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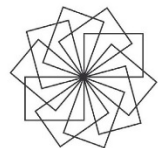
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International Studies in Educational Administration (ISEA)

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International Studies in Educational Administration (ISEA) aims to enhance the effectiveness of educational leadership, management and administration to support intellectual, personal and social learning in schools, colleges and universities and related educational, social and economic development in a range of national contexts. It publishes research- and scholarship-based papers within the broad field of educational leadership, management, and administration including its connections with educational/ social policy, and professional practice. It focuses on the Commonwealth and beyond. It is strongly international in that, while it may publish empirical research or scholarship undertaken in specific national or regional contexts, papers consider issues and themes of interest that transcend single national settings. Papers offer new facts or ideas to academics, policy-makers and practitioners in education in varied national contexts ranging from advanced economies to the least economically developed countries. The journal aims to provide a balance between papers that present theoretical, applied or comparative research, and between papers from different methodological contexts, different scales of analysis, and different access to research resources. Editorial Correspondence and Books for Review should be sent to the Editors. Business Correspondence should be sent to the President or the CEO. ISEA adopts review procedures common to highly regarded international academic journals. Each paper is reviewed by the editors to judge suitability for the journal, and if accepted then undergoes a double-blind review process involving two international reviewers.

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Editorial Note

Worldwide Educational Responses to the Pandemic: Issue Two of Four

In these challenging times the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) is exploring ways to help support the education community to continue to do their important work. As one of the oldest journals in the educational leadership field, the academic journal of CCEAM, *International Studies in Educational Administration* is well placed to make an important contribution and so four issues of the journal have been devoted to focusing on responses to the coronavirus pandemic that is currently gripping our world.

As the editor, I invited short articles that either describe country or more local responses to education during the pandemic, or short articles that provide educators with knowledge to help them lead their educational organisations during this time. From more than 150 submissions, 60 papers were accepted for publication. The four issues will be published between July and September, 2020. Most of the papers are not empirical research papers, but rather informed opinion pieces documenting personal observations of local educational responses to the pandemic crisis, or about key leadership and management ideas that will help educators lead through the crisis and after.

Across the 60 papers there are 27 countries represented, including: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China (mainland and Hong Kong), Cyprus, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Vietnam. There are papers also focusing on the broader contexts of Africa, Arab countries, Asia, and the wider world. Conceptual papers include foci on leadership ideas to do with adaption, crisis and future education. The papers were not limited to any education sector and so there are papers focusing on pre-school, school, post-school, tertiary, and other education providers.

In this second issue there are again 15 papers. The issue begins with two papers related to practitioner views. The first, from O'Connell and Clarke, describes O'Connell's experience and reflection of leading a school through the pandemic crisis. It not only provides personal reflections, but also a sense of what will change as a result of this experience and sense of optimism. The second, by Brelsford and colleagues, is from a group of Texan elementary and secondary teachers doing post-graduate study who reflected on their experiences of how administrators (principals and superintendents) responded to the pandemic. The 10 teachers and

their professor provide a deeply connected account of their experiences, insights about what worked and didn't work and suggestions for how schools can be better prepared for future crises. The issue then focuses on several country reports. Nigeria is the first focus. Oyeniran and Oyeniran, and Igbokwe, Okeke-James, Anyanwu and Eli-Chukwu report from different perspectives on what has happened in Nigerian education and the significant challenges that have arisen. Both highlight equity and quality issues. From Sweden and reporting on perceptions of principals involved in university study, Ahlström, Leo, Norqvist and Isling describe challenges that principals have faced in supporting their school communities and themselves, and highlight the importance of trust, stability and equity issues. Kafa and Pashiardis then describe responses in Cyprus. Whilst distance/online education will become an enduring feature of education on Cyprus, they argue for a greater emphasis on local context and principal autonomy to best meet the needs of communities. Two papers from Singapore follow. Both Ho and Tay, and Hung, Huang and Tan suggest that leadership needs to be contextually responsive and both suggest an ecological leadership perspective is useful both to understand the measured and successful responses that have occurred and for future leadership work. The papers highlight the important role of system leadership in generating and implementing system initiatives and the importance of principal and teacher leadership to provide local responses. Sato provides a Japanese perspective that, somewhat surprisingly, highlights the lack of readiness for remote learning that has hampered the provision of education in Japan during school closure. The next two papers focus on Canada. Hauseman, Darazsi and Kent describe the impact on school principals in Manitoba, highlighting work intensification due to job demands and role expansions, and the possibilities for reform following lessons learnt during the crisis. From an Ontario perspective, Sider describes efforts to provide for students with special education needs; the reader may recall that there was also a paper from Fournier, Scott and Scott in the first special issue exploring this area. Sider's paper brings to the fore issues with inclusion and makes suggestions how learnings through this crisis period might help provide better future support for students with special needs. Talesra explores the complexity of the Indian school closure highlighting effectiveness and equitability issues in relation to learning, as well as innovative solutions. Suggestions for future education are provided in relation to global citizenship, educator roles, student life skills and learning technology use. The issue concludes with two more papers describing the school experiences in Nigeria and a paper from New Zealand focused at the university level. Akinwumi and Itobore describe the effects, responses and implication of school closure in Nigeria, particularly focusing on equity of access to learning, teacher-student relationships, suitability of pedagogy and sustainability of the strategies deployed. Adekunle, Adeyanju and Oyegoke also explored responses in Nigeria to the lockdown, but did so from the perspective of the large number of private secondary schools. They noted how financial constraints and poor infrastructure (electricity supply and technology resources and skills) hampered efforts. In the final paper, and from a country that has so far been able to eliminate the virus, Robertson reports on her work in transitioning a large first-year university subject to asynchronous delivery. Using

the learnings from the New Zealand government approach to the pandemic, Robertson's account illustrates what can be achieved with a 'go hard and early', can do it approach.

Two more issues will be produced on education responses during the pandemic and I encourage you to read these issues also. All the special issues will be provided freely to anyone and can be accessed at www.cceam.net

David Gurr

Editor of International Studies in Educational Administration

July 27, 2020

A School in the Grip of COVID-19: Musings From the Principal's Office

Alec O'Connell and Simon Clarke

***Abstract:** This exposition is premised on the understanding that leaders' dominant style arises from their existential dispositions. It is also informed by the understanding that benefits can be derived from leaders enriching their experience by being aware of what they are doing and what they are learning from it. This 'opinion piece' comprises one principal's reflexive commentary on challenges presented to his school community by the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, strategies adopted to deal with them, and his learnings about enacting school leadership.*

Keywords: School leadership, COVID-19, crisis, challenges

Introduction

This paper is premised on two understandings regarding leadership. First, leaders' dominant style arise from 'feelings, values, beliefs and experiences' (Loader 2010: 195). Secondly, leadership needs to be seen as continuously presenting opportunities for learning to develop adaptive capabilities necessary for successful leadership (Robertson 2011). This exposition comprises one school principal's musings on leading his school during extraordinarily challenging circumstances presented by the COVID-19 virus. It sets the scene with a brief description of the school's context. This is followed by the reflexive commentary on the issues and influences he faced in performing his day-to-day work as the crisis created by the virus unfolded; strategies he adopted to deal with resulting complexities in his work and why he did so; and his approaches to school leadership that he deems most effective in tackling the situation.

College Context

Scotch College caters for over 1,450 students drawn from across metropolitan, regional, interstate and overseas constituencies and is considered a leading independent day and boarding school in Western Australia. It comprises a Junior School (PK-5), a Middle School (Years 6-8) and a Senior School (Years 9-12). There are also three residential wings and an

outdoor education campus located two hours from Perth. Since opening in 1897, at least 15,000 students have graduated and become part of the Old Scotch Collegians' (OSC) community for life.

Seven headmasters in 123 years of operating would hardly suggest an aptitude for dealing with a rapidly changing landscape. Notwithstanding its history and tradition, however, the college has a strong reputation for leading, especially regarding organisational structures, curriculum offerings and facility design, all geared towards increasing international impact in education and service learning. As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World school, and a member of the Round Square network of schools, Scotch is very much a college maintaining strong local roots while engendering an international outreach.

COVID-19 – Unplanned Agility

This year commenced without much fanfare apart from an avid anticipation of the opening of a 'state of the art' building for our School of Mathematics and Commerce. Consolidating on work commenced in 2019, the focus for 2020 was to continue developing our strategic planning process. That usually involves lock step planning through consultation, setting milestones, evaluation, and creating an agreed path composed of major phases to guide a three-to-five year journey.

Strategic plans often seek perfection at the point of release. In reality, most strategic plans should be agile enough to react to a changing environment, but not so fluid that one is left meandering through a swamp of disparate ideas. The word 'agile' took on a completely new meaning for us with the advent of 'COVID-19'. While previously a day often felt like a year because of the pace and volume of events, now an hour can feel like a year; 'nothing clarifies our priorities like a crisis, and nothing keeps the brain active like an encounter with the unexpected' (Mackay 2018: 10). Thus, dealing with COVID-19-driven disruption has been challenging and uniting. I also believe there is much water yet to flow under its bridge.

'Never let a crisis go to waste', Winston Churchill is purported to have said at the 1945 Yalta Conference regarding the alliance between himself, Stalin and Roosevelt when seeking to establish the United Nations. On the surface, that comment may seem mercenary, especially when appropriated by the corporate sector. Nevertheless, some innovative responses I witnessed owing to the COVID-19 crisis, and particularly in education, indicate those prophetic words may continue to be poignant.

A clear message from the initial period of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) (Johansen 2012) is that while schools have always fulfilled multiple functions in our community, COVID-19 has highlighted their crucial importance. For example, it has reinforced that schools are significant places of learning, worship, community service, stability, reliability, and socialisation. In relation to all of these, and considering a recent burgeoning of online classes, we at Scotch, along with society more broadly, have concluded that a totally online teaching environment is far from ideal, especially after recognising anew

the value of face-to-face interaction in the school community. There has also been a realisation that teaching is not quite as simple as some may have believed. As Slavin (2020: para. 6) has commented, 'there is a reason that homeschooling is rare'. Furthermore, anecdotal feedback from within our own community would suggest that our current teaching and learning environment prompted by the CODIV-19 virus is not that appealing in the eyes of many parents.

While our Scotch College Online Teaching (SCOT) programme was successful in helping us traverse a three week period being off-site, we remain mindful of Parsons' (2020: para. 7) position that:

Distance learning requires us to be humans in an inhuman situation. We can't simply provide lessons and assessments; we have to bridge this digital gap and carry some sense of humour and goodwill and community through the cold wiring. If we've succeeded in even a modicum of that task, we owe that to the success in the months prior when we created something special. A school family. A community that could rely on itself, that could flourish even in isolation.

Hence, based on the fundamental belief that one's community needs to trust leadership, particularly during crises, we kept community considerations at the centre of all decision making. In other words, the school community should feel informed, confident and reassured. These dispositions tend to result from conveying a sense of hope, coupled with unambiguous decision making in dealing with the challenges that eventuate.

While society often rewards success based on public opinion, true leadership has never been about that. Indeed, leading through the COVID-19 crisis has shown how the dichotomy of leading *vis a vis* being popular has played out in political and school arenas. Under the pretext of a significantly improving health and safety environment, schools were corralled into returning to full operation through a 'soft opening'. At the same time, some school leaders made decisions based more on an increasing buildup of parental pressure than on reliable data. In other words, they fell into a trap of doing what others were doing, regardless of whether that aligned with their contextual circumstances. More disconcerting and sometimes alarming is that some of the rapid changes appeared to be focused on headline grabbing and were somewhat naively couched as 'leading by conviction' while often appearing more like being first to 'jump at shadows'. Indeed, one never thought that decision making in a crisis would be determined by a school's 'Marketing 101' strategy.

In leading the college community through the COVID-19 period then, we stuck to a fundamental tenet, namely, that we should always lead authentically, even if on occasions internal and external tensions arose. Not being a time for populist decision making nor community appeasement, we avoided making decisions based on unfounded assumptions, we proceeded with caution (though not inertia), and most of all, we never became complacent.

Leading Through a Crisis

As Martin Luther King (1963: 26) commented, ‘the ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy’. While he was referring to an individual, the same principle may be applied to our college as it encountered the realities of COVID-19 and prompted the following intertwined approaches to leadership:

Stay calm – During a crisis, no one wants to sense that leaders are panicking. They should separate themselves from the emotions of the day-to-day as events unfold, an observation that has profound implications for the exercise of emotional intelligence in leadership enactment.

Identify and solve the pressing problems – Under ‘normal’ circumstances, one tends to spend time seeking to perfect a decision. In periods of crisis, there is no such luxury. When on the scale of COVID-19 there is also no shortage of people keen to advise. Thus, it is crucial to deal with facts rather than opinion when defining and addressing the pressing problems.

Seek advice – In ‘normal’ times seeking advice is sensible. During a crisis, it is essential as unintended consequences of decisions made are likely to have an immediate impact. Nevertheless, advice by consensus is not always the best option. Within the education sector there appeared to be occasions when schools were swayed by decisions made by others while ignoring specific contexts. In highly charged emotional environments where some parents or members of the wider community are seeking decisions most amenable to their particular situation, the leader requires courage to make judgements that may appear contrary to the populist view of the circumstances.

Think strategically – Entanglement in details and complexities is unhelpful in potentially catastrophic times. In conventional circumstances, developing strategy entails seeking an impeccable path. In a period of crisis, however, rapid decisions are required about things that truly matter. Perfect decision making, therefore, is neither realistic nor desirable. Rather, decisive and ‘point of time’ decisions are what count.

Be authentic – A crisis is no time for ‘grandstanding’ or engaging in narcissistic leadership. The school’s constituents do not want to be second-guessing what a leader is doing. Indeed, the role of the leader should be to reduce obscurity and increase assuredness among all. It is also important not to be afraid of revealing one’s vulnerability. In crises, one’s demonstration of humanity counts for much in the eyes of those being led.

Be open – To hide bad news or seek to impose an overly positive veneer on the situation would be a mistake. Openness requires that one speaks up early and truthfully, especially regarding a situation such as COVID-19 in which ‘intelligence’ is changing rapidly and staff are exposed to abundant information. Thus, it is critical to enable staff to express feelings and offer a forum for sharing their concerns and trepidation. Providing psychological safety in encounters with multiple changes and challenges is as important as providing physical safety.

Act decisively – The scale of message, speed of decisions and judicious use of language are crucial considerations during crises. The efficacy of decisions in such circumstances directly affects the confidence people have in leadership and the way in which current and future decisions are received.

Communicate clearly – Communication is paramount. One can never communicate too much. If there is too little there is a danger that rumour and innuendo will distort genuine information. It is imperative, therefore, to keep everyone informed from the outset and to be candid about what is known and not known. It is also desirable to explain on what grounds a particular decision has been made. Furthermore, all media available should be used to communicate given that preferences can vary.

