pupils and their parents in other to understand their demography to adequately produce worksheets to aid the literacy and numeracy improvement of primary school pupils. Thereafter, work packets were produced disseminated and administered to pupils at home.
- ❖ The Livelihood unit created a WhatsApp platform for members of the Youth Centre and hold tutorials in Mathematics, Creative writing, ICT and Graphics Design weekly. These sessions have fully engaged the students and enabled them discover new learning methods. To further support their learning, additional educational resource and materials are shared with the students.

- ❖ It is important that the learning methods used to engage the students during this period while they are away from schools are interactive. Tools such as Zoom, Google form and Microsoft teams can be used to conduct interactive sessions and get feedbacks.
- ❖ Useful educational resources to support student's learning was also shared and they include the following:

Apps:

- ✓ Feed the Monster – Playstore
- ✓ Spelling with Akili

For free learning worksheets on Numeracy and Literacy for Grades 1-6:

- ✓ www.k5learning.com
- ✓ <https://www.123homeschool4me.com/home-school-free-printables/>
- ✓ <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/worksheets/>

Other learning platforms:

- ✓ Mathletics (Mathematics): www.mathletics.com
- ✓ Stile Education (Science): www.stileeducation.com
- ✓ Ascend Math: <https://ascendmath.com/coronavirus-offer/>

Speaker also took turns to respond to questions from the audience after their presentations.

Q: While embracing eLearning options, there have been challenges with data sufficiency, internet and electricity stability. Are there practical ways to overcome this challenge and make eLearning platforms more effective?

A: Knowing adequately the challenges associated with eLearning, preloaded educational materials can be used to cope with this situation. Education Advancement Centre has over the years supported the Oyo State Government by loading educational materials on memory cards used on devices to enable students have access to the resources with ease from the comfort of their homes. While making use of WhatsApp and other chat enabled applications for learning, security measures need to be put in place to guide against predators or spammers entering this group in a bid to lure students out for ulterior motives.

Q: Is this limited to elementary classes? I have a daughter in final year in university and another is in Year 2. The issue of data is serious. I don't see how the SD card will work for my kids as they actually have lectures online, at least the University kid. For the child in Year 2, it's all about assignments and no learning so I don't see the effectiveness of the system.

A: Continuous assessment is required to ensure that learning is actually taking place. Feedbacks should be gotten from the students to enable educational programmers plan better for the students. Interactive and fun features should also be included in the learning cycle.

Q: A lot of Lagos school children are not aware of the various learning platforms, especially the Radio. It would be necessary to drive messages on these learning opportunities to the communities; from LGAs/LCDAs to the wards and streets

A: It is very essential to increase awareness and provide Information about the programs and learning platforms available to students and their parents who require it.

Q: Can Government do something about cost of data

A: Though the private sectors and development organizations have done a lot in supporting the government in providing of palliatives. However, they need to also to prioritize education as well as feeding. Also, solutions should be adapted which will rely less on expending data to downloaded the educational materials. The preloaded contents will work be more effective than downloading information using data.

Q: From interaction with some children in public primary school, while trying to give them radio, I realized most of them are not aware they have Radio/Television classes not to mention the various stations or channels these sessions are taking place. How can this issue be addressed?

A: From experience, it has been noticed that a certain set of people are continually been left out when awareness about these programs are been created. Proper channels of communication should be followed to ensure that various sets of people are reached by the awareness created irrespective of social strata, demography and income level. The cycle needs to be completed, if resource is expended in providing educational contents and programs for the pupils, additional efforts should be put in ensuring that people access them. Proper monitoring and evaluation of this programs is important, this will enable the providers know if the programs and its content are meeting the educational needs of the students.

Q: I heard of a private school that denied some students who have not yet paid school fees during the lock down. What could be done to regulate the schools that does that.

A: As the Government provides support for other sectors who have been affected by the effect of this pandemic, it is also important that the educational sector is also put into consideration when giving grants or loan support. The impact of the pandemic on the private school proprietors has been one of the reasons for the recent pressure on the government to reopen schools. Though this isn't a right step at the moment, the financial impact on the schools have provided them with little options.

Q: The attention span of kids, how can that be improved?

A: Interactive learning should be prioritized for the students to ensure continuous engagement and involvement. Likewise, assessment is critical to learning. Feedbacks received from the assessment will enable the students know about the areas where improvements are required.

In closing Mrs. Adeola Awogbemi gave her final comments rhetorically asking about what becomes of Nigeria's Future if we have the majority of youth population being illiterate. She advocated for the adequate intervention and collaboration by the government and the private sector to ensure that the huge gap between the public and private schools are bridged. Thereafter, the moderator, Mrs. Iwalola Akin-Jimoh thanked all partners, speakers and participants for making the webinar a success.