

Exploring Students' Experience on Distance Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bauchi State Nigeria

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the experiences and obstacles on distance education faced by students during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bauchi State Nigeria. A phenomenological research was adopted for the study through shorter case interview. Ten (10) senior secondary school students were selected through purposeful and snow-ball sampling for the study. Thematic analysis was used to synthesize the data collected and highlight key findings. The results indicate that the students views were categorized into positive and negative while the obstacles faced were technical, pedagogical, environment and longing for school. Recommendations were offered to overcome and understand these obstacles to benefit teachers, students and curriculum developers in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19; Students' Experience; Distance education; Secondary schools

INTRODUCTION

The recent outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) or Covid-19 across the globe resulted in serious drawback in almost all human endeavors. The education sector is no exception (Ziaul Hoq, 2020). Covid-19 is a virus that affects the respiratory organ of human beings, as a result of cough or sneeze released by infected person. The virus spread from one person to another through touching a surface that an infected person coughed or sneezed or by being too close to the infected person (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020). The disease which was first discovered in Wuhan City of Hubei Province China in December 2019, it was strongly connected to the Huanan Seafood Market (South China) and lead to the spread of deadly infection to several countries around the world (Hafeez et al., 2020). Then, World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as "public health emergency of international concern" through the Health Regulations Emergency Committee. A month later, on January 30, 2020, COVID-19 was declared pandemic by WHO.

African continent was not exclusive in the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. The first recorded case in Nigeria was on 27th February, 2020 in Lagos (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020). In order to bring down the spread of Covid-19 pandemic to the barest minimum Federal Government of Nigeria banned all large gathering of people as a precautionary measure. On March 19th, 2020 a circular from Federal Ministry of Education has granted an authorization for skipping all schools activities for

a period of one (1) month commencing from Monday 23rd March 2020 to avoid the spread of the Corona virus (Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group [EiEWG], 2020). This action led to closure of all educational institutions in Nigeria. UNESCO (2020a) reported that the closure of educational institutions in order to contain the pandemic affects about 1.725 billion learners worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected educational institutions in Africa resulting to over 130 million learners are to stay at home as a result of school closure (Selbervik, 2020). This indicated that Covid-19 pandemic may cause serious setback in providing education for all in Africa.

The pandemic affects the lives of learners, teachers, parents and other stake holders (Nel & Marais, 2020). UNESCO (2020a) and Teachers Task Force [TTF] (2020) reported that Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest disruptions to education the world has ever known upsetting more than 90% of the world student's population. Schools closure disrupted learning process and vital school service to Nigerian students and about 40 million learners were affected during the nationwide closure of which 91 percent are secondary school students (Obiakor & Adeniran, 2020). The World Bank (2020) further stressed that this pandemic could lead to students' dropout from secondary schools, especially those from low earning families. In another development, schools closure will definitely reduce educational achievement of student and most likely to affect children of low socio-economic background due to less access to other means of learning (Eyles et al., 2020).

However, Fugate (2020) suggested that, with classrooms closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, students in Nigeria are seeking much-needed substitute approaches to continue their fundamental education. He further emphasized that teaching and learning cannot wait for the calamity to end. Therefore, classes should be postponed without stopping learning. It is believed that when learning continues although there is crisis, it tends to reduce the level of anxiety, stress and idleness on students (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). The World Bank actively worked with ministries of education in dozens of countries across the globe (including Nigeria) in support of their efforts to utilize educational technologies (EdTech) of all sorts to provide distance learning/distance education opportunities for students while schools remain closed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (The World Bank, 2020). Lassoued et al. (2020) termed technology as an important element in distance education in the time of crisis. Conversely, changes in teaching and learning systems due to pandemic force schools all over the world to implement either of the following: distance education or online learning, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, remote emergency learning and massive open online courses (Rasmitadila et al., 2020 and Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). This mandated Nigeria to join the rest of the world in acclimating distance education as an alternative, by engaging the use of Radio, TV and other few online platforms.

