

Ride to Remote:

Towards Improving Nigeria's
Education System amidst
COVID-19
(Policy Brief)

January 2022



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01

Executive Summary

COVID-19 pandemic met the world unprepared, halting almost all aspects of human activities. The pandemic is still very much present, though we continue to develop coping strategies that enable us to live with and survive the pandemic. Despite this, its impact on human beings, particularly young people in sub-Saharan Africa is overwhelming.

Nevertheless, the pandemic also creates an opportunity to understand the gap in access to digital technology, equitable education, work, and employment opportunities for the young people; an opportunity for young people to creatively initiate solutions, join decision-makers to develop sustainable policies that will promote accessible and inclusive school and work environment for the youths.

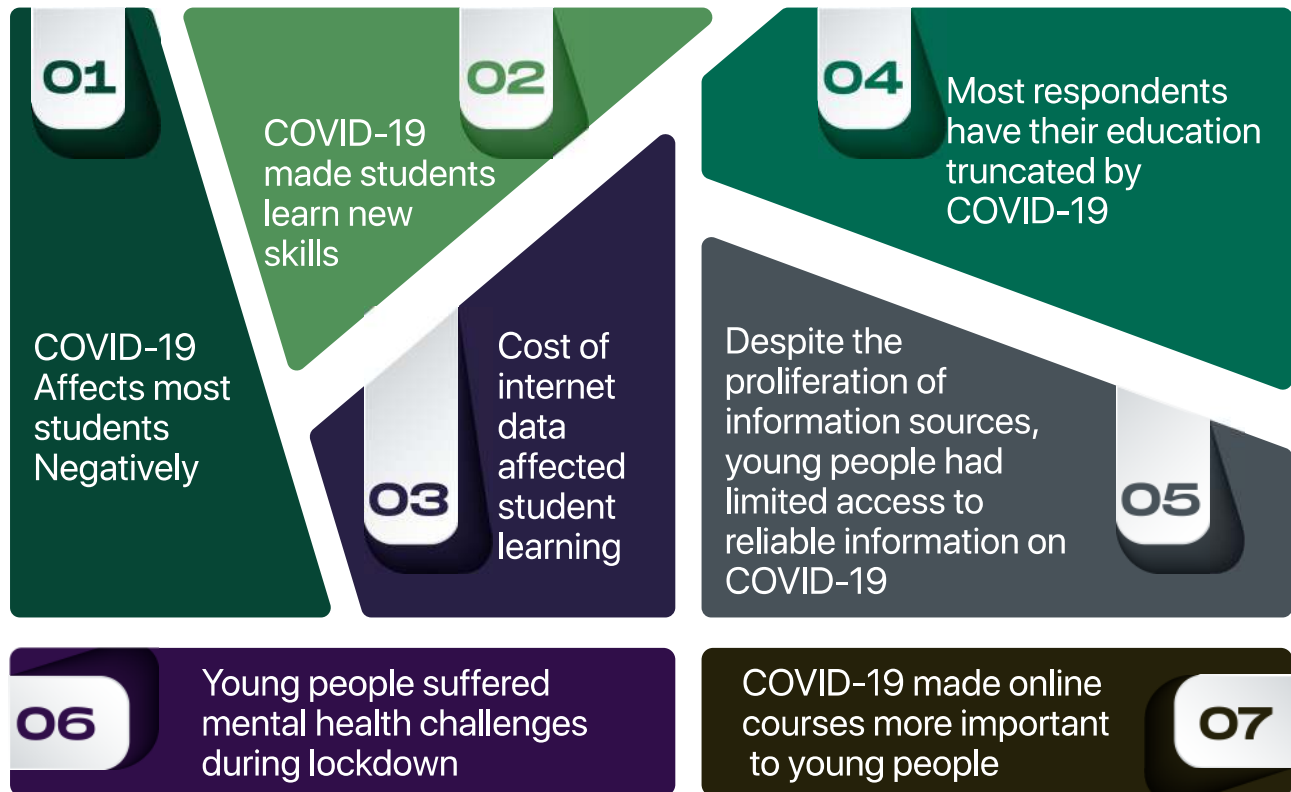
Sequel to the youth-focused research commissioned by BBYDI with support from the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), this Policy Brief is developed to support the effort of policy actors to build an equitable education system in Nigeria. The document includes 15 major action points with cross-cutting responsibility of the Government, Management of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Young People in the country. It is anticipated that these recommendations will strengthen Nigeria's education system and enable its preparedness for unforeseen circumstances like COVID-19