Strengthen the existing community – A vital role performed by leaders during crises is helping those around them feel safe through strengthening their respective communities. During crises people tend to rely on the familiar and look to their community for support. In COVID-19-type circumstances it is imperative that students, parents, and staff be confident that their daily working environment is safe, reliable and predictable. The situation can be enhanced by ensuring clarity, timeliness, openness and honesty when communicating across the school community. Aligning words and actions, so integral to authentic leadership, can equally cultivate resoluteness within a school community that is buttressed by a sense of security and togetherness as it encounters perplexing circumstances.

Demonstrate empathy – Emotional intelligence is essential for empathising, especially in challenging and unpredictable times. After all, staff and students have families and lives beyond the school that are most important to them. Thus, one should lead with empathy to give assurance that overall community welfare is paramount in decision making. Indeed, the exercise of emotional intelligence when dealing with crises can nurture empathy while also locating dignity at the core of interactions.

Envisage the long-term – Leading through a crisis requires taking the long-term view. Thus, leaders need to envisage what comes next week, next month, and even next year to prepare the organisation for changes ahead.

What Did We Learn?

It seems the ramifications of our COVID-19 management will last well beyond the end of this crisis. Our employees, families and community are watching closely to see how we deal with this period of enormous uncertainty and how we finally emerge from it. One thing that has not changed is the need to stay focused on what really matters to our college: our core values of 'integrity', 'service', and 'stewardship'. It is when the 'chips are down' that one's foundational values become a bedrock from which to operate, make decisions and, ultimately, to emerge stronger. Inevitably, there will be much to contend with once we return to the world we knew pre-COVID-19, but our core values will continue to guide our thinking and decision making.

Dealing with the COVID misfortune has prompted considerable reflection, especially during our time of self-isolation. Indeed, it may be argued that this period of crisis and the opportunities for solitude that have been afforded could prove to be an overdue catalyst for meaningful education reform. There is a real prospect for us to emerge from COVID-19 with a different view on society, in particular on the purpose of schools and the formal process of education. Put bluntly, our current model of schooling was shaped by an industrial revolution that occurred around 250 years ago. Things have clearly moved on since this model of schooling was conceptualised. Hence, the role of schools conceived as genuine learning organisations becomes more pressing as we progress towards a post-COVID-19 environment. COVID-19 may also have provided a reason to revisit some of Ivan Illich's thinking espoused in his classic book 'Deschooling Society'. As he commented (Illich 1972: 113), 'school is the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is'. From this perspective, there may now be scope for refocusing schooling away from its traditional academic orientation, towards creating more learning opportunities engendering such skills and attributes as critical thinking, communication, self-management, research and social analysis, which may contribute to forging a successful and cohesive future society.

In addressing our current challenges and those yet to eventuate as we work through COVID-19 and its aftermath, the answers may well be found outside our usual armoury of strategic solutions or thought processes within schools. Indeed, Mackay (2018: 16) has highlighted that, 'given our paradoxical blend of dissatisfaction and complacency, it may require even more serious instability, perhaps amounting to chaos, to convince us to look for more imaginative solutions to the problems that beset us'. For this purpose, leaders need to be resilient. One way this can be achieved is by them maintaining their own routines. This may well include some 'down time' for reflecting on the process of dealing with the crisis, not just creating a context of doing and reacting. In my case, it meant getting to the same beach for 10-30 minutes every day before sunset. This inescapable part of my routine acted as a daily 'circuit breaker' to the mayhem that had ensued during many days in shutdown. On a more selfish level, perhaps, it provided 'me' time to do something personal, even if only for a short period. Such a small adaption to my normal routine provided the chance to 'code switch' from the turbulence of the school environment to a calmer physical and mental space, which offered recharge and realignment. In times of crisis, therefore, leadership requires us to challenge the now, and find answers that we do not even know are out there. In this regard, the following comment attributed to Einstein is most apposite, 'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.'¹

¹ Although this quote has been attributed to Einstein, there is no original source.

Coda

Einstein's observation leads back to the two understandings of leadership alluded to at the beginning of this commentary, namely, the importance of personal feelings, values, beliefs and experiences in determining leadership style, and the perception that leadership continuously presents opportunities for learning so that adaptive capabilities are acquired for enacting successful leadership through that practice. As we hope it has been demonstrated in the musings above, these two observations regarding leadership are considerably accentuated when intractable challenges are encountered such as those associated with the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Indeed, the tumultuous conditions that the COVID-19 environment has unleashed in school communities, and the approaches to leadership that these circumstances tend to require, lend credence to this short excerpt from the timeless verse of T.S. Eliot with which we conclude our deliberations in an appropriately cryptic fashion:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

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Keeping the Bus Moving While Maintaining Social Distance in a COVID-19 World

Stephanie Narvaez Brelsford, Erica E. Camarillo, Amanda Santana Garcia, Gloria Garcia, Valerie Reyes Lopez, Celeste Paredes Montoya, Ralph Mora III, Zuleica Olvera, Andrea Ramirez, Fred Wicker and Betty Merchant

Abstract: *In a post-graduate class, 33 American elementary and secondary teachers from five different school districts in southwest Texas provided their personal reflections on how their administrators responded to the coronavirus pandemic from March to May, 2020. Ten of the teachers, supervised by their professor, analysed these responses. The paper describes the administrative actions in each category that teachers thought were effective, as well as those that were not, across three broad categories: communication, accountability, and interpersonal relationships. Four recommendations for improving administrators' effectiveness in unexpected crises are provided.*

Keywords: Principals, education administrators, crisis leadership, communication, accountability, interpersonal relationships

Introduction

The material for this paper came from reflections that were written by 33 American elementary and secondary teachers from five different school districts in southwest Texas. They were written in response to a post-graduate class assignment asking them to describe the ways in which their administrators responded to the coronavirus pandemic from March to May, 2020. The co-authors of this paper are 10 of the teachers, and their professor, who analysed the reflections and organised them into three broad categories: communication, accountability, and interpersonal relationships. The paper that follows describes the administrative actions in each category that teachers thought were effective, as well as those that were not, and concludes with the authors' recommendations for improving administrators' effectiveness in unexpected crises.

Communication

Teachers described effective communication as: proactive, frequent, collaborative, flexible, accurate and transparent. In contrast, they characterised ineffective communication as: reactive, delayed, contradictory, and insensitive to teachers and parents.

What Worked

Effective campus leaders set weekly times for virtual meetings on Zoom or Google Meets for individual departments as well as the entire school faculty, which provided a space for principals to share with teachers the information they received from their superintendent. The principals displayed considerable sensitivity in gauging the amount of information to provide to their teachers, so as not to overwhelm them. The weekly department meetings provided an opportunity for additional, in-depth conversations between the principal and the teachers as well as an occasion for teachers to ask clarifying or content-specific questions. These weekly check-ins with administrators and teachers were critical in maintaining a sense of cohesiveness, and as the weeks went by in self quarantine, they became an essential source of social interaction and reflection.

With the rapid development of information, principals moved beyond email to multiple modes of communications to maintain accessibility to their staff and community. Although previous school policies had discouraged the use of social media, COVID-19 made the use of social media platforms a necessity for reaching wider audiences. The use of social media allowed parents to view administrators and teachers in a less formal manner. For example, one superintendent connected directly with the community via a video in which he admitted: 'We are learning as we go', thereby sending the message that although much of what was happening was trial and error, success was on the way.

Principals, whose efforts had been largely focused on redirecting negative student behaviour or providing instructional leadership for teachers, redirected their efforts to collaborative problem-solving with teachers to meet the needs of students and their families. They established clear guidelines for school-to-home communication, including who would be responsible for calling parents and how often, with the understanding that these calls were to focus on student wellness rather than academics. Principals who established these clear expectations for teacher-parent communication were able to maintain a positive relationship with families in their community while also significantly lowering teachers' stress levels about staying in touch with parents. The principal of one school, for example, known for his emphasis on competitive academics, shifted his focus to a concern for the health and wellbeing of the school's students and families, as illustrated in his reminder to teachers: 'Many of [our students] are taking care of younger siblings and worrying about where their next meal is coming from. Many of our students' parents have lost their jobs and are trying to make ends meet.'

What Didn't Work

It became clear that some districts were seriously unprepared to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, having based their current plans on past events, rather than anticipating future possibilities and the need for a proactive disaster plan. The result was a 'plan' that was reactive rather than proactive. Since no recent event in history had resulted in such widespread school closure, district administrators saw no discernible need to revise their existing plan. The complete lack of preparedness resulted in the creation of a 'plan' that was solely reactive, and characterised by knee-jerk reactions to complaints that were brought to the district's attention by parents or community members.

Administrators in these districts initially struggled with a breakdown of communication that initially occurred on multiple levels, all the way from the district superintendent to students and parents. When information was finally disseminated from the district and began to make its way down to teachers and parents, it occurred in an inefficient manner, so teachers and parents ended up turning to social media as their primary source of information for issues that affected them. Oftentimes, official statements from the district to teachers arrived a week or more after the teachers had already informed themselves through alternate modes of communication. Adding to the delay of information from district administrators and the chaos that resulted from this, was the sheer quantity of incorrect or contradictory messages, which created further confusion.

When district administrators were finally forced into action, teachers were overwhelmed by the flood of information and struggled to make sense of it, saying it was like: 'being told to do 50 things in 10 different ways'. As teachers compared the bits of information they had received, they discovered that the information flowing from the district was piecemeal, and not shared equally with all those who needed it. Instead of being reassured by the district's informational meetings, teachers described them as 'pointless' and resigned themselves to, 'just trying to keep up with the demands'. Teachers turned to each other and found comfort in being able to share their complaints and confusion over what was being asked of them. They found that, by doing so, it was easier to, 'stay calm and somewhat sane through this time'.

Rather than establishing a more efficient line of communication between district and building-level administrators and parents, it became the sole responsibility of teachers to reach out to the students and families every week. The demand for constant communication suddenly monopolised teachers' already dwindling amount of personal and family time. The unrealistic expectations were aggravated by a lack of empathy from administrators who, it seemed to teachers, were not dealing with similar expectations of around-the-clock communication with students and parents.

Teachers attempted to keep parents informed while simultaneously working with information that was late in coming, as well as insufficient for understanding. Principals' demands for teacher-parent contact failed to take into consideration the wide range of

families and their response to a sudden bombardment of phone calls and texts. Families were struggling to balance their own quickly shifting lives in the chaos of the pandemic. In the midst of seemingly insensitive calls from teachers regarding their children's lack of participation online, they were dealing with everything from a potential job loss due to the pandemic, as well as having their children isolated at home as a result of school closure.

It became clear that the constant flood of phone calls was ineffective. Unfortunately, administrators' reversal of the teacher-parent communication policy and subsequent directive that teachers should not overwhelm parents with phone call and texts, came far too late. While some parents were beyond exhausted with the well-intended teacher contact, others took the opportunity to demand more information about the developing pandemic situation. This only proved to be more detrimental as many teachers did not have access to this information themselves and so were forced to respond with the unhelpful answers that the administration had previously given them. By the end of the school year, parents had become so frustrated with the constant phone calls from teachers and administrators, many of them had 'blocked' all school calls or changed their phone numbers altogether.

Accountability

Teachers characterised effective accountability policies and practices as: flexible, supportive, monitored, realistic, definitive, and accommodating. They described ineffective policies and practices as: inflexible, unsupportive, unrealistic, punitive, controlling, and vague.

What Worked

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, teacher accountability for student learning was measured largely in quantitative terms (e.g. student scores on state-mandated achievement tests) and letter or numerical grades on report cards. With the arrival of coronavirus, a large school district in the area responded quickly and flexibly to the challenges associated with the new form of instruction. Administrators understood that the transition from classroom-based teaching to online instruction would be difficult for many of the teachers, students and their families. They also understood the anxiety, stress and financial hardship that many families were experiencing in the midst of the pandemic, so they made a genuine effort to generate policies that were both realistic and accommodating. For example, one district created a new grading policy which stated that, although grades would still be given to high school students, no grades were to be given to students in grades K-9 for the remainder of the school year.

Administrators continued to ask teachers to hold students accountable for completing assignments, but also asked them to be empathetic and flexible with students. Teachers were responsible for planning, creating, and delivering online lessons and administering one assignment a week to measure students' content mastery and monitor their progress. Their goals were to provide clear, concise, and immediate feedback to the students, rather than

numeric grades. Technology teams that were already in place in every school began handing out devices to teachers and students on a daily basis. These teams supported teachers by suggesting alternative approaches for monitoring students' learning such as: allowing students to email or text pictures of completed assignments to them; calling students and asking them to respond verbally to questions on assignments, or if necessary, going to students' homes and working with them in the front yard, while wearing masks and maintaining the required social distance. District administrators' flexibility and support made it possible for teachers to maintain their relationships with students, while also developing closer and meaningful relationships with parents.

What Didn't Work

Districts without a proactive disaster plan in place focused their response to coronavirus on simply extending spring break for one week, and then bringing teachers and students back to school. As the weeks of school closure continued, however, it became evident that schools would be closed indefinitely. District plans that were being made almost overnight and revealed to teachers were changing every day, sometimes two or three times a day.

Principals were very inflexible and unrealistic during the first few weeks of online instruction, and required teachers to make their virtual classrooms' schedules reflect as closely as possible, the 'normal' institutional routines and practices. For example, students and teachers were required to meet online, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., cover a full day's worth of lessons, and complete assignments by the end of the day.

With the overnight changes districts had to make, it became obvious that some districts had not invested proactively in training teachers to incorporate technology into their classrooms; neither had they prioritised the purchase of student computers for instruction. As their technology plan was being created, teachers in these districts had to prepare paper learning packets that were handed out by grade level to each student. When district administrators were finally able to purchase new technology for families to use for school work, they failed to communicate this information to the schools themselves, so teachers were caught unaware that technology was now available to families. Creating even more confusion was the discovery (mostly by parents) that not all of the instructional programmes that students were supposed to use could actually be run on the devices that were given to them. The absence of technology planning on the part of the district also meant that students had to go to multiple online classrooms, each with multiple assignments per teacher, rather than being able to use a single platform like 'Google Classroom' that held all of their teachers' assignments in one place.

The biggest victims of the move to online learning were the students who required special education services. Their teachers were not provided with additional time or support from the district for the difficult work of designing online instruction to accommodate the academic and social needs of these students, while also being held responsible for modifying all of the

assignments that the students received from their other classroom teachers, sometimes with only a few hours to do so: 'We are doing everything that a special education teacher is supposed to do, however, without any extra time or help from administrators.'

Controlling administrators demonstrated little to no concern for teachers who not only had to respond to the expectations of their own children's teachers, but also implement an online learning classroom for the students they were responsible for teaching. As one teacher observed:

I feel as if our time is not being valued by my leaders. We have daily faculty meetings, even if there is nothing new to share. These meetings last well over thirty minutes, and sometimes consist of playing games like Pictionary and scavenger hunts. Do they not think we are able to use our time wisely?

The tendency of some administrators to micromanage was frustrating to teachers:

Please trust your employees. We are not only managing our professional responsibilities, but we also have our family duties that we are trying to manage. We are using our time wisely to ensure both of these priorities are being taken care of appropriately.