Distance education has a long history been first implemented as correspondence education and today transforms to involve online education (Florida National University, 2019). According to Simonson (2012) distance education is a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Lassoued et al. (2020) pointed out that distance education allow students to learn according to what their time allows and in the place that they choose without direct contact with the teacher. The development in radio and television technology makes distance education programmes more accessible to large number of audience (Hebebeci et al., 2020). This brings about the introduction of educational radio programmes, which according to Berman (2008) is the term given to the medium's use in formal learning systems, whether primary, secondary or higher education. However, developed countries used other forms of distance learning tools like: google meet, zoom, WeChat, QQ, Ding Talk and several other platforms. This method of learning has been and is ongoing to take various features depending on the capability of the country and technological development to apply information technology (IT) in education (Feruzi & Li, 2020). Nigeria and other African countries used radio and television even before Covid-19 pandemic but today their uses are broader due to the pandemic. Most of the countries encompassed the use of TV and radio in teaching and learning throughout the pandemic because they are available and cheaper to provide. In another development, Berman (2008) emphasized that educational radio broadcasting is an important tool in distance education suitable for different educational levels. Nigeria is classified as a lower-middle income economy country, hence almost all households have access to radio and most households have non-smartphone cell phones (Haßler et al., 2020). In line of the above reasons we choose to use

educational radio programme as a tool for distance education in this study, because it is widely used among the people in Nigeria.

Educational radio is one of the broadcast media that has been identified as an alternative to classroom teaching (Gowon, 2009; UNESCO, 2020b; TTF, 2020). In the same vein, Mohammed et al. (2020) reported that the use of educational radio is not limited to substitute to classroom teaching but also to emergency remote teaching in violence ripped environments. Also, UNESCO (2020b) pointed out that in some countries, radio programmes are perceived to provide intergenerational learning, including issues such as health and psychosocial well-being. These are all vital in supporting populations affected by the threat of Covid-19 and other emergencies. With this, we can say educational radio can also be used in the areas where schools are closed down due to conflict or violence, example north-east Nigeria. Currently, more than 800 digital pedagogical resources are being shared using social media as well as via traditional media coverage such as radio and television across Africa (Haßler et al., 2020). Even though radio is a flaccid media, but Burns (2020) suggested that it enjoyed worldwide ownership, huge reach, easy in usage, and offered learning via a centralized location.

More than a few studies Basilaia and Kvaavadze (2020), Lassoued et al. (2020), Rasmitadila et al. (2020), Mohammed et al. (2020), Hebebcı et al. (2020), Feruzi and Li (2020), Alea et al., (2020) and Nel and Marais (2020) reported that during distance education/learning imposed due to Covid-19 pandemic, stakeholders faced many obstacles, especially students, teachers and schools that suddenly had to shift to distance or alternative teaching and learning approach. These necessitate the researchers to explore students experience on distance education in the context of Bauchi state Nigeria. In support of this, Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) proposed that incessant investigation of students' viewpoints of distance education is highly needed to improve the design of the courses, optimize the student learning experience and to add to the body of knowledge in the field.

Objective

This study aims to explore the students' experience on educational radio programme during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bauchi state. This was researched through the identification of students' view on educational radio programme and obstacles faced by the students during the programme.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs Phenomenological research. A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved with the issue that is being researched (Groenewald, 2004). Creswell (2014) described phenomenological research as a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. He further elaborated that it is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study.

The epistemology assumption refers to the philosophical theory of knowledge i.e. nature of knowledge (Merriam, 2014). Based on this study, the epistemological assumption is centered on what is considered as knowledge and specifically gaining an understanding of what a researcher can know and what one wants to know. The nature of this study involves acquiring knowledge from the understanding and experiences of participants involved in the study, hence define the epistemological assumption of the present study. That is to say to achieve the objective of this study; a face-to-face interview is used to acquire knowledge from the participants' understanding and experiences. Also, this study is anchored to Social constructionism theory. As defined by Berger and Luckmann (1966), suggests that reality is constantly in flux as it is negotiated and renegotiated through our experiences with social worlds. They argued that all of our understandings and knowledge are socially constructed. The idea is that we create our own reality through social interactions, relationships, and experiences (Pryce et al., 2014).