02

Findings

Following the research conducted by BBYDI across the country, the following findings were identified:



01

COVID-19 Affects most students Negatively

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the restriction of movements and eventual lockdown of almost all countries in the world. Nigerian schools were unprepared for this unprecedented calamity, therefore, had no alternative but to close. The Strike by university lecturers worsened the situation for students in public institutions. For more than nine months, they were at home, with no access to university education.

92%

of respondents were negatively impacted by COVID-19. It increased their school year and left some of them stranded, in hunger, anger and anxiety.



I spent 25 months instead of 15 months in my 5th year in medical school. It was a lot to swallow.

"An extra session was added to my school calendar a 4-year program became 5-years. Considering my age and my plans, COVID-19 affected my mental balance."

02

Young people responded to COVID-19 positively

Beyond all the challenges and impacts identified and subsequently explained in this research, young people in Nigeria believed that COVID-19 has made a positive impact on their lives.

50.8%

of respondents indicated that they responded to COVID-19 positively.

13%

cannot describe how they responded.

When asked further, students noted that COVID-19 came as a "rude shock" but was also a "moment of realization" for them.



I applied for Jobberman soft skill training, learnt how to use zoom and started an online course and learnt data science. I didn't just waste my time sitting at home without engaging in anything."

"During the period of the lockdown, I was able to reconnect with myself, I mastered public speaking by exercising with my uncle. I started writing poems and ventured into Arts, despite being a science student. COVID-19 pandemic was a blessing for me, though it added a year to my school year."

03

Despite the proliferation of information sources, young people had limited access to reliable information on COVID-19

Along with the pandemic was an infodemic – the availability of too much information, often including false and misleading information in the digital and physical environment.¹ The infodemic of COVID-19 is as worse as the impact of the pandemic. Young people, despite access to the digital space, and information, were misled by fake news about the pandemic.

83%

of respondents indicated that they received, at least one COVID-19 fake news.

13%

noted that they struggled with a platform to trust for information.

The respondents noted that this situation created a “tension of trust”, as they could barely rely on government, media or civil society for information. Despite the global campaign against misinformation and disinformation, young people, because they are available on the platforms where fake news spreads, fell prey to fake news.

¹WHO, What is Infodemic.
Available online at https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1

04

**Many people lost their jobs
due to COVID-19**

The pandemic presented a new reality of work-life and young people are finding it difficult to adjust. Young people mentioned that it is more difficult to get a job now, due to the pandemic, as they must learn new skills that meet the realities of the current world. Unfortunately, there was massive job loss during the lockdown. Many employees were laid off for different reasons, largely because of the inability of their companies to pay salaries. As schools were closed, teachers in primary and secondary schools were out of jobs and out of pay. When asked whether they had an alternative job,

83%

responded that they had no alternative source of income during the pandemic.

The digital capability of most people that had a job before COVID-19 did not adequately prepare them for the reality of the pandemic and virtual work.



I struggled with the zoom platform during the lockdown, I was not used to it before COVID-19. There are some of my colleagues that lost their jobs because they could not participate in virtual meetings”

The education system does not prepare young people for the skills demand of the 21st Century. Young people rely on self-training and adaptability via extra-curricular activities to learn high-demand skills that make them competitive in the job market.