Whereas accountability starts with good communication and a clear understanding of expectations, parents and teachers were overwhelmed by the amounts of emails, phone calls and messages they received weekly from the district. While making them aware of the rapid and often disjointed changes that were occurring, the frequency of these communications became a double-edged sword, in that teachers and parents were actually feeling less connected as a community, as the sheer volume of district messages morphed into an unwanted, SPAM-filled intrusion into their lives.

Interpersonal Relationships

The teachers' reflections described the critical characteristics of effective interpersonal relationships as: care, trust, and respect, whereas they defined ineffective interpersonal relationships as lacking in all three of these essential qualities.

What Worked

Care for one another was reflected in the sense of community that had already been established in the district prior to the pandemic, and continued to be reflected in administrators' efforts to reach out to students and parents during the COVID-19 crisis. Administrators showed respect for teachers and parents by ensuring that they were given timely and transparent information and so they would be prepared for what was next. Some administrators, for example, used Facebook to talk daily with students and families.

Not only this, but the honesty and vulnerability that some principals were willing to show deepened the level of trust and respect between them and the teachers. The principal in one

school, for example, was open with her staff and demonstrated that she considered teachers as ‘family’, by sharing personal stories, and not being afraid to show her emotions. The honesty and vulnerability that she and other principals were willing to show deepened the level of trust and respect between them and the teachers which, in turn, made it easy for teachers to open up about their own feelings.

A sense of ‘family’ between administrators and teachers could be seen in many schools as teachers and administrators took time to show appreciation for one another. For example, at one school, teachers bought gift cards and baskets, made posters and drove past their school, singing ‘Lean on Me’ to show appreciation for the principal and vice principal, who reciprocated the following week by placing ‘An Amazing Teacher’ sign in teachers’ front yards and leaving gifts entitled ‘COVID-19 Teacher Quarantine Survival Kit’.

Administrators maintained positive interpersonal relationships with teachers in several other ways, including providing the resources and training they needed for online instruction, sending personalised text messages to check on how they were doing, offering to meet with them in person if necessary, and empathising with those who were balancing working from home while also taking care of their own children. Administrators took advantage of every opportunity to strengthen relationships, as exemplified by one principal who began meetings by asking teachers to share any good news they might have, reciting an inspirational quote or true inspirational story involving one of the students or a community member, sharing staff baby pictures, or showing a humorous video of administrators dancing. These small actions not only allowed teachers to be at ease and in the moment, but also to connect with the principal and one another through laughter, joy, and authentic caring.

What Didn’t Work

Some teachers felt as though their time was neither honoured nor valued by their principals, whose lack of caring was reflected in the unrealistic expectations that were placed upon them, and the lack of information provided to them, which left teachers to figure things out on their own. Such principals were insensitive to the challenges facing teachers who had children at home during the pandemic, as well as to the difficulties that parents themselves were experiencing in having all their children at home, even though some of them were also working. These principals also projected a lack of empathy toward teachers and parents as illustrated by the fact that several administrators scheduled meetings for parents of children with special needs at times when the parents were working, rather than adjusting these meeting times to accommodate their schedules.

Teachers who worked with principals who did not have good interpersonal relationships were given strict and demanding schedules, additional tasks on their to-do lists with no regard to their needs, required to attend multiple meetings, and given specific times for calling parents, tutoring students, and holding office hours. In some schools, principals required teachers to submit checklists to the district as evidence of accountability. Teachers,

who were already feeling a lack of support and care from their leadership viewed these checklists as punitive and as evidence that their principal didn't trust them to carry out their responsibilities. The schools of such principals were also characterised by a lack of teacher trust and respect for their administrators. This led to teachers' reluctance to agree to suggestions that their principals proposed to them, as well as to increased scepticism about their principal's motives. For example, when the principal in one school unexpectedly volunteered to assist teachers in picking up and dropping off assignments at students' homes, rather than interpreting his actions as an authentic sign of caring and a genuine effort to be helpful, some teachers construed his actions as motivated solely by a desire for personal recognition.

The negative effects of an absence of caring in some schools accrued not only to teachers but to students as well. For example, in one district with a large proportion of children and families living in poverty, there was a clear digital divide between these students and their counterparts in wealthier school districts, with respect to technology and access to the Internet. Despite the obvious need of families for these resources, the principal of one school told teachers not to distribute district-provided laptops to families unless they asked. This demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the educational needs of the children in those families, and as one teacher commented, 'Most of the time I feel our school is being run by managers and not leaders that care for our well-being.'

Recommendations for Improving Administrators' Preparedness for Times of Crisis

Arising from these reflections we have some trustworthy and helpful recommendations.

- Know your school community, its assets and strengths, as well as its needs, to create a flexible disaster plan that responds to unpredictable events based on a thorough understanding of, and consideration for, all members of the school community.
- Develop authentic relationships with teachers, students and parents; they help everyone to feel heard, appreciated, less anxious, and less alone.
- Anticipate and provide the resources and training (particularly technology) that teachers and students would likely need if regular schooling was disrupted.
- Use a variety of methods for communicating important information to all those concerned in a timely, clear, understandable, accurate and efficient manner.

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A Descriptive Analysis of Educational Services in Nigeria During COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a government-imposed lockdown on citizens in their different localities. Prior to the lockdown in Nigeria, primary and secondary schools' end of term examinations were in progress, and three major transitional examinations were just a few days away. As the lockdown persisted and with the end highly unpredictable, students and their parents became anxious about the learning gap being created. Educational agencies resorted to the use of radio and television for teaching core subjects to students at designated times of the week. This was followed by the introduction of e-learning portals by the federal and state governments, education authorities, educational institutions and even individual teachers. The thrust of this paper is to describe the modus operandi of these educational services, identify what is working and what isn't quite working, and highlight the leadership and management initiatives required for overall effectiveness of the identified services.*

Keywords: Educational services, COVID-19, pandemic, lockdown, educational broadcasts, e-learning, remote learning, Nigeria

Introduction

End of term examinations were in progress, and three major transitional examinations were just a few weeks away when the Federal Government of Nigeria imposed the COVID-19 induced lockdown. The examinations were the common entrance examination for transiting from the primary to junior secondary school, the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), for transiting from the junior to the senior secondary school, and the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE). The reason for, and the nature of, the lockdown imposed by the government did not give room for parents to enrol their children in extra-mural coaching. As the lockdown lingered into weeks, different reactions from different sectors of the populace began to manifest. These ranged from anxiety by all stakeholders in education, children becoming bored, troublesome and unmanageable at home and within

their communities (U. Nnaike, COVID-19: ODeL will change world's landscape of teaching, learning, *THISDAY*, April 8, 2020), increased addiction of youths to their mobile devices, fictitious school resumption dates on social media amidst several dangerous rumours, to a gradual drift of focus by youths from education to extra-curricular interests.

To bridge the learning gap created by the lockdown, government resorted to the use of radio and television for teaching core subjects like English language, mathematics, and basic science to primary school pupils and secondary school students at designated times of the week. Also, many e-learning platforms were created, while some existing ones were adapted or supported by state governments, education authorities, educational institutions and even individual teachers. Against this background, this paper is prepared to highlight the variety of educational services deployed in Nigeria during the lockdown, examine the leadership and management initiatives in managing the services, and, highlight the challenges to the successful implementation of the diverse educational services.

The educational services provided during the COVID-19 pandemic were championed by the Federal Ministry of Education (2020) which used the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) to broadcast lessons on radio and encouraged individual states to use both radio and television to transmit instructional broadcasts to their students. The ministry took a step further by adopting two existing e-learning portals which were: School Gate (powered by the Federal Ministry of Education and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)), and the Mobile Classroom App., an application developed mainly for secondary school students (C. Idoko, FG launches free elearning portals for primary, secondary school students, *Daily Tribune*, April 24, 2020). The Ministry also created the Unity Schools' Virtual Learning Platform, where the Edmodo Learning Management System was used in collaboration with EduFirst Online TV (an initiative of Edufirst.ng and Skool Media Nig. Ltd) to reach out to students of the 104 unity secondary schools in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Education also assisted different states to upload on its website, electronic learning, resources and education chat rooms for their pupils to utilise (O. Aluko, FG Uploads elearning education rooms across states, *Punch Newspaper*, May 1, 2020).

State Ministries of Education were not left out in disseminating free lessons. The Lagos State Ministry of Education in partnership with Naija 102.7 FM Radio and South Sahara Social Development Organisation broadcast educational programmes in different subjects at designated times to students in their homes. Also, the Osun state branch of the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON) sponsored make-up classes broadcast via Rave FM radio to prepare senior secondary three students for their impending Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. The Plateau State Peace F.M 90.5 was among many others. Television programmes were also sponsored by ministries of education across different states in the country. The Ogun State DigiClass Initiative, the Ondo State Radiovision Corporation (OSRC) television programmes, and Oyo state School on Air Video broadcast are just a few. Other states with notable similar initiatives were Kaduna, Borno, Edo and Delta States. The ministries also developed different e-learning packages for their students to access in the

comfort of their homes. The EdoBest@Home initiative of the Edo State Ministry of Education is one of such. Others include TELECLASS, an initiative of the Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in conjunction with the Delta State Ministry of Information.

Private schools reached out to their students mainly through online tools. While the development of e-learning portals was undertaken by a few schools in urban centres for engaging their students academically, many others used social media (Kolawole 2020a), such as WhatsApp and Telegram applications, for disseminating video recorded lessons, PowerPoint presented lessons, notes, workings, and illustrations on whiteboard/paper, assignments and notifications. The fora also served as an avenue for question and answer and a means of communication between teachers, students and parents. The charges for the services varied from school to school.

Subject specialists among teachers created social media groups for presenting lessons in their subject specialisation and advertised them not only to their students but also the general public. Students who showed interest were added to the group which served as a means of accessing lessons and homework, asking questions, obtaining answers and sharing other useful information. The classes took place asynchronously and fees charged varied from teacher to teacher and from subject to subject.

Many hitherto existing educational technology companies and e-learning solution providers came into the limelight during the lockdown. Most of them operated independently, while a few partnered with government or corporate organisations to render their services to the public. The applications basically present lessons in the form of educational video tutorials, and animation, facilitate individualised learning, and help students practice past questions to prepare for examinations. Some of them are subscription free such as Schoolgate, Mobile classroom, Khan Academy, UNESCO's School-Meets-the-Learner Approach, Seesaw Free and Access9ijaKids Platform, while some amount of money is needed to access course content for others like ClassNotes.ng, teststreams.com, ulesson, Remote School.ng, Seesaw for Schools and Easyprep.

Management of the educational services took place under different organisations and levels of leadership. Governments financed, coordinated and regulated the services in different ways. To reduce the financial burden of extra classroom learning on parents, federal and state governments shouldered the responsibility for the provision of necessary financial support to maintain the smooth running of instructional broadcasts, thus rendering the services at no cost. They even parleyed with some internet service providers to enable e-portals to operate without the need for data. The ministries coordinated the educational services through such actions as: placement/posting/announcement of mission statements and lesson timetables on radio, TV and educational websites to create awareness about available services and ensure timely access by target students and payment of special attention to terminal classes about to take external examinations, through the provision of diverse resources for practice, revision and remediation.

To ensure inclusiveness, radio and TV stations within each state scheduled programmes to dovetail, rather than compete with one another. This prevented siblings in different classes in one-device-only homes from being deprived of their lessons.

The packaging of lessons in the form of video by educational technology companies allowed multi-sensory learning and boosted learning effectiveness. In addition, making the video downloadable allowed for individualised, self-paced learning which made it possible to extend these downloaded videos to less privileged students to watch. Provision of within and after class services through phone calls, SMS and social media groups to ask questions and submit assignments fostered interaction among students, their teachers and learning materials. Provision of helpdesks and feedback forms allowed users to make enquiries and forward their complaints. Requiring registration by individual users of e-portals helped to prevent anonymity, abuse and ensure commitment.

Some challenges were encountered in the rendering and receiving of the educational services. According to a report on News at 9, a Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) news programme aired on May 13, 2020, non-availability of digital learning devices, epileptic power supply, and cost of data subscription were the major obstacles to e-learning for learners in Ogun state. The situation is not different in other states in the country. Not every home in Nigeria has a functional computer or television set (L. Effiong et al., Students from poor homes lag behind in e-Learning, *Daily Trust*, April 30, 2020). The radio set, despite its relative affordability, is a luxury for many out-of-school children in internally displaced communities (E-learning: UNICEF distributes radio sets to vulnerable Borno children, *The Nation Newspaper*, June 10, 2020). Gadgets for receiving educational broadcasts all require energy to power them, and keep them working. Unfortunately, the supply of electricity is very irregular and unreliable, hence often necessitating extra spending on diesel, petrol or batteries as alternative energy sources.

For online learning, there is no doubting the fact that ‘Data is Oxygen’ according to a cliché by Glo, one of Nigeria’s internet service providers. Money is needed to access data. This is where many get stuck. Going by the sometimes very slow internet connection, the amount required to buy enough gigabytes to watch or download educational videos is not affordable to many Nigerians. Ironically, the supposedly data-free e-learning platforms turned out to be anything but free. In a user experience survey conducted by the management of the Mobile Classroom e-learning portal, the major grievance of dissatisfied users centred around the fact that they wasted their data without getting quality service.

Technical problems were also common. A user experience survey was carried out by the developers of the Mobile Classroom learning application. Aggregate user rating was relatively lower than expectation in spite of the beautifully packaged lessons. It was found that the low rating was due to technical issues being constantly experienced by users. These ranged from constant denial of access to users, videos failing to load or loading very slowly, to quick exhaustion of users’ data. These were often arguably attributed to email validation

or data connection issues by the software developers. Though there was a helpdesk, there was time lag between complaints and effective solution. The bug fixing process was rather slow, keeping potential users in suspense. In a situation like this, where the needed application often does not respond, the tendency for learners to switch to other working, though irrelevant applications that interest them, is very high.

The educational services covered only subjects considered to be core. This is to the disadvantage of other students who may be keenly interested in the left-out subjects. Non-sequential presentation of topics in different subjects to different classes on EduTV on the YouTube channel may have hindered effective learning by distracting the attention of learners learning individually. Students registered in a coordinated learning system such as the Skool Portal are also susceptible to distraction. They are required to visit the YouTube channel to locate, watch and attempt some exercises on a stipulated EduTV video on a given topic in a subject. They are made to search through a host of YouTube videos: some with content related to the needed topic and many completely unrelated, potentially distracting and data consuming. The Learning Management System is not effectively managed as teacher presence is rather low, leaving students to fill up the mail with messages sometimes not related to content. Teaching is very random and submitted homework is seldom graded.

Most youngsters (popularly referred to as digital natives) are multimedia enthusiasts. They are very eager to have their own personal digital devices. The lockdown has significantly reduced the barriers set by many parents between their children and digital screens. It is now more difficult than ever for parents to limit their children's screen time as the lockdown has made e-learning and educational broadcasting the major alternatives for keeping in tune with the school's curricula. However, spending excessive time on the screen could have health and security implications (Irene 2020).

