Original Research Article

Educational Administration amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Prospects for Secondary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the challenged encountered by school administrators amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and suggested measures for mitigating its impact in secondary schools in Nigeria. Two research questions were posed to guide the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The entire population of 258 principals was studied without sampling as the size was manageable. A researcher-developed questionnaire 4-point rating scale containing 23 items in two clusters which was validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University was used to collect data for the study. Reliability of the instrument was determined through pilot test and data collected were analyzed using Cronbach alpha which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.85 and 0.77 for the two clusters respectively with an overall co-efficient value of 0.81. Mean was used to answer the research questions and standard deviation used to determine the closeness or homogeneity of the respondents' ratings while t-test was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that failure to maintain social distancing, lack of capacity building of staff, desperation and anxiety on the part of parents and community members, failure to maintain good sanitation practices like regular hand washing among students, and vague orders from school inspectors among others were some of the challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic. Findings also showed that in order to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 school administrators need to participate in capacity building programmes on Covid-19, project hygiene and health practices in their schools as well as adopt blended learning and technology in teaching students. The location of principals did not influence their opinions. Based on these findings the researchers recommended among others that school administrators should ensure that they attend in-service programmes that will educate them properly on Covid-19 and measures that would help forestall its impact in their schools.
Keywords: Educational Administration, Covid-19, Challenges, Prospects, Secondary Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a tool that enables the development of human capital of any nation. The role education plays in facilitating the realization of the national goals is embedded in the Federal Republic of Nigeria's (2013) national policy on education which sees education as instrument per excellence. This means that education is an instrument that enhances human, social, economic and physical development. Sadly, the outbreak of Covid-19 completely haltered the development activities of educational institutions globally. This is resulting from the high infectious and death rates caused by the virus. It has been reported that over 111 million coronavirus cases have been reported and over 2.4 million people have died from the virus globally while in Nigeria, 155,657 confirmed cases of Covid-19 infections and 1,907 deaths and counting (Julie, 2021; Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2021).

These staggering figures continue to show the need for precautions in schools where most schools have resumed as at the time of writing this report. At the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries instituted measures to mitigate the effect of the virus; they include the use of face masks, regular hand washing, social distancing and complete lock down. According to the United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Harris and Jones (2020), 1.6 billion young people are out of school. This is because of the closure of schools and total lockdown measures of most countries affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In countries like Nigeria where schools have resumed its normal activities are faced with barrage of challenges relating to observing the Covid-19 protocols of regular wearing of face mask, social distancing and

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regular hand washing. Harris and Jones (2020) opined that educational administrators whose schools have resumed academic activities are faced with problems of maintaining social distancing, ensuring proper cleaning and maintenance of sanitation. According to Pollock (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic creates two clear challenges for school administrators. The first is ensuring safe schooling and setting the context for future schooling while the second is simultaneously extending their role to include being adigital instructional leader. The above scenario presents a challenge to principals of secondary schools in Nigeria to ensure that students in their school keep to the Covid-19 protocols for secondary schools in Nigeria as provided by the Federal Ministry of Education (2020).

Furthermore the challenge on school administrators especially the principals and teachers to be technologically sound in terms of providing leadership in the integration of technology in administrative, teaching and learning processes of their school. Pius-Uwhubetiyi (2020) opined that school administrators are faced with problems learning the new technologies, the problem of too much too soon, the expense of technology, inadequate training, technological issues, the need to adapt content for blended learning, decreased motivation, lack of access to technology, poor power supply, and weakened relationships between students and teachers, etc. Conclusively, educational leadership and the student need to obey and follow. Furthermore, Espino-Diaz, Fernandez-Caminero, Hernandez-Lloret, Gonzalez-Gonzalez and Alvarez-Castillo (2020) averred that Covid-19 has exposed school administrators to a daunting phase of assimilation to new conditions, which is causing high levels of stress. Espino-Diaz, *et al*. (2020) further reported that teachers reported emotional fatigue, stress, anguish, or anxiety as a result of confinement and distance learning. In schools, teachers and principals are inundated with issues of excessive bureaucratic activities, vague orders, a lack of teleworking support, and a lack of technological resources as the key issues. Harris and Jones (2020) averred that the social distancing of staff and students means extra work and extra pressure on those staff who can return to work.

In order to withstanding the challenges that comes with the changes enforced by the covid-19 pandemic, principals are expected to be outstanding administrators and excellent leaders. It is expected that school administrators must now not only draw on their existing skills and knowledge to address the challenge of educating students during the pandemic, but also develop new skills and knowledge while pivoting some of their current positions (Pollock, 2020). This means that school principals must act swiftly with foresight while carefully considering their options and the consequences of their actions. According to Harris and Jones (2020) school administrators can navigate the covid-19 by applying good leadership practices like having a clear vision, building capacity and managing people among others and engaging in leadership preparation programmes that target surviving the covid-19 pandemic and the new normal.