05

Most respondents have their education truncated by COVID-19

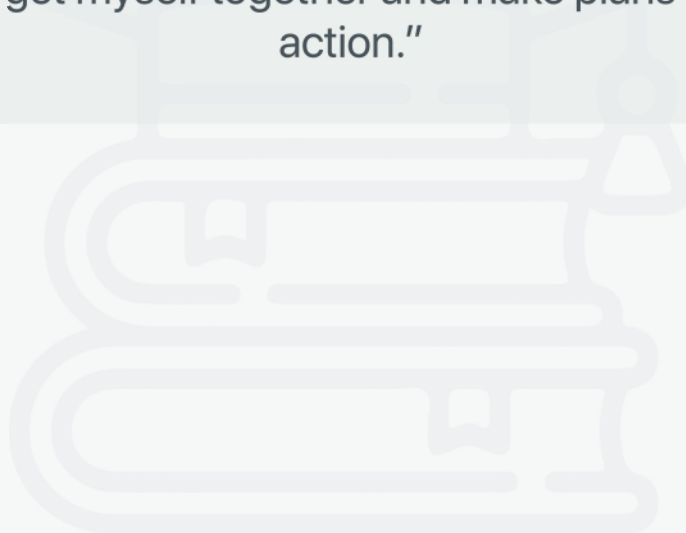
Access to inclusive and quality education is a fundamental human right and a key target of the Sustainable Development Goal. Unfortunately, achieving this target has been a herculean task in Nigeria. However, the advent of COVID-19 exacerbated this challenge.

71% of our respondents indicated that their education was truncated by COVID-19.

At the Higher Institution Level, students' education stopped from a period between **five months – eleven months**. Though some schools tried to adopt virtual learning after the third month, the measure failed, due to lack of technical skills, internet penetration, cost of internet and structure.

“

my school was not prepared for COVID-19, I was not prepared for it. I am sponsoring my education and was hoping to finish quickly so that I can have more time to concentrate on work and take care of my family. Unfortunately, it took me seven months to get myself together and make plans for the next action.”



06

Young people suffered mental health challenges during lockdown

At the beginning of the lockdown, many young people suffered from mental stress and other mental health challenges.

63% of the respondents mentioned that the pandemic affected their mental balance.

When asked, what was the major challenge they faced during the lockdown,

21% mentioned mental health, ahead of lack of internet data, connectivity, and poverty. This was a result of delayed learning, insufficient food, and loneliness.

“

I am still battling with my project work, COVID-19 has caused a serious delay in my life plans. I hope we can do something to prevent this kind of thing from ever occurring.



07

COVID-19 made online courses more important to young people

A significant change that came with COVID-19 was the popularity of online courses.

68%

of respondents took an online course during the lockdown. The pandemic provided the opportunity for students to learn a new skill.

75%

of respondents learnt a digital skill during the lockdown. Data analysis, graphics design, product design, video editing, content writing and coding was the top skills respondents took during the lockdown.

“

The pandemic was a time for me to bond with my family, it was the longest time I had spent with my family. I also started an online class. That's all I did during the lockdown, family time and online class.”

“

I have heard about online courses and enrolled in some before COVID-19, however, I took more courses and was inclined to them more with the advent of COVID-19.”

“

Before COVID-19, I did not complete any of the online courses I enrolled in but COVID-19 taught me the discipline to enrol and complete many courses online. I now have certificates attached to my LinkedIn.”

08

COVID-19 made students learn new skills

Aside from taking courses online, students used the lockdown period to engage in other beneficial activities.

27%

of respondents learnt a new trade during the lockdown. Students learnt artisan skills like Art and Craft, Fashion Designing, Beadmaking, farming, soap making, interior designing, and smartphone repairs. This additional skill will provide them with alternative jobs and a source of income.

09

Cost of internet data affected student learning

Data subscription is expensive, and many students could not afford them. Schools that adopted remote learning could not coordinate learning because some students were not privileged to have gadgets and enough data that support distance learning.

27%

of respondents suffer could not afford internet subscriptions during the lockdown.

54%

mentioned that they were not on social media for more than two days because they could not afford the cost of data.