Our general observation is that most of the teachers had good mastery of their subjects. However, the methods of instructional delivery adopted by some of them were not so impressive. Fast pace of lesson delivery, inadequate examples, poor voice, poor handwriting, and inadequate use of instructional media were some of the problems. Some instructors were made to teach several subjects, which eventually exposed their weaknesses. Due to language proficiency issues, articulation of points was difficult for certain instructors. Occasionally, grammatical mistakes were made in the course of teaching while pronunciation problems and speech mannerisms were not uncommon. In a few cases, evaluation was not in alignment with the instructional objectives.

While governmental bodies provided the educational services free of charge, private schools, educational technology companies and individual teachers charged fees which as perceived by parents, ranged from moderate to too high. Many parents whose children/wards attend private schools are engaged in controversy with the school management over the fees charged for e-learning. While some parents believed that the fees charged were on the high side, others believed that charging for the service at all was unjustifiable. The Lagos State Commissioner

for Education actually had to play a mediatory role between affected parents and school authorities by appealing to both parties to be considerate with one another as parents were not earning during the lockdown yet school staff had to be paid (C. T. Alabi, Schools remain closed, Lagos warns private school owners, *Daily Trust*, April 29, 2020). This exemplifies the mediatory role that should be played by educational administrators in such a crisis situation. Closely related to cost was the issue of learner satisfaction. During a television interview, some parents expressed satisfaction with the quality and quantity of e-learning that their wards were being exposed to by their respective schools. One parent claimed to be particularly pleased by the fact that the subjects were being taught by the same teachers who were teaching her children before the lockdown. However, the case is not the same for some parents in Lagos state, some of whom did not perceive the services being rendered as being commensurate with the fees charged. In the light of these drawbacks, it can be concluded that there is disparity among individual families in the level of acceptance of e-learning.

Nigerian families will embrace these innovative educational services, if and only if they are affordable, interesting and tailored to their children/wards' specific needs. However, going by the numerous challenges earlier discussed, lessons placed on e-learning portals will most likely be accessible to only a fraction of the target audience, thereby, fuelling the newly emerging digital divide. Therefore, urgent action is needed to allay the fears that are already being expressed in some quarters as to the viability and sustainability of e-learning in Nigeria (Kolawole 2020b).

In as much as any initiative aimed at helping learners in the COVID-19 lockdown period are to reach them in their individual homes, educational administration has to extend beyond the school premises right down to individual homes. In other words, every parent has got to add educational administration to their parental assignments. These will include and may not be limited to: identifying and locating useful learning resources appropriate for their children's educational level; creating workable learning schedules/timetables; supervising their use of the learning resources (LagosMums 2020); monitoring to ensure careful, effective and abuse-free use of learning devices; and sharing of available resources equitably among siblings. Since the majority of the e-learning sessions are administered asynchronously, leaving out the need to be online in real time, parents can assist their wards by downloading these electronic resources and possibly placing them on computers that have no internet connections to reduce distraction and security risks.

Ministries of education should imbibe best practice in teacher selection for the educational services and expose them to adequate training to meet up with demands of the assignment, while e-learning contracts should be granted to only tested and trusted e-learning solutions providers to improve efficiency, effectiveness and acceptability. They should ensure that lesson content and sequence align with curriculum prescriptions. Research is needed to provide information for improving on the current educational services to attain enviable standards.

As the demand for data services continues to witness exponential growth now that many more tasks need to be accomplished from a distance, internet service providers should be made to provide their services at much more affordable rates to facilitate e-learning among the teeming learner populace in Nigeria. In addition, more corporate organisations should be mandated to aid the provision of digital learning devices as part of their corporate social responsibilities. Also, innovative alternative energy sources need to be explored to keep broadcasts on, and ensure they reach target receivers at the right time and in the best condition. We therefore recommend that the services be continued even after the lockdown, so that students can adapt well to this new and indispensable way of learning.

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Managing the Challenges to the Effective Utilisation of E-Learning as a Response in COVID-19 Nigeria

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Abstract: *The severe disruption of the activities of educational institutions by the COVID-19 pandemic was never imagined in Nigeria. Yet, teaching and learning continue online, on an untested and unprecedented scale. With the abrupt shutdown of all schools in March 2020 and the sudden swing into e-learning to control the spread of COVID-19, some challenges that scholars and institutions have shared globally on the adoption and integration of e-learning technologies in education without adequate preparedness were immediately observed. These challenges have left some impacts on students at all levels especially the temporary cessation of face-to-face teaching and learning in the embrace of e-learning culture, a completely new school climate. This study investigates the benefits of e-learning in COVID-19 Nigeria, the challenges to its effective utilisation and suggests ways of managing it during these COVID-19 interruptions and post pandemic Nigeria.*

Keywords: Education, e-learning, COVID-19

Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused widespread disruption across the world to the important work of education. The sudden and abrupt shutdown of all schools in Nigeria in March 2020, and the sudden swing into e-learning to control the spread of the virus has proved challenging and created a gap between the teachers and the learners in Nigeria. For the time being, e-learning has become an alternate means that educational institutions have adopted in Nigeria as a new normal.

Electronic learning, or e-learning, is a form of distance learning that requires the use of varieties of technology and the Internet to communicate, share ideas, access information and share knowledge from instructors to learners. For Aboderin (2015) and Hubackova (2015), e-learning refers to anything that is offered, enabled, or mediated by electronic technology

for the clear purpose of learning. Kyari, Adiuku-Brown, Abechi and Adelekun (2018) refer to e-learning simply as a kind of learning that is enabled by electronic technology which could be web-based learning, computer-based learning or virtual classrooms and content delivery is done via e-networks, audio or videotape, satellite TV, videoconferencing, etc. These definitions and others give the basis on which e-learning operates. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning has of necessity come to the front burner. Many countries have already implemented the use of e-learning to cope with the closure of schools and universities (O. Jegede, Why Nigeria must invest in open, distance learning. *The Guardian Newspaper*, April 1, 2020). In this study, e-learning is defined as a learning approach that is centred on the use of electronic technologies to teach, learn, and regulate educational activities in an online environment. A number of states in Nigeria including Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Borno and Kaduna are attempting to use e-learning to solve the issues of schooling created by COVID-19. Little research attention has been paid to investigating and analysing the attempts of some of these educational institutions to sustain teaching and learning when all schools are closed. This paper is an investigation into the benefits of e-learning in COVID-19 Nigeria, the challenges to its effective utilisation and how these challenges can be managed in 2020 and beyond.

Benefits of E-Learning in COVID-19 Nigeria

In Nigeria, there are many learning benefits associated with e-learning, and in a time of major health concerns there are health benefits too (WHO 2020). These benefits include:

Enhancement of the Efficacy of Knowledge and Easy Communication

E-learning enhances the efficacy of knowledge and qualifications through ease of access to huge amounts of information. It is also able to provide opportunities for better relationships between learners by the use of discussion forums without violating the rule of social distancing. Through this, e-learning helps eliminate barriers that have the potential of hindering participation including the fear of talking to other learners. It motivates students to interact with others, as well as exchange and respect different points of view. It eases communication and improves the relationships that help sustain learning. It makes available extra prospects for interactivity between students and teachers during content delivery.

Reduction of Physical Contact of the Participants and Providing a Safe Environment

As e-learning is a form of distance learning, in this period of the COVID-19 outbreak, e-learning is important as it physically separates teachers and students. E-learning serves as a preventive hygienic practice for COVID-19. Specifically, e-learning provides teachers and students the opportunity to self-isolate, to stay home and be safe, whilst still providing a useful learning environment.

Accommodation of the Needs of the Individual Learner

E-learning can centre on the learning and other needs of students and take into consideration the individual learner's differences. Some learners, for instance, prefer to concentrate on certain parts of the course, while others are prepared to review the entire course. During the pandemic, some students may be anxious to attend school, and so, this methodology is apt during this period of COVID 19 and post-pandemic Nigeria because of tensions, confusions, trauma and apprehensiveness in the country created by the pandemic.

Provision of Opportunity to Learn Anytime and Anywhere

E-learning is flexible when issues of time and place are taken into consideration. It enables the teacher and learner to teach and acquire educational instructions, anytime and anywhere. There is the potential for students to have the luxury of choosing the place and time that suits them, and for this learning to occur in a safe climate. E-learning offers and can provide a more equitable learning environment through offering equal access to the information world irrespective of the location of the users, their age, ethnic origins or race (Algahtani 2011; Kwofie & Henten 2011).

Encouragement of Innovation and Diverse Teaching-Learning Methodology

E-learning encourages innovation, makes resourcing of education materials easier and provides diverse teaching methodology. It helps teachers to monitor learning needs and the learners' progress. It has the ability to assess the students or learners as they learn, and at the same time increase their experiences in education by way of interactivity suitable to community education, cultural diversity and globalisation, while eradicating boundaries of place and time. Besides, through e-learning educational objectives can often be accomplished in the shortest possible time with least amount of effort. Both learners and instructors can accomplish and keep up with development as they obtain experience that is provided by numerous specialists in the various fields of knowledge. It also provides for innovations related to health through social distancing and other practices.

Cost Effectiveness

E-learning is cost effective in the sense that there is no need for the students or learners to travel. It is also cost effective in the sense that it offers opportunities for the maximum number of learners to learn with no need for many buildings. It helps compensate for scarcities of academic staff, including instructors or teachers as well as facilitators, laboratory technicians etc. The use of e-learning allows self-pacing. For instance, the asynchronous way permits each student to study at his or her own pace and speed whether slow or quick. It, therefore, increases satisfaction and decreases stress. E-learning functionalities can be exploited to integrate pedagogical theories and make lessons more interactive (Ahmed, Patrick & Karsten 2016). As Hubackova (2015) admits, it does not only decrease cost, but also allows students

to choose the learning materials that are suitable to their interest and induces self-confidence and knowledge.

Challenges to the Effective Utilisation of E-learning in COVID-19 Nigeria

Despite the benefits of e-learning in this period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, it is observed that effective utilisation has numerous challenges. They include:

Computer Constraints

Most parents in Nigeria hardly meet their basic human needs, and so providing computers for their children is beyond them. More importantly, no provisions of personal computers were made available by government for either the teachers or students. In this case, e-learning is limited to participants that have computers, and this seems to make its e-learning utilisation an uphill task in Nigeria.

Internet Constraint

In addition, most participants that have access to computers do not have internet connectivity. Those who have are constrained by poor network connections. Most areas in Nigeria have poor internet connectivity. Most learners cannot purchase the data bundles necessary for internet connection because most of them are financially dependent on their parents or guardians. The global pandemic has also created a major economic recession further impacting on the financial state of families.

Computer/Web Usage Illiteracy

In Nigeria, some teachers, and most students, especially in junior secondary and primary education, are not computer literate and this provides a major challenge. If people cannot operate the systems needed to access e-learning, then the medium has limited effectiveness.

Electricity Constraints

Most rural areas have no electricity connection at all, while city areas are faced with unsteady power supply. This reduces effective utilisation of e-learning. Ogbnuogwo, Ugwoegbu, Obunna, Apiti and Okunna (2019) also pointed to lack of electricity as a challenge to the utilisation of information and computer technologies (ICT) among students in Nigeria.

Emotional and Psychological Constraints

Most students take their teachers as role models, mentors, and friends. With e-learning it will be difficult to share most of their personal needs with their teachers through the e-learning process. This may lead to emotional and psychological breakdown and alienation since many

students feel safe and more comfortable to share their fears and personal needs on face-to-face discussion with their teachers.

Strategies to Manage the Challenges of E-Learning in COVID-19 Nigeria

Following the numerous challenges that bedevil e-learning in COVID-19 Nigeria, it becomes apparent to consider strategies to manage them.

Policy Review on E-learning

There should be a review of policies that relate to all aspects of open and distance learning in order to improve e-learning. There is need to deliberately articulate a policy to integrate ICT, specifically e-learning into the mainstream of education and training in Nigeria as currently announced by the Nigerian government. This will sustain e-learning during these COVID-19 interruptions and post pandemic Nigeria.

Training of Teachers in Internet Usage

Massive training of teachers to teach at a distance and in the use of e-learning is necessary. It will curb technophobia in those who are afraid of operating electronic devices (O. Aremu, COVID-19 and the challenges of virtual learning, *The Nation Newspaper*, May 10, 2020). This training of teachers in the use of e-learning will be a plus to educational advancement in COVID-19 Nigeria and thereafter (Igbokwe, Okeke-James, Akudo & Anyawu 2020). There should be massive investment in ICT infrastructure and training to provide the needed technology and human support by the government.

Use of Mobile Phones

School administrators should encourage learners to make use of mobile phones which is relatively cheaper than personal computers. Almost all learners have mobile phones which can be deployed for e-learning so that students can take responsibility for their own learning instead of giving excuses with the high cost of personal computers and laptops. Those who do not have can make use of their guardians' or parents' phones for this period of the pandemic especially now that most people work from home.

Customisation of Solar Energy

One way of managing the challenges of e-learning in this pandemic period is to customise solar energy and other types of energy freely and cheaply available in Nigeria to power a distance learning system (O. Jegede, Why Nigeria must invest in open, distance learning. *The Guardian Newspaper*, April 1, 2020). This will go a long way to boost the electricity instability which is a major setback to the effective utilisation of e-learning during COVID-19 Nigeria.

Development of Quality E-Learning Course Material

The government and other educational stakeholders should increase and diversify the programmes that are offered. This is in line with the thoughts of Aboderin (2015). It could involve the development of more creative and innovative ways of developing quality course materials. E-learning platforms with quality assurance can be used in favour of skill acquisition and portfolio methods of assessing learning. This will go a long way to make e-learning more interesting for both learners and teachers during this COVID-19 period and post pandemic Nigeria.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the temporary cessation of face-to-face teaching and learning in the embrace of e-learning culture during this COVID-19 pandemic has both benefits and challenges. The challenges can easily be managed by reviewing and making long-term policies that will incorporate the e-learning processes into teaching and learning mainstream in Nigeria by the government and other stakeholders. It can also be achieved by training of teachers in internet literacy and computer usage, customisation of solar energy and other types of energy available in Nigerian, and diversification of the programmes offered through the e-learning platform. In this way, e-learning will aid in the preparation of the Nigerian society to globally communicate and dialogue better with other nations in future, after the pandemic.

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School Leadership as (Un)usual. Insights From Principals in Sweden During a Pandemic

Björn Ahlström, Ulf Leo, Lars Norqvist and Pär Poromaa Isling

Abstract: *This paper offers insights into educational leadership in relation to the example of Sweden exceptionalism that kept most of its schools open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Informed discussions based on reports from conversations with principals, media and a survey highlight three themes identified as challenges for the principals: dealing with pupils, staff members and parents' anxiety; a constant state of uncertainty; and the ones left behind. These themes ignite discussions of implications for educational leadership in which the elements of trust, the formation of stable organisations and equity are leadership strategies in what we consider leadership as (un)usual.*

Keywords: Collective trust, equity, COVID-19, educational leadership, principal, management

Sweden: An Example of Exceptionalism?