Harris and Jones (2020) further stated that self-care and consideration must be the main priority and prime concern for all school leaders. The health of the principals must also be taken into account as they lead through the pandemic. Leading a school through the changes and challenges that accompany COVID19 and post COVID19 will require school leaders who put their own health and wellbeing first, so that they will be able to help others. Igbokwe, Okeke-James, Akudo and Anyanwu (2020) offered that school administrators can determine hygiene facilities needs of the school and also deploy school resources to meet such needs.

On another note, Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) suggested that school leaders are expected to be more technologically savvy and well-informed in the future. As a result, school leaders will need to be picky about the digital products they use and cautious to strike a balance between technology and pedagogy in their classrooms. To deal with the many issues that Covid19 has raised, especially for disadvantaged, marginalized, or alienated young people, stronger ties with parent/community groups to help families, young people, and children is now a necessity (Harris & Jones, 2020). This is because it has been suggested Covid-19 have greater impact on students in rural and disadvantaged communities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021) compared to their colleagues in urban areas. However, this view seems not to have been empirically proven to be the case in most secondary schools in Nigeria in general and Anambra State in particular. Thus the study sought to empirically ascertain the challenges faced by school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic while determining strategies for the future.

Statement of the Problem
The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have presented a huge hurdle to the quality of educational administration in secondary schools in Nigeria. The rapid spread of the virus heightened by the huge number of deaths led to the hurried closure of educational institutions including public secondary schools in Nigeria. The prolong academic layoff resulting from the inability of public secondary schools administrators in Nigeria to adapt pedagogical and school activities to the change forced by the pandemic as witnessed in most countries abroad. The lack of innovativeness displayed by public secondary schools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic presents a worrying sign for education development in Nigeria. Thus the need for this study to x-ray the challenges that enabled the failure by school administrators to swiftly

react to the burden of change presented by the Covid-19 pandemic as well assuggesting remediating measures for the future.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the challenges and prospects of secondary school administration amidst the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:
1. The challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
2. The measures for to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:
1. What are the challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria?
2. What are the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:
1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals in rural and urban secondary schools on the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals in rural and urban secondary schools on the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria.

METHOD

The research design for this study was descriptive survey. The design was considered suitable for this study since it collected data from a specified sample of public secondary school principals in Anambra State through a questionnaire to determine the challenges and prospects of Covid-19 in Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 258 principals of public secondary schools in the six education zones of the State based on information from Post-Primary Secondary Schools Services Commission (PPSSC), Awka, Anambra State, December, 2021. The entire population was used without sampling because the number was small and manageable. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher from the reviewed literature; consultation with experts all based on the research questions guiding the study. The instrument was titled "Questionnaire on Challenges and Prospects of Secondary School Administration Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic (QCPSSAAC19P)" and has two sections-

A and B. Section A contains respondents' background information covering location of school. Section B contains 23 items in two clusters of B1 and B2 according to the two research questions guiding the study. All the items were structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The face validation of the instrument was determined. To do this, the research questions, purpose of the study, hypotheses and the questionnaire were given to three experts; who are lecturers; two in the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one in Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, all in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. These experts were requested to validate the instrument relative to the appropriateness and coverage of the items, wordings and clarity of the instructions. A pilot test was conducted to establish the instrument's reliability whereby the questionnaire was administered on 10 principals of secondary schools in Delta State who were not included in the population of the study. As a result of the fact that the instrument is in two clusters, the researcher had to ascertain the reliability of each cluster using Cronbach Alpha reliability method, which yielded coefficient values of 0.85 and 0.77for clusters B1 and B2 respectively. The Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis on the obtained data yielded a score of 0.81 for internal consistency, which was deemed high for the study. Data were collected by the researcher with the help of six research assistants who are teachers in secondary schools and they were assigned to each of the education zones in Anambra State. The research assistants were briefed by the researcher on the content and mode of the instruments administration. Copies of the questionnaire were administered by the research assistants on the spot in their schools. Yet those principals who were not disposed to fill the item for immediate retrieval, an appointment of revisit was booked with the researcher and this exercise lasted for two weeks. The reason was to ensure and facilitate high return rate of the item for analysis. Out of the 258 copies of the questionnaire administered, 211 copies were returned. This indicate that 49 copies representing 19 percent of the questionnaire distributed were not returned while 211 copies representing 81 percent return rate of the questionnaire distributed were used for data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The mean value was used to answer the research questions while the standard deviation was used to ascertain the homogeneity or otherwise of respondents' ratings. Any item with mean ratings between 2.50 and above is agree while any item with mean ratings below 2.50 was disagree. The null hypotheses were tested with t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Where the calculated t-value is less than the critical value of t, it means that there was no

significant difference in respondents' mean ratings and the hypothesis was accepted. Conversely, where the calculated t-value is equal to or greater than the critical t-value, it means that there was significant difference in the respondents' mean ratings and the hypothesis was rejected.