03

Recommendations

Improving the education system to provide nonstop, quality education for young people in Nigeria requires a shift from the current mode of operation to a more robust strategy that promote distance learning in higher education institutions in the country. The Federal Government, Management of Higher Education Institutions and Young People must work together to ensure this strategy is implemented. The following recommendations indicate reflections towards building a stronger education system in the country:

Federal Government

- Review education curriculum
- Improve accreditation criteria for Higher Education Institutions
- Increase budget allocation for education
- Increase investment in broadband penetration

Managements of Higher Institutions

- Develop infrastructure for virtual education
- Include remote learning in study options
- Train lecturers on Digital skills

Young People

- Avoid physical isolation
- Identify and solve problems indigenously
- Leverage digital platforms to access opportunities
- Take responsibility and Concerted Effort to Curb COVID-19
- Develop a Mindshift from Self-interest to National Interest



01

The Federal Government

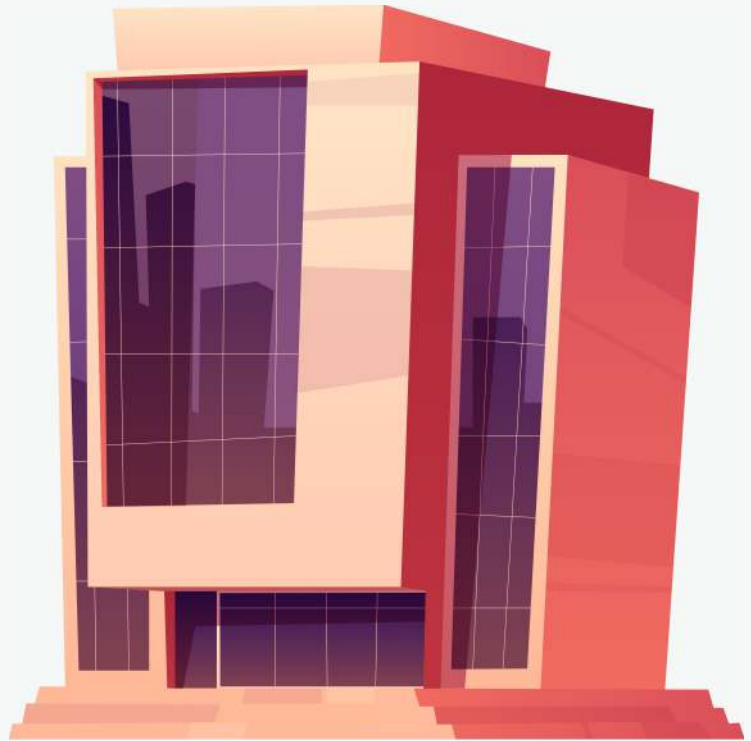
A. Review education curriculum: the federal government, through the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) should commission a review of the education curriculum and mode of education. This is to ensure that learning and learning methods meet current realities. Education should move from leapfrogging to the adoption of digital accelerations. Instead, it should be ahead in thinking and application to amplify Nigeria's digital development.

B. Improve accreditation criteria for Higher Education Institutions: the National University Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and other accrediting agencies should include digital latency as part of accreditation criteria for higher institutions. Improving digital frontiers of higher institutions should not be at the behest of the school management, rather, it should be a legal mandate, for the establishment and maintenance of the institutions.

C. Increase budget allocation for education: the federal government must make a concerted effort to increase investment in education by supporting higher institutions to build digital learning infrastructures. In the last 10 years, the budget allocation for education is less than 10%, government must take education seriously and improve investment in education to prepare young people for the present work-life.

D. Increase investment in broadband penetration: Nigeria's internet penetration is currently poor. 2G network has insufficient coverage with extremely poor and ineffective data capacity; 3G is primarily limited to urban environments, but with a moderate data capacity; and 4G has extremely limited coverage with functional data capacity. Without sufficient coverage (in rural and urban areas) with functional data capacity, investment in remote learning will be ineffective. Therefore, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) must collaborate with the Ministry of Education to ensure that Higher institutions and their suburbs have access to quality internet. Also, NCC must deepen its effort to implement the National Broadband Plan to improve internet penetration across the country.

"Schools represent the ideal starting point for connecting young people. By connecting schools and utilizing them as locusts for young people learning, and local community activities, it will enable connectivity with digitally cut-off people."