As educators of principals at Umeå University in Sweden, the reality of the pandemic hit us in March 2020 and thus changed our ordinary teaching practices and management of the Swedish national principal training programme. The coronavirus (COVID-19) quickly went from a distant, foreign threat to a present phenomenon of our everyday lives. The scheduled principal training classes were cancelled on short notice for the following week and re-organised into distance education for an indefinite period. The rapid spread of COVID-19 called for swift measures from the government. The national strategy to keep large sectors of society open, just as before the pandemic, shone light on 'Swedish exceptionalism'. Thus, in comparison to most other countries, Sweden pursued a much more liberal policy and the Swedish educational system was no exception. The government recommended upper secondary schools and the universities to organise classes through distance solutions, by using digital tools, and it recommended preschools and compulsory schools stay open. The strategy could be described as 'business as usual'. Nonetheless, this strategy involved parents, pupils, staff members and principals following the government's recommendations. In this

paper, we set out to discuss the challenges school leaders in Sweden encounter in this time of crisis. We aim to highlight what we can learn from Swedish school leaders' experiences of practicing 'business as usual' in unusual circumstances.

Historically, Sweden's governmental institutions have had a large amount of support and trust among its citizens (Trägårdh 2018). People's trust in the state and its institutions was paramount in implementing general recommendations for the public. The recommendations included a 'no lockdown' policy, the importance of physical distancing and allowing many institutions (e.g. compulsory schools) to remain open. As mentioned, this policy was quite different from measures taken by other countries that had a firmer and a more authoritarian way of handling the pandemic. Key policy decisions related to the education system highlight Sweden's 'exceptionalism' approach:

- On the 12th of March 2020, the minister of education communicated the government's first recommendations that schools should remain open.
- On the 18th of March, upper secondary schools, adult education, higher vocational education and universities were recommended to close and continue with distance education. However, children in Sweden up to the age of 16 (Grade 9) were expected to go to school, with the reservation that schools must follow the Public Health Agency's recommendations on how to protect people from COVID-19.
- From the 15th of June, upper secondary school, adult education, higher vocational education and universities were re-opened.

Challenges of the Pandemic: A Principal's Perspective

In this section, we present what we have learned about school leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. We have three main data sources: experiences from principals, media, and a survey. These sources have formed the overall understandings and trends presented in this paper, summarised in themes in order to ignite discussions of implications for educational leadership. The principals' experiences that we will present are principals' stories on actions taken during the spring semester that we encountered in our line of work as principal educators. From media we provide some information regarding the education system communicated through reliable media channels. From the survey we present quotes from two open-ended questions focusing on the impact of the pandemic in schools. The survey was distributed to 680 principals that attended the principal training programme at our university, starting between 2017 and spring 2020. The principals represent all forms of education in the formal school system, from preschool to adult education programmes throughout Sweden. Three hundred and sixteen principals, the majority from compulsory education (Grades 0-9, ages 6-16 years) and upper secondary school (up to age 19), responded to the survey. We will refer to answers chosen from the 361 answers given by the principals to the open-ended questions in the survey. The questions sought opinions on the biggest challenges regarding home schooling and distance education in case of total lockdown of the

schools; and, how the principals perceived and experienced the caretaker's situation regarding home schooling and distance education in case of total lockdown of the schools.

We have identified three themes that include representative examples from the data sources: dealing with pupils, staff members and parents' anxiety; a constant state of uncertainty; and, the ones left behind. The main findings are presented below.

Dealing With Pupils, Staff Members and Parents' Anxiety

At all principal training classes, we plan for the principals to have the opportunity to discuss current trends, issues or situations significant to their profession. Among the participants, a common and obvious theme involved experiences as school leaders dealing with effects of COVID-19. In these discussions, many of the principals in compulsory schools expressed an anxiety among parents, pupils and staff. Because the schools stayed open and were supposed to provide education as usual, it collided with what other countries were doing. In our neighbouring countries Norway and Denmark, for instance, the compulsory schools were shut down. In addition, there were clear instructions to parents and pupils that if they felt symptoms, such as a sore throat, coughing or sneezing, then they should stay at home. This regulation led to a high number of absent pupils and staff members, which increased the workload for the principals and teachers managing everyday teaching. One principal expressed what happened within their school because of these initial rules and regulations: 'In the beginning it was a large group of staff as well as pupils that were absent, so we worked hard to make it all work ... the everyday activities at our school.'

The high number of absentees did not reflect the actual number of sick or infected pupils, but rather the high number of absent pupils was primarily a consequence of caregivers' fear and anxiety about sending children to school without knowing how the virus actually works. A parent expressed this anxiety, in a daily newspaper (Kardell 2020), as follows: 'I hope that the Swedish government will soon take the decision to close the pre- and compulsory schools. Otherwise, we will keep our children at home for as long as it takes. We have already brought home schoolwork.'

According to a survey of absenteeism in April 2020 conducted by the Swedish National Agency for Education, the absenteeism was 35 per cent higher in compulsory school compared to a normal situation. The absenteeism among staff in compulsory schools was 40 per cent higher than in a normal situation. It is important to point out the large variations in the absenteeism rate between schools, and some municipalities reported a higher rate of absenteeism in socioeconomically challenged areas (The Swedish National Agency of Education 2020).

A Constant State of Uncertainty

At the early stages of the pandemic, it was uncertain whether all schools should remain open or if a general lockdown was at hand. After a few months of handling changing

recommendations, restrictions, fears and anxieties, a new state of normality appeared. Yet, this normality was characterised by a great deal of uncertainty related to the complexity of the virus and for how long these new and changed routines should be in effect. A principal stated that pupils asked, 'Why can't we do like we always do?' Recurrent activities such as annual school trips by public transportation were cancelled. Visits to the upper secondary schools that pupils from compulsory schools attend every year were impossible, which might lead to uncertainties among pupils and teachers when starting the new school year. Principals also had to address pupils' absences from school. They had to create strategies to handle the uncertainty of whether absent pupils were ill or were absent based on fears of the pandemic. Another problem was the learning prerequisites for pupils who stayed at home for an extended period. As one principal asked:

Is there someone at home with the pupil? We don't know that. The amount of home support they get is at very different levels, which does not promote equity. It is a challenge in families that have several children at different ages.

Further, in times of a pandemic the principals do not have more information than anyone else does. When not knowing when and how the pandemic and the strong recommendations from the government are going to change and develop, it creates uncertainties among parents, pupils and staff members, as well as for principals.

The Ones Left Behind

A general concern among principals was the pupils who benefit from the formal structure of education and those who need an individually designed education to cope with the demands of school. With the lockdown of the upper secondary schools, the number of pupils at risk of being left behind is expected to increase. In this group, pupils who belong to families with a foreign background are described as particularly vulnerable. According to one principal:

The gaps between the pupils will increase. The best pupils will get lots of support while those who need the support the most will not get it. Those who live in a small apartment will not get the peace and quiet they need to study, etc.

This group can be described as disadvantaged and vulnerable due to their limited knowledge and understanding of the Swedish language and because they have limited resources to receive help with their schoolwork, thus they are perceived as more likely to fail. However, there are also concerns about pupils who in a normal situation can be described as privileged and having better prerequisites for learning but are put in challenging situations to manage their daily lives and schooling. In addition, some caretakers cannot be at home to help their children because they are needed in jobs that are considered essential in society, especially in times of crisis.

Implications for Principals and Principal Educators

As shown above, the pandemic has led to a number of challenging situations for Swedish school leaders. However, leading schools, even without the uncertain prerequisites imposed by the pandemic, calls for a generic set of leadership strategies that could be important tools in challenging times. Schools are dynamic organisations where the principals must deal with various levels of anxiety, uncertainty and equity issues on a daily basis. Challenges include improving student outcomes, facing budget cuts, and dealing with organisational tensions and high turnover among staff (e.g. Norberg & Gross 2019). Based on the information from principals, we argue that despite the impact of the pandemic and the following recommendations, no new set of strategies and leadership actions were needed. Rather, some of the generic leadership dimensions were highlighted and needed a higher input or dosage (cf. Pashiardis & Brauckmann 2014).

One of the most important factors to deal with, based on our findings, is matters concerning trust. At the national level, trust in recommendations from the government, the Ministry of Education and the Swedish Public Health Agency is vital. At the school level, collective faculty trust including trust in parents and pupils (Forsyth, Adams & Hoy 2011; Hoy 2012) is key to dealing with issues linked to anxiety, uncertainty and equity. In the Swedish case, trust between the government and citizens could be described as mutual, with 70 per cent of the population in favour of keeping the schools open (Kantar Sifo 2020). The strong government recommendations relied on the pupils, staff members and principals' trust to follow them to keep the schools open. This means trust is vital and that these recommendations are based on good reasons. On the other hand, the government can only give these recommendations if it trusts the parents, pupils, staff members and principals' ability to follow them. This includes physical distancing and staying at home if feeling ill. When experiencing anxiety and uncertainty, trust is an important driving force to organise and deal with these challenges. Scholars have explored the significance of trust in schools and suggest that teachers' trust in their principals and co-workers is important when studying school success and effectiveness (Forsyth et al. 2011; Hoy 2012). In other words, schools that have a high level of trust and a positive school climate have the fundamental building blocks needed for creating a culture that can be resilient in times of crisis. Research also shows that the behaviours and actions of principals and teachers affect the level and quality of trust within a specific organisation (Hoy 2012; Tschannen-Moran 2014). Further, principals who can build collective trust have the basic prerequisites to build an organisation with trustworthy obligations and therefore would be prepared for organisational turbulence from the outside world. Trust is therefore an important factor if related to the concept of organisational stability in turbulent times.

When experiencing turbulence, it is important for an organisation to have the capability to withstand external pressures. Therefore, an organisation has to be stable but not rigid. In this case, principals must have the ability to organise and restructure the internal organisation to meet the challenges imposed by the pandemic. When facing these new prerequisites, the

principal and the organisation as a whole must be able to deal with the situation in a dynamic and flexible manner without losing the shared vision and direction (Norberg & Gross 2019; Shapiro & Gross 2013). One of the shared tasks is promoting equity, which calls for a socially responsive and ethical dimension to school leadership. In our data, it is evident that the pupils who might suffer the greatest loss because of the pandemic are the ones with limited resources and special needs. Based on these circumstances, the principals need to pay attention to the notion of power and unequal power relations and to inequalities in schools to reveal those who risk becoming marginalised (Angelle, Ärlestig & Norberg 2015; Larson and Murtadha 2002). The ethical dimension of school leadership involves a responsibility to be proactive and actively prevent harm, and doing so not just as a principal, but as a human being, educator and citizen (Starratt 2004).

In conclusion, this study reveals how principals perceived and acted upon the consequences of Sweden's exceptionalism to keep schools open during the pandemic and how it affected their organisations. These measures could be described as though principals were involved in business as (un)usual due to the fact that the pre- and compulsory schools remained open. We argue that in times of crises, some leadership practices have to change, but the content and leadership abilities remain the same. As principal educators these results must have an implication on how we conduct our training during times of crisis, and as a preparation for upcoming crises. As issues of trust, organisational stability and equity are highlighted in the principals' experiences, it gives us, as educators, directions and themes that need to be further strengthened within the national principal training programme. Principals need support to be able to lead, especially when a turbulent outside world creates anxiety, uncertainty and unequal prerequisites for pupils in the schools.

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Coping With the Global Pandemic COVID-19 Through the Lenses of the Cyprus Education System

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Abstract: *This paper considers the response of the centralised education system in the context of Cyprus to the global pandemic COVID-19. Specifically, this paper describes the timeliness of the Cyprus' education system response during the challenges occurred by the pandemic. Also, it highlights the main challenges and initiatives faced by the Ministry of Education with regards to the new mode of digital learning processes across school organisations in Cyprus. In addition, based on the circumstances which occurred in the Cyprus education context, this paper considers the important role of school principals by highlighting the crucial aspect of leadership, coordination, and facilitation in this new context.*

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, Cyprus, education, school organisations, school leaders

Introduction

Undoubtedly, the world has been trying to cope with this unprecedented appearance of the 'invisible' enemy called COVID-19 or coronavirus disease. Specifically, in the recent months this virus has impacted the economy and businesses across the world, whilst the travel and tourism industry has been severely damaged. Clearly, this sudden change affected the daily lives of millions of people around the globe. In the case of Cyprus, if we exclude the Turkish invasion in 1974 (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1974, 1983) and the economic crisis that affected the island in 2012-2013, this was in fact a very uncommon and dramatic experience. An invisible threat forced the Cypriot citizens to be locked up in their own houses, for almost two months, and consequently had a deep negative impact on their daily lives. At the same time, this pandemic has affected education systems worldwide and disrupted the way in which students are educated around the globe. The education system of Cyprus has certainly been no exception to this. Although, in the higher education sector, Cyprus offers multiple online postgraduate programmes successfully, primary and secondary education was lacking a particular strategic plan or policy for introducing e-learning in schools. As a

consequence, teachers and school principals were called upon to deal with this sudden change, with almost no training and preparation. Furthermore, thousands of students were called upon to manage the inflow of new knowledge through the use of their own computers (those of course who had all the necessary equipment) and were introduced to a new way of learning in their own home environment.

Educational Policy VS School Reality

In Cyprus, criticism began when teachers' and parents' unions voiced concerns when the first two confirmed COVID-19 cases were announced on March 9, 2020. In fact, teachers were requesting the closure of school organisations across Cyprus, since the Ministry of Education did not proceed with all the necessary measures for the prevention of the upcoming pandemic. The following day, on March 10, 2020 the government announced suspension of the operation of all schools levels (public and private) for a number of days, but only in the Nicosia province, the capital of Cyprus. According to the Ministry of Education, this was deemed appropriate for precautionary reasons since the first two confirmed cases were reported in Nicosia. This sudden and, to some extent, misplaced decision triggered parents' reactions around Cyprus, since that decision was considered to be in favour of protecting students only in Nicosia, rather than students all around the island. However, the following day the Ministry of Education was quick to revoke the initial decision by suspending all schools in Cyprus from Friday, March 13, 2020. This decision was taken due to pressure exerted by the parents' and teachers' unions. The decision to provide a three-day margin until March 13 aimed to assist working parents to make any necessary arrangements for the care of their children who would stay home. This decision once again led to reactions, since this three-day margin was not taken into account when the Ministry initially decided to suspend the operation of schools in Nicosia. As a result, most parents around the island did not send their children to school from the very next day.