RESULTS
Research Question 1
What are the challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria?

Table-1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Challenges Faced by Secondary School Administrators during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria   (N=211)

S/NO	Items on challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic:	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Difficulties in maintaining social distancing in schools	3.66	0.81	Agree
2.	Vague orders from school inspectors	3.04	0.79	Agree
3.	Lack of teleworking support from government	3.37	0.76	Agree
4.	Lack of technological resources.	3.59	0.84	Agree
5.	Failure to adapt pedagogical content to blended learning	3.57	0.86	Agree
6.	Anxiety and fear among members of staff	2.58	0.70	Agree
7.	Lack of access to internet	3.21	0.92	Agree
8.	Poor power supply	3.09	0.82	Agree
9.	High cost of technology	3.12	0.87	Agree
10	Failure to train school staff on best strategies to mitigate the impact of Covid-19	3.05	0.71	Agree
11.	Excessive bureaucratic activities	3.12	0.87	Agree
12.	Failure to maintain good sanitation practices like regular hand washing among students	3.26	0.83	
13	Desperation and pressure from parents	3.00	0.76	
	Cluster Mean	**3.20**		Agree

Information in Table 1 revealed that principals in secondary schools in Anambra State agree that items 1-13 with mean ratings ranging between 2.58 to 3.66 were challenges faced during the covid 19 pandemic. The cluster mean of 3.20 reveal that difficulties in maintaining social distancing in schools, lack of technological resources, failure to adapt pedagogical content to blended learning, failure to maintain good sanitation practices like regular hand washing among students, failure to train school staff on best strategies to mitigate impact of Covid-19, lack of teleworking support from government and excessive bureaucratic activities were some of the challenges faced during the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the standard deviation scores show that the respondent's opinions were related.

Research Question 2
What are the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria?

Table-1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Measures to be Utilized by Secondary School Administrators to Mitigate the Impact of Covid-19 during and after the pandemic   (N=211)

S/NO	Items on challenges faced by secondary school administrators during the Covid-19 pandemic:	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Engaging school administrators in leadership preparation programmes which are targeted at surviving the Covid-19 pandemic	3.21	0.76	Agree
2.	Ensuring that the health and wellbeing of school administrators are given priority attention	3.34	0.84	Agree
3.	Determining the hygiene facilities needs of the school	3.11	0.71	Agree
4.	Making available resources to ensure the maintenance of good sanitary conditions in the school	3.55	0.86	Agree
5.	Maintaining good rapport with parents/community	3.43	0.83	Agree
6.	Ensuring that school administrators are technologically savvy and well informed	3.48	0.78	Agree
7.	Ensuring that school administrators engage in constant crisis and change management	3.35	0.83	Agree
8.	Ensuring that school administrator carry staff along on issues in the school	3.18	0.79	Agree
9.	Forging stronger links with private tech organizations	3.48	0.82	Agree
10	Carefully selecting digital products that best attends to the school needs	3.37	0.86	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.35**		Agree

Data in Table 2 reveal that the respondents agreed that items 1-10 with mean ratings ranging between 2.11 to 3.55 are measures that could be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria. This is further enunciated by the cluster mean of 3.35 which indicate that engaging school administrators in leadership preparation programmes which are targeted at surviving the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that the health and wellbeing of school administrators are given priority attention, Determining the hygiene facilities needs of the school, making available resources to ensure the maintenance of good sanitary conditions in the school and ensuring that school administrators are technologically savvy and well informed among others. The standard deviation scores show that the respondents' opinions was close and related.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals in rural and urban secondary schools on the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Table-3: t-test Analysis of Respondents' Means Ratings on the Challenges Faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria Based on location

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	á	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Rural Principals	93	3.15	0.87					
	209			0.05	0.67		1.96	Not Significant
Urban Principals	118	3.23	0.83					

Data in Table 3 show that the calculated t-value of 0.67 at 209 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This shows that the respondents did not significantly differ in their mean ratings on the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria based on school location. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals in rural and urban secondary schools on the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria.