Data Collection Tool

Shorter case study interview (Yin, 2014) was used to collect data because of limited time. The interview, constructed based on Jacobs and Furgerson (2012) protocol was conducted via cellphone calls to the participants. This was done because of movement restrictions and we wanted to exercise social distancing as mandated by Federal Ministry of Health. The phone calls were all recorded independently and saved for further action.

Participants

The sample of this research was determined by using snowball and purposive sampling method. We purposely selected SSII and SSIII students because SSII students were about to face their mock examination which could prepare them for SSIII, while SSIII students were preparing for their senior secondary school certificate examination (SSCE). Hence, we felt these set of students were in a better position to pay attention to distance learning programme broadcasted via radio. Snowball sampling was used because we found it suitable for tracing the students that follow the distance learning over the radio and can communicate fluently. The sample size of the study consisted of 10 senior secondary school students from public secondary schools in Bauchi state. Because Creswell (1998) and Boyd (2001) suggested that 10 participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation in a phenomenological study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Caulfield (2020) pointed out that thematic analysis is a good approach to research where researcher is trying to find out something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from a set of qualitative data. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was used in this study which involves allowing the data to determine the themes. The followings steps were followed: familiarization; getting exhaustive overview of all the data. Coding; highlighting sentences and phrases from the data and coming up with shorthand labels called 'codes'. Generating themes; looking over the codes and identifying pattern so we came up with themes. Reviewing themes and naming of themes; we review themes in order to make sure that they are true representation of our data. This is done by comparing each theme against the data. Finally, we defined and named the themes; defining themes involved framing exactly what we mean by each theme and figuring out how it helps us understand the data while naming the themes involved coming up with a brief and easily comprehensible name for each theme (Skordis-Worrall et al, 2015). The data were displayed using matrices (tables) because according to Verdinelli and Scagnoli (2013) matrices are the most adaptable and practical of all the types of data displays, and it was used to represent different aspects of a qualitative study.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the data was determined using member checking, which is a process in which the researchers ask one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012) or to clarify that their contributions were exactly reflected in previous data (Rasmitadila et al 2020). Peer review/examination (Krefting, 1991 and Baxter & Jack, 2008) was used in order to maximize the reliability, add dependency and to cross-check the integrity of the data and findings. This was done by giving out raw data and the analyzed data to experts in the field of qualitative research from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi and made modifications and or inputs where necessary. Also, the researchers discussed the research process and findings with neutral colleagues who have experience with qualitative methods where insights were discussed and problems were presented as a form of interrogation.

Ethical Issues

Before the interview, students were told about the reason for the interview and were reassured that their choice to participate (or not) in the study, as well as any contributions made during the interview, would have no bearing on their person. They were asked if they agreed to participate and were reassured that they could withdraw at any time during the interview and everything would be kept confidentially. Accordingly, male students were coded as MS1, MS2, MS3, and female students were coded as FS1, FS2, and FS3. All the ten students agreed to voluntarily participate in the study and did so throughout.

FINDINGS

Students' View on Educational Radio Programme

The students expressed variety of views regarding their experience of educational radio programme during the pandemic. From thematic analysis, two sub-themes were identified; positive and negative views. The analysis resulted in five codes, four from negative (limited time, learning style, lack of feedback from teacher and method of teaching) and one from positive (helpful) views. (See Table 1 for data display).

According to the students, there was limited time for the educational radio programme. They expressed the view that there were some concepts that need longer time for the students to understand. The students further suggested that the time for the programme need to be increased. Student MS1 stated his view as:

“I wish I can talk to those that organize the programme to at least add more time and to reschedule it say twice or three times a day for us to capture some of the things very well....”