With the school closures, in a matter of days the definition of the teaching and learning process in Cyprus was transferred from the well-known conventional context to the distance/online context. In fact, the Ministry of Education was called upon to manage an unprecedented situation and help coordinate efforts to provide a quality distance/online education. Specifically, the Ministry of Education together with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and, Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, began a close collaboration in order to implement the e-learning education process across schools. However, this surprising and unexpected shift from conventional teaching to the new distance/online teaching and learning reality led the Ministry to a partial confusion, even if the Ministry was trying hard to address this challenge. This result was not surprising, as it is completely rational and justified to be confronted with various problems and obstacles after a sudden and unforeseen change in the environment.

However, what was not justified was the lack of immediate direction that the Ministry should have provided, being a centralised education system. Specifically, Cyprus has a centralised

education system and the coordinated efforts and guidelines in a country that applies such a system means this system must provide structure and guidance, as schools are not used to operating on their own. In the case of Cyprus, this did not work very well. At the same time, as a counterpoint to the centralised education system in Cyprus, local factors were not taken into consideration. Students, especially in schools with low socio-economic status (SES), were called upon to manage the inflow of new knowledge and information through the use of their computer (those, of course, who have the necessary equipment) in their own home. The importance of contextual factors that affect school organisations are supported by research conducted in Cyprus (see Pashiardis 2014b; Pashiardis, Brauckmann & Kafa 2018a, 2018b; Schwarz & Brauckmann 2015).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has announced that all teachers will continue to teach their course content according to the provided school curriculum in this new distance/online learning process. In fact, teachers were obliged to follow the school curriculum, where possible, something that would burden teachers with further preparation during this new learning environment. On the contrary, in the German-speaking countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland, teachers were asked to teach content that had already been taught in the classrooms and that new teaching content was not intended as a solution (Huber & Helm 2020). This may have been a wiser decision, as this would not create further difficulties and stress for teachers who were trying to prepare their course content based on this new distance/online teaching process. Also, the Ministry of Education announced that the course content covered in this online learning process will not be considered for students' final examinations. On the contrary, students' final examinations will only include what was already taught in the classroom up until the middle of March (A. Chrysostomou, Coronavirus: e-learning in state schools fully operational by Thursday, *Cyprus Mail*, March, 24, 2020).

Cyprus Education System (Centralisation and Trade Unionism) VS School Reality

Following, in relation to the main obstacles in this new digital learning challenge across school organisations in Cyprus, a very important obstacle was the large number of circulars, as a consequence of the centralised education system. Specifically, circulars on a daily basis provided teachers with various instructions and announcements, something that led to confusion because it seemed as if a 'straight-jacket' was imposed on everybody, irrespective of local circumstances. Also, these circulars were informing teachers about the various decisions and guidelines taken by the Ministry, whilst most of the time these decisions included the cancellation or differentiation of previous circulars that had already been provided and supposedly implemented by teachers. Unfortunately, the circulars rendered the situation problematic for most teachers.

In addition to centralisation, the Cyprus education system is characterised by strong trade unionism and conservatism (Pashiardis 2014a). These affected school teachers' perceptions

and work performance. Trade unionism is considered to be an important part of the education system in Cyprus and the resistance to change both by school staff and trade unions might be considered an obstacle, due to the conservatism which characterises Cyprus society (Pashiardis 2014a). Indeed, most of the time the trade unions, through regular announcements, called upon its members not to implement the circulars provided by the Ministry of Education. Thus, in reality school principals and teachers were operating in a 'dual world' of confusion between circulars from the Ministry and directives opposing these circulars by the Teachers' unions.

Existing Public and Private Support Channels for Teachers and Students

Nevertheless, we need to recognise the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Education as the transition to remote learning was complicated. Examples of this support include:

- Providing access codes for specific online programmes for over 110,000 students across Cyprus.
- Providing both parents and students with all the relevant information through the schools about the new e-learning environment and how students could participate.
- Helping school principals, in collaboration with teachers, to develop a plan, based on the school curriculum which would be adapted to the new circumstances.
- Provision by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, whose main activities focus on teachers' in-service training, of training for all teachers in the Microsoft Teams application (MS Teams). This was used in the e-learning process across Cyprus.

In conjunction with the above, we must point out that any shortages of students' equipment or lack of internet connectivity were addressed mostly from private initiatives. For instance, EPIC, a private telecommunication company, as part of its social programme #NoOneAlone, joined forces with the Ministry of Education and offered free internet access to 230 families in need (Press Release, Epic offers free internet access to students, *Cyprus Mail*, April, 24, 2020). Also, another private company, the Olympia Group, which operates electronic and other stores around Cyprus, handed to the Ministry of Education over 1,300 digital tablets worth 170,000 euros (Press Release, 1,300 tablets from Olympia group to the Ministry of Education, *Cyprus Times*, May, 24, 2020). The tablets were distributed to schools in order to be used by primary school students who needed them with regards to the distance learning process. Finally, it is worth mentioning that regional school boards decided to offer 0.5 per cent of their budget for the immediate purchase of tablets to support students.

The Reopening of Schools

Based on a decision by the government and the Ministry of Education, the reopening of schools began almost two months later, after the expert group advised that the disease was in recess on the island. Graduating students attended schools from May 11, whilst the rest of

the students returned to schools on May 21. Specific protocols, precautions and rules were provided to school principals and teachers, whilst students attended classes in rotation, every other day, in order to keep the social distance needed in classrooms. However, once again the trade unions complained that the Ministry of Education had not been specific on the reopening of the schools and many of their questions were unanswered. At the same time, parents and teachers criticised the government and the Ministry, saying that there was a lack of protection for students and teachers. In fact, on May 16, four new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed among students and staff members. However, schools all over Cyprus continued to operate, whilst a sample of 20,000 students and staff at schools were tested for COVID-19, with priority given to schools where positive cases had been reported (A. Chrysostomou, Coronavirus: tests begin on all students in schools where positive cases found, *Cyprus Mail*, May, 18, 2020).

School Principals and School Leadership in a Digital Educational Context

With that being said, it is very crucial to acknowledge the important role of school principals and highlight the salient aspect of leading, coordinating and facilitating this new digital learning context. In the case of Cyprus, the Ministry of Education organised some distance learning meetings with school principals in order to inform them with regards to the health protocols upon the return of the students in schools. However, in a larger context the important role of the school principal in this current situation was omitted. Although the physical presence of a school principal is undeniably important, in this case the effort to control and coordinate the whole distance/online learning process is catalytic and equally important and school principals should have had more support from the Ministry of Education to coordinate this abrupt change. Specifically in our case, school principals had to record all the teachers' names who faced various health problem and were vulnerable to the disease, to observe teachers' promptness to engage in the new e-learning process, as well as to record students' lack of technological equipment during their online lessons. Therefore, based on the instructions provided by the Ministry of Education, school principals were called upon to coordinate and support this overall distance learning process. Based on that, school principals must promote elements of proper organisation and structure or, in other words, to promote a concrete structuring leadership style (see Brauckmann & Pashiardis 2011; Pashiardis 2014b) which includes aspects of providing clarity, direction and coordination to this new digital learning context. According to Pashiardis & Johansson (2020) the structuring leadership style points out the important aspect of a school's structural organisation, including the proper use of time and space, as well as how tasks are assigned, facilitated and performed.

However, the main task that a school principal has to perform these difficult and strange days is mainly related to the concept of leadership. So in addition to the managerial role, a school leader is the one who supports teachers morally and emotionally. A school leader is the one

who communicates, supports and motivates teachers, with whatever difficulties they face and to carry out the cumbersome tasks assigned to them. The frustration and isolation that most teachers were facing during these challenging times in Cyprus and all over the world required the school leader's social presence even from a distance. Therefore, in this new context a school leader must create various communication channels by using social media, by creating 'online office hours', as well as by creating texting groups through mobile phone applications that could support and facilitate teachers' work, etc. In general, it is of importance to set up a digital space community where teachers can ask their questions and be answered by their school leader, as well as by other fellow teachers.

Conclusion

Taking everything into account and as a concluding note, the Ministry of Education in Cyprus declared that distance education will soon be enshrined in law by the Cyprus government (P. Prodromou, Minister of Education, Distance education will soon be enshrined in law, *Paideia News*, May, 18, 2020). At the same time, educational policy and various important stakeholders in Cyprus must realise the salient aspect of 'change' in the Cypriot centralised education system. First and foremost, school organisations are formed by local contextual elements which, in turn, shape school leaders' leadership practice (Pashiardis & Johansson 2020). Therefore, a school principal's partial autonomy in Cyprus' schools, depending on the school's needs, will lead to better and more effective results both in the conventional and in this new digital learning environment. After all, and putting it simply through the words of Charles Darwin, 'It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change.'

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Ensuring Learning Continues During a Pandemic

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Abstract: *In the volatile, uncertain, and complex environment of the 2020 pandemic, education systems, school leaders and teachers must be ready to respond, adapt and even re-shape the context to ensure that student learning continues. In this paper, we analyse the Singapore Ministry of Education's response to the 2020 pandemic. We propose that two leadership constructs explain the leadership provided: contextually responsive leadership and an ecological perspective of leadership. Our analysis reiterates the importance of the teachers' role in working with and encouraging their peers, particularly when changes are required in the teachers' instructional practice, such as the use of technology.*

Keywords: Contextually responsive leadership, ecological leadership, distributed leadership, Singapore schools

Background

As a small island-state with no natural resources, Singapore has always been exposed to external forces. Consequently, there exists a cultural mentality that we need to constantly adapt and innovate to survive as a nation. The underlying philosophy of Singapore's first info-communication masterplan for education (1997-2002), which continues to drive our later masterplans (2003-2008; 2009-2014; 2015-present), is that education should continually anticipate the future needs of society and work towards fulfilling those needs (Lee 2008).

This background is important as it is illustrative of the Singapore Ministry of Education's leadership in continuing 'to scan the horizons and understand the future needs and challenges that Singapore and our students will face (Ng 2015). The Ministry and schools were able to respond in the ways they did to the COVID-19 pandemic because of Singapore's long-term investment in building our schools' and homes' technological infrastructure, developing school leaders' capacity to harness technology, developing our teachers' capacity to use technology for teaching, and developing our students as future-ready learners.

Learning From the Past in Preparing for the Future

The COVID-19 pandemic is not Singapore's first experience with a medical crisis. In March 2003, Singapore was hit by SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). The impact on schools at that time involved a shorter period, with all primary schools, secondary schools, junior colleges and centralised institutes closed from March 27 to April 6. By May 30, the World Health Organisation declared Singapore SARS free.

Despite the short time frame, the SARS experience left an indelible impact. In response, the Ministry of Education (MOE), Singapore, initiated plans to minimise disruptions to learning should schools need to be closed again. Since the late 90s, the Ministry supported schools to set up learning management systems, initially procured from vendors, that schools could use for technology-facilitated lessons and periodic home-based learning (HBL). These different learning management systems evolved to become the Singapore Student Learning Space (SLS) in 2017, MOE's own learning portal, which comes with curriculum-aligned resources developed by the Ministry. MOE also continued the professional development of teachers to enable them to harness the affordances of technology for educational purpose.

Besides encouraging schools to implement HBL, MOE institutionalised protocols which started during SARS, such as the taking of students' and staff's temperature at the beginning of each term, after the school holidays. As the Minister of Education, Mr. Ong Ye Kung, wrote in his Facebook post on January 22, 2020, schools have measures in place since SARS to ensure the safety of students and staff and are 'ready to activate them if the situation requires it'.

Responding With Deliberation and Ingenuity to the Context

Reed and Swaminathan (2016) coined the concept of a contextually responsive leadership (CRL). They proposed three tenets of CRL: first, leaders need to take into consideration the context that they are leading, both at the school level and beyond; second, leaders must use creative ingenuity to address contextual needs and the needs of diverse stakeholders, finding workable solutions to complex problems; finally, leaders need to achieve a balance between transformational leadership and transactional leadership, taking incremental steps and making smaller changes, while maintaining a more ambitious goal.

We propose that MOE (Singapore) demonstrated CRL, particularly the first two tenets, in their various decisions related to COVID-19. In March 2020, around 8,000 parents signed a petition to close schools in Singapore, noting that many countries had done so. It would have been easy for MOE to give in to this pressure and close schools. Instead, the Ministry reminded the public of the needs of a specific segment of society, families whose parents need to work and cannot afford alternative childcare arrangements. MOE explained that schools serve as pillars for 'the most vulnerable members of our society' (March 27 Facebook) and thus should be kept open for as long as possible, so that learning continued.

Nevertheless, responding to the national rise in COVID-19 cases and the need to prepare schools and parents should there be a need for school closure, MOE came up with a creative

interim solution, activating on April 1 a blended learning model of one day a week of home-based learning for all students. The rationale was to prepare parents and students for more days of HBL should the COVID-19 situation worsen (One day of home-based study a week, *The Straits Times*, 28 March, 2020). At the same time, this one day a week of HBL enabled teachers, the other main group of stakeholders, to test run HBL with their students.

The Ministry's progressive and calibrated responses to the evolving COVID-19 situation meant that schools managed to stay open until April 8, one day after Singapore implemented nation-wide circuit breaker measures, which have similarities with lockdowns in other countries, with people who can work from home required to do so. This meant that by the time schools were closed, many parents were at home to supervise their children's home-based learning. However, as usual, MOE anticipated the needs of its diverse stakeholders. For parents who needed to go to work, and for students whom schools assessed would benefit from attending school, schools remained open so that learning could continue for these students. Furthermore, anticipating that students in families with lower social economic status might not have access to computers, schools loaned their notebooks and worked with the community to source for additional notebooks to loan to these students.

Besides considering the needs of parents and students, the Minister of Education considered the needs of the teachers, also key stakeholders. The Minister reminded the public that teachers are also parents of young children. Thus, he asked for parents' understanding during HBL when some teachers may not be able to give immediate replies to their students' queries (Families all set for home-based learning, *The Straits Times*, April 8). In deciding whether to extend HBL when the government extended the circuit breaker to end one month later on June 1, MOE decided to bring forward the June holidays instead, explaining that it would be 'better to let everyone have a break from this intense [HBL] period' (April 21, Facebook), especially the teachers who needed 'some time to rest and recharge' (May 2, Facebook).

Throughout the evolving COVID-19 situation, MOE kept its larger goal of learning for students in sight, while considering the needs of diverse stakeholders in coming up with viable solutions: parents who had the means to keep their children at home, parents who had to work and had no child-care arrangements for their children, teachers who needed to prepare and conduct HBL while having to take care of their own children who were at home, and students who had problems accessing HBL.

Communicating Rationale, Listening to Stakeholders and Showing Empathy

As the public face of MOE, the Minister of Education has a Facebook profile which he uses to communicate with teachers and parents. In his postings, he observed that we should not let fear dictate our lives and outlined reasons for not suspending schools too soon. Periodically, he acknowledged questions from concerned parents about MOE's decisions and worked with MOE to provide answers to their top questions. In explaining the ministry's plan to

progressively bring students back to schools, he assured all that schools were taking 'whatever precautions we can to ensure the well-being of all students and staff'.