02

The Management of Higher Institutions

A. Develop infrastructure for virtual education: higher institutions must invest in digital technology for distance learning. The pandemic has brought a new wave of education systems and institutions are struggling to adapt. Before the pandemic, some institutions in Nigeria have an investment in some digital technologies, like the installation of Local Access Network (LAN) across the campus, investment in Wi-Fi connectivity and provision of tablets to students. These were done to gradually shift towards digital learning. However, some of the institutions falter in their efforts before 2020. When the pandemic hit, the available infrastructure was inadequate to support distance learning. Some schools opted to use social media platforms like WhatsApp for learning, but it was inadequate because it could not accommodate a large class and lecturers could not manage the platforms. It is obvious now that investment in digital learning must go beyond the provision of tablets, but also bespoke virtual platforms for online learning.

B. Include remote learning in study options: the education system must evolve beyond full-time and (rarely) part-time physical classes only. Study options must be available for young people (both physical and online). These options should include Online Study (Full time and part-time) and physical study options. All institutions should adopt this strategy to improve the preparedness for absolute remote learning (as caused during COVID-19 Lockdown) and make adaptability easier. A flexible education system will make schools and students navigate difficult times like the pandemic in a much relieving manner.

D. Train lecturers on Digital skills: schools that adopted remote learning during COVID-19 had trouble in managing the system because lecturers are not acquainted with the platform. Some lecturers are not digitally literate and could not manage the platforms. There is a need to invest in training lecturers on how to use virtual platforms and manage remote learning.



03

Young People

A. Avoid physical isolation: Though COVID-19 has made virtual learning inevitable, it has also exposed the reality of isolation amongst students. There is a poor student-student and student-lecturers relationship. This has reduced their emotional intelligence and affection for one another. This resulted in self-loss and mental stress. Students must try to relate with one another beyond being classmates. This will help them to connect better and be emotionally attached to their needs and peculiarities.

B. Identify and solve problems indigenously: Young people should gather facts around the challenges within their community and try to solve them using indigenous and available methods. Our respondents believed that young people could solve problems and not necessarily wait on the government.

C. Leverage digital platforms to access opportunities: Young people should not wait to finish school before leveraging opportunities that can provide income for them. Students to leverage the opportunities available online to learn skills, put themselves out and offer tangible and impactful services that will generate income for them.

D. Take responsibility and Concerted Effort to Curb COVID-19: Young people must actively ensure their engagements limit the spread of the virus. They must obey COVID-19 protocols and be at the frontier of fighting the virus, rather than building mistrust and disbelieve about the virus.

E. Positive and Constructive engagements with Policymakers: Young people should move from ranting on social media to having constructive conversations with relevant stakeholders. They should gather facts, analyze state policies, and offer suggestions for improvement. Also, young people should criticize in a manner that promotes national sovereignty, legitimacy, and development, this will endear them to the decision-making table.

F. Mobilize campaign for equitable education system: Young people should mobilize and advocate for increased budgetary allocation for education. They must demand better education systems and standards from higher institutions.

G. Develop a Mindshift from Self-interest to National Interest: Students should acquire knowledge and apply it for societal benefits. They must invest in education that has a direct impact on societal advancement. Beyond gaining skills to earn income, young people should invest in acquiring knowledge that will solve our societal problems and improve our standard of living.

H. Use social media to Advocate for Minority Groups: Young people should continue to leverage social media for advocacy and campaign, particularly for vulnerable groups and minority groups. These voices should be amplified for equitable policy implementation and to improve growth and development in our society.



04

Conclusion

The effect of COVID-19 on education of young people in Nigeria is a good crisis that must not be wasted. The inability of institutions to cope with the pandemic and ensure the continuity of learning is an indication of the failure of the education system in the country. Young people were at the receiving end – a pause in education and inadequate access to internet services. Though many of them used the period to learn new skills, it was a critical juncture for them, where they realize the gap between what they learn in classes and the current realities of work-life. Therefore, it is important to enable young people access quality and equitable education that will prepare them for the future of work.

This Policy Brief was produced as an output of a detailed research by the BBYDI team led by Abdulhakeem Ibraheem ABDULKAREEM and Abideen Opeyemi OLASUPO



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