The students described differences in learning styles as another view with regard to the educational radio programme. Some students are fast learners and some are slow learners, this brings disparity in terms learning the content delivered in the programme. The following quotation from student FS4 captures this sentiment,

“I learned things in a manner when teacher keeps repeating a concept or an idea. I love face-to-face teaching and to see things are written to me clearly on a blackboard, I don't know why but I even prefer it with jotting main points in my notebook.”

The students also describe a view on absence of immediate feedback from the teacher or their peers as this would enhance the learning. They pointed out that whenever there are questions and feedback between the learners and the teacher or sharing ideas with the peers, the teaching and learning become more interesting. The following is a quotation from student MS5:

“I am a question type of student that is why my classmates tag me as ‘Questioner’...one of the major things that have been a burden to me with regard to this radio programme is that: I cannot ask question and get my answer instantly, and this could help me understand what is being taught by the teacher.”

Method of teaching was another view described by the students. They felt that the way teacher in the educational radio programme was delivering the lesson should be far different from mode of delivery in normal classroom setting. The following student (MS2) made this statement: “The teacher used to ask unnecessary questions and I don't know how he is going to be answered...sometimes the teacher reads too fast which become difficult for me to catch up....”

Even though significant numbers of the students have negative view on educational radio programme but student FS5 made this statement: "I consider the programme important, it is better than doing nothing; because we are no more going to school. I usually listen to the programme when I don't have other things to do."

Table 1. Sub-themes and Codes Related to Students' View Theme

Sub-Themes	Codes	Example Quotations
Negative View	limited time	FS3: "...in most of the cases I realized that the programme ends at the moment I started enjoying it."
	learning style	FS1: "em...in my own case the teaching is going on very well...sometimes I got missed during the programme and what baffles me is that the teacher is not always repeating things he said."
	Absence of immediate feedback	MS5: "...I always want to be in the midst of my classmates because we interact and discuss about new topics that seems difficult, we ask questions, we solve exercises, quizzes and so on."
	method of teaching	MS2: "The teacher used to ask unnecessary questions and I don't know how he is going to be answered...sometimes the teacher reads too fast which become difficult for me to catch up..."
Positive View	Helpful	FS2: "The only thing I can say with regard to this radio programme is that is better than none...."

Obstacles Faced by Students During the Educational Radio Programme

Table 2 displays data that shows the problems experienced by the students on educational radio programme during the pandemic as analyzed. There was one sub-theme and four codes, which include: technical, pedagogical, environment and personal. This indicated that some of the obstacles faced by the students are related to the change in learning environment and adaptation. In this regard student FS1 stated that she faced technical problem: "There was a time I intended to listen to the programme but the radio station was not airing it. It was later they tender their apology and said it happened due to unpredicted problem." Student MS2 talked about pedagogical problem: "Some topics are taught quickly and I have difficulty in understanding when things are taught in that manner...." Another student FS4 narrated how she faced an obstacle with regard to environment as: "Most of the time I want to listen to the programme my baby younger sister disturbs me and even distracted me from the content of the programs." There is a student that expressed his problem as; not being in school: MS1: "...I just want to be in school, I miss it."

Table 2. Sub-themes and Codes Related to Obstacles encountered during the educational radio programme.

Sub-theme	Codes	Example Quotations
Problems Encountered	Technical	FS3: "There are issues of voice clarity and signal interruptions in the radio station, even though this usually happed at the beginning of the programme ."
	Pedagogical	MS3: "explanations on some concepts or ideas are done hap hazardly you see the way I see it is that the teacher is just reading the teaching material."
	Environmental	FS2: "...at home, there are always house chores, sometime the programme clash with one of these chores which can distract my attention."
	Away from school	MS5: "School environment is something that is encouraging me to be more engaged focused in my studies."

DISCUSSION

The result from this study identified several positive and negative features of distance education which are parallel to those identified in prior studies, example; Akgün et al. (2013), Alexander et al. (2012), Smidt et al. (2014), Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015), Durak and Ataizi (2016), Yurdakal (2019), Hebeci et al. (2020), Lassoued et al. (2020), and Sekkal (2020).