The Ministry of Education also reaches out to parents, teachers and students through the MOE Facebook profile and other digital and non-digital means. A mobile application, Parents Gateway, was launched in January 2019 (GovTech - <https://www.tech.gov.sg/>) as a one-stop platform for schools' and parents' communication. Responding swiftly to the continual changes in the COVID-19 situation, MOE came up with Parent Kits to assist parents in supporting their children's HBL, and later to share fun and meaningful activities parents could carry out with their children during the holiday period. A live FB session was held on May 23 for parents to raise their concerns about school re-opening on June 2, 2020. To inspire the teachers, innovative HBL lessons designed by their peers were highlighted.

The use of social media, such as Facebook, to keep in touch with the ground, and to communicate with different stakeholders, both parents and teachers, enabled MOE to monitor and nimbly respond to contextual concerns and needs.

Working With the Community and as a Community

As observed by Crow and Scribner (2014), the context which school leaders need to work with lies beyond the school to include the larger community, with the need for principals to form community partnerships to support their students' learning. Similarly, an ecological perspective of leadership recognises that schools are situated within a nested context of ecological systems (Toh, Jamaludin, Hung & Chua 2014), requiring leadership to be practised by stakeholders at various ecological levels, including the macro community and the micro teacher levels, particularly when dealing with adaptive challenges which require untried, experimental ways to adapt (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner 2005).

In the Singapore context, MOE and schools work closely with various government agencies to support students' learning and well-being. One example is the Infocomm Media Development Authority's (IMDA) NEU PC Plus Programme which complements schools' loan of devices to students. This programme started in 2006 and aims to help low-income families with school-going children own a new computer with Internet access. Over the years, IMDA has reviewed and increased the qualifying income cap for this initiative, later including an option of a subsidised second PC for families with three or more school-going children. IMDA provides leadership to support students' use of technology through the provision of resources, continually reviewing its policies in response to changing contexts.

As Singapore's circuit breaker continued, schools realised that their concern about students' learning turned out to be the least of their problems. When parents started to lose their jobs, community partners, such as 'Food from the Heart', stepped in to work with schools or independently on their own to provide food packs (Singapore schools step up to help needy students, families, *The Straits Times*, May 2, 2020). In an ecological perspective of leadership, leadership emerges as agents in interdependent networks mutually engage issues.

At the micro level, there was evidence of teachers supporting one another. When teachers who returned from overseas during the March holidays had to observe 14 days leave of absence, staff who were working in the Ministry returned to schools to support schools who had many staff on LOA. During HBL, teachers worked together, through the MOE networked community on Facebook, to lead in designing and sharing HBL lessons with the fraternity. Known as the Singapore Learning Designers' Circle (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sglearningdesigners/>), the community grew exponentially to over 15,000 members within a few months of the COVID-19 situation.

Barriers to Home-Based Learning

Research has focused mainly on the use of technology within a school context, with two barriers identified (Ertmer 1999). First-order barriers refer to accessibility to hardware and software, network infrastructure and technical support. This barrier has largely been addressed in Singapore, with every teacher provided with a computer notebook, and with the setup of computer laboratories or mobile laboratories with broadband access in schools. However, for students to participate in HBL during COVID-19, consistent access by students becomes critical and this can be problematic in poorer households or in families with a big number of school-going children. Although MOE loaned out more than 20,000 computing devices and 1,600 internet-enabled devices, the COVID-19 situation showed up how inequality affects children outside school. For children, beyond the first-order barrier of access, some also faced poverty, domestic violence, lack of space, limited parental support and limited access to other educational resources (COVID-19 can widen gaps, *The Straits Times*, May 21, 2020). Recognising that providing students with access to technology, and through technology to continual learning, is a key strategy to keep social mobility alive, all secondary school students will receive a personal laptop or tablet for learning by 2021, seven years ahead of the original target of 2028 (Each secondary student to get learning device by next year, *The Straits Times*, June 18, 2020). This timely response accentuates MOE's willingness to make changes to policies to reshape context when the situation highlights a need for change.

The second-order barrier (Ertmer 1999) refers to teachers' use of technology; it includes teachers' beliefs about computers in education and their willingness to use technology. In an ironic way, this barrier was overridden in the face of COVID-19. Teachers basically had no choice but to respond by rolling up their sleeves and working with peers to design one month's equivalence of home-based learning, incorporating a blend of online and offline learning. Teachers also generously shared these lessons with the fraternity, providing leadership in a difficult situation. Variations in teachers' competency in adapting the use of technology to the instructional needs for different contexts resulted in variations in the quality of students' HBL experiences (Covid-19 pandemic hastens Smart Nation drive, *The Straits Times*, May 21, 2020). Recognising teachers' difficulties in designing HBL, which involves designing for both synchronous and asynchronous learning, MOE will be reviewing ways to

enhance teachers' capacity to blend classroom and digital learning (Now is a good time to reopen schools, *The Straits Times*, June 3, 2020).

Conclusion

Two leadership concepts appear to explain the leadership provided in Singapore in our educational response to the Covid-19 pandemic: contextually responsive leadership and an ecological perspective of leadership. Both concepts view leadership as needing to respond and adapt to shifts in contexts.

The literature suggests that context-responsive leaders are not confined by the contexts in which they work. They decide what is important and are able to rise beyond the immediate context to a larger goal (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson 2011; Drysdale & Gurr 2017), shaping the context where necessary (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins 2008). The Ministry of Education, Singapore, despite the uncertainties arising from COVID-19 and pressure from some parents, was clear that it was important to keep students in school for as long as possible, not just for their learning, but also for their social-emotional well-being. Thus, MOE explored creative alternatives to immediate school closure, such as the once a week home-based learning. When schools were re-opened on June 2, 2020, they similarly adopted an initial mix of onsite learning and HBL for different grade levels, reducing the risk of infection while helping students to progressively regain their lives.

Clearly, leadership to respond to a pandemic cannot be provided by an individual. While the Minister of Education is the face of the Ministry, and should be both heard and seen in providing leadership (Drysdale & Gurr 2017), leadership is required at the various ecological levels (Toh et al. 2014), from the community to the Ministry to schools to the teachers. While the Ministry provides the direction, and schools the supporting structures, teachers are ultimately the ones who design and facilitate the learning experience for the students. Research has consistently shown that teachers need to be actively involved in influencing their peers to change, particularly when educational reforms require changes in teachers' instructional practice, such as the use of technology (Ho, Chen & Ng 2016; Tay & Lim 2016). The COVID-19 situation shows that our teachers were able to work collaboratively to adapt to the crisis, with teachers who were more competent in designing HBL emerging as leaders and motivating their peers to explore more innovative pedagogies in implementing HBL.

In brief, a long-term investment perspective needs to be adopted by leaders at the country and school levels towards educating students to be more self-directed and self-regulated as change and uncertainty are the only constants in the future world. While maintaining a long-term perspective, since change is a constant, leaders also need to be ready to respond to changes and re-shape the context where necessary.

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Leadership in Times of Pandemics: Reflections From Singapore

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic is compressing the timeline for Singapore's digital transformation in education. Reflecting on the implementation of Home-Based Learning (HBL) during the pandemic, we examine three barriers that inhibit digital transformation and technological implementation in education with leadership considerations: the first order barrier is infrastructural and can be mitigated by leadership foresight; the second order barrier concerns design capabilities of teachers which can be mitigated by tight-but-loose calibration; and the third order barrier deals with sustainability which can be mitigated by ecological leadership. The tight-but-loose calibration optimises the 'tight' system-led innovations such as Student Learning Space (SLS) for efficient deployment and for equitable access of high quality online resources for students; and 'loose' opportunities for teacher-led innovations on learning designs within and beyond system-led innovations to nurture teacher agency and professionalism. We posit that ecological leadership is key to sustaining deep change together with the 'tight-but-loose' system calibration.*

Keywords: Online learning, system leadership, ecological leadership, tight-but-loose calibration, home based learning, digital transformation

Introduction

As we reflect on the current pandemic, we come to grips with human mortality and the frailty of humankind. Despite our technological and scientific advancements, previously unshakeable billion dollar institutions and industries like airlines, tourism, and oil are now teetering on the verge of bankruptcy in a matter of months. In these uncertain times, we really develop the latitude to come to an accounting of what matters more than others. There is an urgent need to prioritise what is crucial and what is urgent. This prioritisation is inextricably linked to good leadership and courageous action.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis, it also presents opportunities. Since its outbreak, Singapore has been both lauded and vilified in the news. Our strong governance and courageous action by our leaders to do what is right to flatten the curve, even in the face of what is unpopular, has stood us in good stead in terms of combating the virus and making

sure life goes on. The Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Heng Swee Keat (2020), in his parliament address made reference to a McKinsey (2020) study showing that five years of digital transformation had been compressed into eight weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With Home-Based Learning (HBL) being part of the new normal, the timeline for digital transformation in education will be compressed as well. In this paper, we delve into observations on the ground and our reflections on technology-mediated HBL that schools have implemented swiftly.

The general public may perceive three gaps associated with digital transformation in Singapore education arising from the HBL episode recently: a lack of resource equality; perceived variations in how teachers engage students in HBL; and inadequate alignments between central agencies and local partnerships. All three perceived gaps indicate the need to think more deeply about how to sustain digital transformation in education where leadership is imperative. We weave these leadership tenets within our recommendations on overcoming barriers to technological-cum-curriculum integration.

In terms of resource equality, especially for low income families, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has loaned out over 20,000 devices (MOE 2020a) in addition to opening school premises for students who need additional support (with more than 4,000 students continuing to go to school during COVID-19 circuit breaker period according to MOE, reported by the *Channel News Asia*, April 20, 2020). In terms of teacher variations, MOE has, for the last decade, been working to heighten teacher capacity for use of education technology (EdTech). In terms of partnerships with parents, a substantial effort has been put in place by the MOE recently to connect with parents and prepare them for home-based learning. These efforts include the establishment of school-home partnership guidelines; up-to-date information on back-to-school arrangements, national examinations, cyberwellness, and other advisories.

Extant literature identifies three barriers influencing EdTech implementation and digital transformation in education: the first order, which is infrastructural in nature; the second order which speaks to the design competencies of those who provide for learning and instruction, in other words, the design abilities of teachers and how they use technology effectively (Ertmer 1999); and the third order, which concerns the sustainability of interventions or implementations (Hung et al. in press), including sustaining design thinking by teachers (Tsai & Chai 2012).

Managing the First Order Barriers: Leadership Foresight

MOE's development of infrastructure and resources for schools, such as the Student Learning Space (SLS) to be deployed system-wide, has narrowed the inequality gap in schooling. The SLS is an online learning portal that allows all students to have equal access to quality curriculum-aligned resources (MOE 2020b).

But when learning has to take place at home during a pandemic, inequalities in society continue to manifest. This is especially true for students from low income families who may have fewer supportive resources and peer support at home. Schools can provide additional infrastructural resources but they are not able to eliminate social inequality. Fortunately, even before the pandemic, MOE had accelerated the provision of laptops to all students, and all secondary school students would have their laptops by 2021 (MOE 2020a). Social Service Agencies (SSAs) have been working alongside schools in providing support for low income families (MOE 2019, 2020c). The launch of the 'smart nation' blueprint seeks to extend broadband access for all households through a stipend. Most of these infrastructure plans are already underway to empower education to be a more effective social lever. These efforts need to be sustained and expanded through sustainable ecologically enabled partnerships.

The development of SLS, the plan to provide laptops to all students, and the smart nation blueprint highlight Singapore leadership's foresight and commitment in the digital transformation journey and that every child is enabled to be a life-long learner (MOE 2020c).

Managing the Second Order Barriers: Leadership for 'Tight-But-Loose' Calibration

Technology is not a silver bullet for education and digital transformation requires more than just resource provisions. Student-centred pedagogy requires teachers to be designers of learning, not just users of technology. For example, from time to time, a teacher may play YouTube videos in class to help students learn from video representations. Alternatively, the teacher may choose to use a flipped classroom design by asking students to watch the YouTube videos at home before the class and using the classroom time for deep discussion and problem solving. With the need to stagger students coming to school, and the starting times, for different cohorts due to COVID-19, flipped classroom design is an opportunity. The teacher's pedagogical design determines how technology is used to support learning. The perceived wide variations in how teachers engage their students during HBL suggests that while technology is essential and equipping teachers with digital tools is necessary, both are not sufficient for high quality learning to take place. Innovative pedagogies have also taken place, including doing science experiments in the kitchen at home, and playing music instruments together online in a synchronous fashion (MOE 2020a).

When we analysed EdTech implementations especially those afforded by research, we observed numerous teacher experimentation efforts enabled by funding sources provided for researchers and teachers. EdTech research and development has always been more expensive compared to non-EdTech based interventions, and they are usually 'fit for purpose', and hence, cannot be always scaled up across curricular topics. Insofar as pedagogical experimentations in classrooms are concerned in the past decade, EdTech affords new pedagogical opportunities. They enable teachers to experiment with diverse forms of pedagogies that enable differentiated instruction and assessments for learning. While the

system may be uncomfortable with too much diversity, teachers and schools need to recognise that teacher professionalism is crucial with transformations in education, be it digital or otherwise.

More recently, as part of the insight for digital transformation in Singapore's education, the MOE has been streamlining EdTech experimentations with greater consolidation, for example, through the development of SLS as system-led innovations. Understandably, consolidation aids in optimising and harnessing bottom up teacher and researcher efforts. During the HBL period, SLS has been instrumental in allowing for students to learn from home. Comparing with other education systems that struggle to revive educational television during COVID-19, the MOE's consolidation in terms of system-led innovations has paid off.

However our observations are that research in EdTech and teacher experimentations may have been sidelined, albeit not intentionally. Hence the fostering of bottom-up innovation in schools was also reduced. It might have particularly contributed to the perceived (wide) variations in how teachers engage students in HBL.

To optimise efficiency and innovation for better schooling practices including HBL, we propose that policymakers and school leadership consider making a constant tight-but-loose calibration (Thomson & Wiliam 2007). This includes the optimal calibration of tightening system-led EdTech innovations, such as SLS, for efficient development and deployment on the one hand, and loosening the space of innovation for teachers to innovate learning designs on the other hand. Loosening the space of innovation helps to continue nurturing teacher agency and professionalism, and develops their design thinking and related competency for innovative content cum 21st century learning.

We also need to calibrate teacher-led innovation *within* and *beyond* system-led innovations. This effort would create a pipeline of innovations *beyond* the tight SLS structure. Progressively, as SLS enhances over time, some of these teacher-led innovations may find their way into being integrated in SLS and others may remain outside the boundaries of SLS as useful supplements. These supplements may better prepare us for the next pandemic. In this regard, we argue for a need to revive funding opportunities for both teachers and researchers to experiment deeply with EdTech. Although more expensive in general, the payoff is that teacher competencies in design is developed through lived experiences and in demand-driven teacher learning opportunities, scaffolded and mentored by evidence based research and development. These competencies would then aid teachers in being more sensitive to learners of diverse profiles and needs. If we begin now, we can be better prepared so that in the next pandemic, the (wide) variation across teachers in HBL can be narrowed.