Table-4: t-test Analysis of Respondents' Means Ratings on the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria Based on location

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	á	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Rural Principals	93	3.21	0.79					
	209			0.05	0.44		1.96	Not Significant
Urban Principals	118	3.44	0.85					

Data in Table 4 show that the calculated t-value of 0.44 at 209 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This shows that the respondents did not significantly differ in their mean ratings on the measures to be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria based on school location. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION

Finding on the first research question revealed that educational administration in secondary schools in Nigeria were hampered by some challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the challenges include difficulties in maintaining social distancing in schools, lack of technological resources, failure to adapt pedagogical content to blended learning, failure to maintain good sanitation practices like regular hand washing among students, failure to train school staff on best strategies to mitigate impact of Covid-19, lack of teleworking support from government and excessive bureaucratic activities among others. This finding indicates that educational administrators in Nigeria struggled to adapt to the changes in school administration brought about by Covid-19. The finding is in agreement with Harrison and Jones (2020) who found that school administrators struggled to cope with the changes in the school processes imposed by Covid-19 outbreak. This meant that school principals, teachers and other educational administrators found it difficult to adapt proactive measures that will necessitate that school processes continued on hinged.Igbokwe, *et al*. (2020) noted that school administrators found it difficult to ensure that the sanitation and health conditions in their schools were good. Igbokwe, *et al*. (2020) stated that school administrators failed to effectively determine hygiene facilities needs of the school and were not able to deploy school resources to meet such needs.

According to Pius-Uwhubetiyi (2020)stated that some of the challenges faced by school administrators seem to have resulted because of the failure of government and her agencies to provide support in terms of lack of technological provisions, lack of teaching support and capacity building for administrators with respect to the pandemic and provision of sanitation and hygiene resources for schools.Pius-Uwhubetiyi (2020)also held that the high cost of technologyand failure to adapt content for blended learning, decreased motivation, lack ofaccess to technology, poor power supply, and weakened relationships between students andteachers also frustrated school administrators during the pandemic. Furthermore, findings also showed no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals in rural and urban area on the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This indicates that the challenges outlined above affected both principals in rural and urban secondary schools in Nigeria in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is in agreement withPius-Uwhubetiyi (2020) who noted that administrators of secondary schools in all parts of the country faced numerous challenges during the pandemic regardless of the location of the schools in Nigeria.

Finding on the second research question revealed that engaging school administrators in leadership preparation programmes which are targeted at surviving the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that the health and wellbeing of school administrators are given priority attention, Determining the hygiene facilities needs of the school, making available resources to ensure the maintenance of good sanitary conditions in the school and ensuring that school administrators are technologically savvy and well informed among others were some of the measures that could be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with Pollock (2020) who stated that school leaders have to come up with ways of mitigating the challenges posed by Covid-19. According to Pollock (2020), school administrators need to be creative and innovative by acting swiftly with foresight while carefully determining the best options for their school. This means that the needs of the schools need to be upper most in their thought.

Harris and Jones (2020) suggested that school administrators need to place top priority on their health as well as ensuring that staff members are well taken care of. This according to Pollock (2020) can be achieved by school leadership taking a step further in building on their existing responsibilities for a safe and healthy school, through the development of a comprehensive understanding of COVID-19, including causes, symptoms, public health protocols, and preventions. Harrison and Jones (2020) averred that school administrators could engage in leadership preparation programmes that target surviving the covid-19 pandemic thereby developing their capacity to navigate the pandemic. Furthermore, finding revealed that the respondents opinion did not differ based on their location on the measures that could be utilized by secondary school administrators to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 during and after the pandemic in Nigeria. This is in agreement with Harrison and Jones (2020), Pollock (2020) and Igbokwe, *et al*. (2020) who all agreed that school principals' need to be technologically savvy, health and safety focused in order to manage schools for the new normal.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study the researchers conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic affected the smooth administration of secondary schools in Nigeria. This affected the turn of academic activities making it impossible for public secondary schools to carry on academic activities. Issues relating to poor training capacity, anxiety and fear, lack of technological resources and poor coordination enabled this situation. It therefore become imperative that secondary school administrators seek out innovative solutions that is technologically driven and safety and health conscious which will facilitate the smooth management and administration of their schools through the pandemic and afterwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers made the following recommendations based on the findings of the study:

1. School administrators should ensure that they attend in-service programme that will educate them properly on Covid -19 and measures that would help forestall its impact in their schools.
2. Federal, State and Local Government should ensure the provision of hygiene facilities, cleaning materials and facemasks for students and teachers in schools.
3. There is need for curriculum planners to map-out a curriculum framework that allows for the integration of technology in secondary schools.
4. The Federal and State Ministries of Education should consistently organize capacity building workshops for secondary school teachers, parents and the community.
5. School administrators should publicly display school procedures for students and teachers as well as for visitors to the schools.

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