The students' negative views with regard to distance education surpassed the positive views. The students lamented of limited time during the educational radio programme, this is in line with the study conducted by Song et al. (2004) and Smidt et al. (2014) who on their separate studies found that time limitations was one of the negative opinions of distance education students. The second negative view according to the students was disparity in learning styles. The students stated that they learn at different learning paces due to individual differences. This finding is in consonance with that of Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) who explored the perceptions and experiences of a group of students enrolled in an online course in Economic Evaluation and found out that different learning style among the students was one of the factors affecting their learning in distance education.

Absence of immediate feedback was one of the negative view pin pointed by the students in this study. The students prefer to have a kind of interactive class via the radio instead of one way programme; hence they refer the programme as dull. This finding agreed with that of Hannay and Newvine (2006), Osei (2010), Smidt et al. (2014) and Yurdakal (2019) who in separate studies reported lack of feedback or interaction between student and teacher as a negative opinion on distance education. The last negative view from this study was problem with regard to method of teaching. The students reported that they have issue with the teachers because of their methods of teaching. This finding coincides with that of Song et al. (2004), Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) and Hebeci et al. (2020). However, some of the students pointed out positive view with regard to the educational radio. The positive view that distance education been helpful was reported by the students which is in line with the studies conducted separately by Akgün et al. (2013) Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) and Hebeci et al. (2020) and Sekkal (2020).

Regarding the obstacles faced by the students on distance education during the pandemic, four themes emerged. One, it was reported by the students that there were technical problems that hindered the delivery of the educational radio programme. This finding is in line with that of Alexander et al. (2012) and Durak and Ataizi (2016) their results showed that technical problem is one of the major problems in delivering distance education. Sekkal (2020) conducted a study on attitudes and challenges of students on educational radio broadcast. Her result with regard to problems faced, indicated that out of four highlighted problems 34% of the students backed technical problem while time of airing was 15.9%, insignificance lesson 3.3% and availability of radio lesson 29%. Two, in a study conducted by Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) they found that in distance education, students preferred the teachers to teach slowly and clearly for them to understand a given concept. Their finding is similar to that of this study where the students made similar statements regarding the way distance education teachers were teaching via educational radio programmes. The students need the teaching to be slowly, clearly, use of examples to support an explanation and not just reading the materials.

Three, environment was found to be one of the obstacles that hindered the students learning during the educational radio programme. The students reported that home is constituted of so many distractions that hindered their learning processes during the pandemic. This finding contradicts that of Durak and Ataizi (2016) who investigated the views of learners experienced in the distance learning. Their finding indicated that students wish to get away from the disturbing effects of the traditional classroom environment and thinking that the course can be learned better in the comfort of their homes. Four, Hebeci et al. (2020) conducted a case study to investigate views of students and teachers on distance education practices during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in Turkey. They found that among the problems raised by students are the absence of study environment and distance from the school environment. Their finding coincides with that of this research where the students reported that one of the obstacles they encountered with distance education was longing for school.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results obtained from this research, students' views on distance education during Covid-19 pandemic in Bauchi state, Nigeria were examined. In this context, the students' views with regard to educational radio programme were explored. The essence was to find out where the distance education programme did well and where the programme had flaw(s). This could give reasonable opportunity for the stakeholders responsible/involved to remedy the flaw(s) and to add substance to the kind of programme in future. Bearing in mind that distance education has an important place in education especially at this time of social distancing, it is assumed that these research results will shed light on the studies to be conducted in related areas at all levels of education and at different locations in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

Finally, it is recommended that: distance education should henceforth be designed in conformity with its principles, device a means of interaction between learners, make the programme synchronous instead of asynchronous or both, provision of adequate guidance and timely feedback; and making sure that the programme time is sufficient and convenient to the learners.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

However, there are some limitations that were encountered during this research that could hinder generalization of the findings. Limited time, few samples and shorter case interview are parts of the limitations. It is expected that a research of this kind should be carried out in other states of Nigeria with in-depth interview or with mixed method in order to explore more on the phenomenon. Another research that could include teachers, parents and other stake holders should also be conducted in the area of distance education during pandemic.

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