Managing the Third Order Barriers: Leadership for Ecological Sustainability

Sustaining digital learning requires a culture of innovation. It requires coordinated efforts at all levels, including school leaders and parents, not just MOE and teachers as we discussed earlier.

Singapore's endeavours in 'Future Schools' speak to this point. This former initiative focused on innovative teaching approaches that leverage fully on EdTech and novel school infrastructure designs to bring about more engaged learning for students (IMDA 2019). What we have observed is that for EdTech to be sustained and scaled within schools, school leaders played a crucial role in creating enabling conditions that sustain innovations, chiefly the competencies in teachers in the design of inquiry based learning, apart from hardware provisions such as laptops. School leaders also needed to intentionally integrate EdTech interventions as part of their school's mission, address curricular timetabling concerns, and develop innovation cultures and design thinking among teachers. These cultures go beyond preparing for exams, and support the 21st century learning policies of the MOE (2018). These principles are important for all schools in their respective digital transformation journeys ahead.

School-to-school networks, with the instrumental involvements of school leaders, have also been formed in enabling and sustaining a social-technological infrastructure for the support of teachers' innovations and learning, and how they can be scaled and enacted in classrooms across schools (Hung et al. in press).

Careful trade-offs are needed to redirect some efforts from content mastery to fostering broader 21st century learning in students, enabled by technology. These are continued efforts across schools, albeit at different progressions, in the overall school system. Parental support for bold movements in such curriculum calibrations is critical. Society at large should not over privilege academic performances in terms of grades.

To sustain digital transformation with coordinated efforts at all levels, we need education leadership practices that reflect ecological patterns, processes, relationships and organising principles. According to ecological leadership (Toh, Jamaludin, Hung & Chua 2014), an education system consists of multiple ecological layers, including individual (e.g. teachers and head of departments), microsystem (e.g. classroom culture), mesosystem (e.g. institutional structure and culture), exosystem (e.g. partners) and macrosystem (e.g. national policies and cultural values). Ecological leadership aligns efforts by mitigating tensions and paradoxes within and across the subsystems in the ecology, leverages collective wisdom and resources emanating from any level of subsystem and fosters the emergence of new adaptive capacities for sustainability. More specifically, the leaders at every ecological layer act as a mediating layer to broker up (e.g. more macro) and down (e.g. more micro) and to forge partnership for deep change to take place and sustain.

Conclusion

In times of pandemics, we encourage teachers, school leaders, and policymakers to seize the hybridity of school- and home-based learning as an opportunity for digital transformation. We highlight the importance of foresight in education leadership, particularly for envisioning and resource planning with equitable outcomes.

We propose, in addition to tight and coordinated efforts in developing system-led innovations like SLS, to afford greater autonomy and agency for teachers to innovate learning designs both within and beyond SLS. We also put forth ecological leadership that school leaders and teacher leaders can forge partnerships in the educational ecology, including parents and other social service agencies, to foster and sustain deep change in digital transformation. Cultivating a sustainable ecology of education partners is important going forward, and this need has been intensified and made more urgent due to recent pandemics.

As a highly effective and productive education system, Singapore expects to continue staying ahead of other systems. But we are typically accustomed to tight centralisation and less comfortable with loose decentralisation efforts which may be grassroots initiated, thus we need to better understand how the two complement. Concomitantly, we are also oriented to structure, and less attuned to agency. We need to cultivate agentic behaviour and see them as opportunities for the system. Finally, we are not greatly comfortable with fostering diversity (apart from academic performances). We need to know how to strike a balance between tight and loose structures and mechanisms. System leadership in education is required to know how the system is culturally oriented towards by its historical past and present, and to find the balances between tight and loose in its implementations, chart the directions with future goals in mind, and calibrate the educational change journey supported by data or evidence from all levels of the system.

Exploring the above questions for a tight-but-loose calibration helps to shift our leadership thinking progressively towards system and ecological leadership. Teacher leaders, school leaders, and system leaders need to work in tight alignment in calibrating system policies as they are implemented in school divisions, clusters, and schools respectively. At every level of the system, we need leaders with acumen and courage with sensitivities to learners' needs, and satisfying in particular the needs of the disadvantaged and marginalised is imperative.

To conclude, the COVID-19 pandemic has potential to compress the digital transformation in education. We highlight in this paper that leadership foresight in planning and developing system-led innovations and resources such as SLS is essential but not enough. To deepen digital transformation, teachers' abilities to design for high quality learning should not be sidelined. Constantly maintaining a tight-but-loose calibration between system-led innovations and teacher-led innovations and between innovations within and beyond system structures (such as SLS) is critical. We also posited that sustaining digital transformation needs ecological leadership. Leaders at every ecological layer need to be the mediator to broker up and down and to forge partnerships for deep change to take place and sustain.

Although the current pandemic is a crisis, it also presents opportunities for deepening the digital transformation process and journey in education for the betterment of all students. Dialogues around leadership, particularly its systemic and yet locally enabled implementations (Hargreaves & Ainscow 2015) with moral courage, in times of pandemics for digital transformation can help us see and act on these opportunities. These opportunities are enabling sustainable and enduring changes in our education system (MOE 2020a).

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Educational Responses to the Pandemic in Japan: Primary and Secondary Education Policy Issues

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Abstract: *In 2020 in Japan, schools were closed nationwide in March and reopened in June. During this closure period, almost no online classes were provided, which is attributed to the slow development of information and communication technology (ICT) systems in schools. In April 2020, the Japanese government announced a policy with relevant budgetary measures, to accelerate the development of the ICT environment in schools. While the government also discussed the possibility of shifting the start of the academic year from April to September, the prime minister deferred the September start decision due to the difficulties expected with hasty implementation. In the days ahead, schools are expected to continue operations despite the pandemic. To realise learning and teaching outcomes that correspond with the future of society, the task is to fully utilise ICT in schools.*

Keywords: Education policy, information and communication technology, leadership, schools

Introduction: Research Objective and Questions

The Abe administration's response to the novel coronavirus has been slow, and distrust has grown among the people of Japan. On February 27, with the purpose of ameliorating the distrust, Prime Minister Abe requested that all primary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, and special support schools in Japan close for a month starting on March 2 (S. Sugiyama, Abe's bold school closure move appears spurred by criticism of virus response, *The Japan Times*, February 28, 2020). The abrupt request rattled local governments and schools, but they complied and started preparing for the closures on February 28.

As a result of the closures, two major policy issues surfaced. The first is the underdevelopment of online learning systems. ICT development in Japanese schools is extremely delayed (NIER 2019: 9-10). Schools were therefore unsuccessful in switching to online learning during the closure period, and ICT development has since become a major

policy issue. The second issue involves the start date of the academic year. Because of the delayed learning caused by the closures, there is debate about changing the start of the academic year from April to September as a compensatory measure. Abe has expressed his intention to examine the issue (M. Koizumi, Japan school closures reignite debate on shifting academic year to September start, *The Japan Times*, May 4, 2020). Abe's interest has encouraged discussion among government and political party personnel.

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of primary and secondary schools of the policy measures taken by the Japanese government, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and boards of education to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How did the government and MEXT close and reopen schools in response to the pandemic?
- 2) What problems pertaining to online learning were revealed in Japan, and how is the ICT environment going to be developed in schools?
- 3) What is known about the discussion about moving the start of the academic year?

In this paper, existing policy documents and other relevant documents are analysed. The paper is unique because there is no preceding research, in either Japanese or English, on primary and secondary school education policies to cope with the novel coronavirus.

Government and MEXT Responses to the Spread of the Novel Coronavirus: From School Closures to Reopening

The day after the school closure announcement, MEXT issued a notice, 'Temporary Closures at Primary Schools, Junior High Schools, Senior High Schools, Special Support Schools, Etc. Responding to COVID-19 (Notice)', to superintendents of prefectural boards of education, prefectural governors, and heads of private schools. The outline of the notice is as follows (MEXT 2020d: 1-3):

- 1) guide students to avoid outings, stay at home, and apply appropriate hygiene measures;
- 2) take necessary actions to avoid learning delays, such as assigning proper homework;
- 3) show flexibility regarding the shortage of hours in the classroom so that students are not disadvantaged in terms of graduation and advancement;
- 4) pay sufficient attention to the infection of teachers, and if a teacher shows relevant symptoms, suspend the teacher from school; and,
- 5) ensure boards of education cooperate with welfare offices to secure places for students with disabilities.

By March 17, 97.8 per cent of schools nationwide were closed (MEXT 2020e: 26). Following the increase in the number of domestic infections in March, the government declared a state

of emergency on April 7. The declaration made it possible for prefectural governors to request and direct restrictions on the outings of citizens, the use of school facilities, events and entertainment activities, and so forth. Following this declaration, the nationwide school closure period was extended to May 2020, which again raised the issue of students' delayed learning.

Seeing the decrease in the number of infections as a result of restricted outings, the government lifted the state of emergency on May 25. Accordingly, schools were reopened step-by-step through local government decisions starting on June 1. On June 5, MEXT issued a notice, 'Guidelines for Sustainable School Administration and Comprehensive Package to Guarantee Student Learning Responding to COVID-19 (Notice)', to superintendents of prefectural boards of education and prefectural governors throughout Japan (MEXT 2020a). These policies include reducing the risk of infection, shortening the summer vacation period to compensate for delayed learning, applying the education curriculum in a flexible manner, increasing the number of teachers, allocating additional funds to schools for reopening, promoting ICT use and online classes, and adjusting the scope of questions on senior high school and university admission examinations. In accordance with these policies, boards of education formulated more detailed measures before reopening schools.

Problems Involved with Implementing Online Classes: Promotion of ICT Development in Schools

Online classes can guarantee learning during school closures, and they are commonly used by schools in many countries (A. Hata, Japan's students left behind as world embraces online classes, *Nikkei Asian Review*, April 22, 2020). However, as of April 2020, only 5 per cent of 1,213 municipalities in Japan implement two-way online classes in public schools (MEXT 2020b: 1). A reason for this is the delayed development of ICT in Japanese schools. According to the 2019 MEXT survey report, the number of students per computer was 5.4, 40.7 per cent of classrooms were equipped with a wireless local area network, and 52.1 per cent of classrooms were equipped with a large video display system (MEXT 2019). In response to this situation, MEXT formulated the 'Global and Innovation Gateway for All (GIGA) School Concept' on December 19, 2019, to promote the development of the ICT environment in public schools. The GIGA School Concept includes a plan to provide a computer to each student by the end of March 2023.

Amid the pandemic, the government regarded the lack of online classes as a problem and decided to accelerate the implementation of the GIGA School Concept. On April 7, the government decided to allocate about 229.2 billion yen to promptly guarantee education for all students through the utilisation of ICT (MEXT 2020c: 1), with the realisation of the GIGA School Concept by the end of March 2021. The budget was approved on April 30 at the 201st session of the Diet. The unexpected pandemic thus led to the approval of a budget that promotes ICT development in schools.

Academic Year Change Debate: Maintenance of April Start or Shift to September Start

To encourage studying abroad, the government has long been discussing shifting the academic year to be in line with that of the USA and Europe (Prime Minister's Office 2007: 7). However, this shift remains unrealised. To guarantee learning during the school closures due to the pandemic and to facilitate studying abroad, the governors of Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Osaka suggested shifting the current academic year start from April to September. In response, Prime Minister Abe expressed his intention to discuss the matter widely on April 29 (Abe open to delaying start of Japan's school year, *The Japan Times*, April 29, 2020).

However, the ruling parties of the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito Party announced their opposition to the September start, citing difficulties expected to accompany hasty system changes during the pandemic and the necessity of additional financial expenditure. The Japanese Educational Research Association also declared opposition to the September start (JERA 2020). The prime minister abandoned the idea of introducing the September start in the next academic year in favour of more prolonged discussion of the issue among government personnel (T. Osaki, Abe's proposal to shift the academic year to September faces increased opposition, *The Japan Times*, June 2, 2020). A major policy change such as altering the academic year start date requires careful preparation. Though the proposal invited debate, it was not a realistic policy to cope with the pandemic.

Conclusion: Promotion of School Education Innovation Triggered by the Pandemic

Schools in Japan were closed for three months, from March to June 2020. Since almost no online classes were provided during the closures, students' learning is now behind schedule. As the pandemic revealed the underdevelopment of the ICT environment in schools, the Japanese government initiated its development. The pandemic also triggered debate over shifting the start month of the academic year from April to September. However, a hurried change in the school system was extremely difficult to achieve, and the government had no choice but to discard the idea. As seen by the government's decision to develop the ICT environment in schools and the renewed debate over introducing a September start to the academic year, the pandemic has substantially influenced Japan's education policies.

Promoting ICT in schools will be necessary both to respond to the second and third waves of the pandemic and to nurture students' competency to meet the future society (OECD 2018: 3-7). In the wake of the pandemic, further promotion of the innovation of Japan's education system is expected. Appropriate education policies and budgets will be necessary, and the leadership of superintendents of boards of education and school principals will have significant impact.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper examined primary and secondary education policies responding to the pandemic in Japan. Since the targets of this examination were primarily relevant policy documents, the paper does not include an analysis of the actual situation of boards of education and schools. The plan for future research is to conduct a case analysis to illuminate how boards of education and schools responded to the pandemic.

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Collaboration, Communication and Wellness: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Manitoba Schools

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to increase challenges associated with the contemporary principalship as school leaders can often pay a high emotional toll for shepherding a school community through times of crisis. However, the pandemic can also be viewed as an opportunity to embrace new ways of thinking and change the nature of the work performed by principals and other school leaders. We begin by providing some contextual information about Manitoba's provincial school system and describe the provincial response to the pandemic. Then we document how responding to the pandemic has resulted in principals experiencing work intensification as they navigate new job demands and an expansion of current roles and responsibilities. We conclude by highlighting lessons learned and leadership ideas to assist school leaders tasked with navigating their school community through similar crises in the future.*

Keywords: Work intensification, school leadership, principals, Manitoba, COVID-19, wellness

Introduction

Even in ideal circumstances, the contemporary principalship has been described as a complex, evolving and multi-faceted position (Fullan 2014; Gurr & Drysdale 2012). Leaders often pay a high emotional toll for shepherding a school during a crisis, feeling burdened by their responsibilities to serve others and placing the needs of their school community above their own health and wellness (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski 2004; Berkovich & Eyal 2015; Fein & Issacson 2009). While the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to increase existing challenges, principals and other school leaders can also view it as an opportunity to embrace new ways of thinking and change the nature of leadership and administrative work in schools. We begin by briefly providing some contextual information about Manitoba's provincial school system and documenting its response to the pandemic. Then we describe how new policies and procedures enacted in response to the pandemic influence the kinds of

work that school administrators engage in to support staff, students and their school community during these uncertain and unprecedented times. We conclude by highlighting lessons learned and leadership ideas to assist school leaders tasked with navigating their school community through similar crises in the future.

Public Schooling in Manitoba

K-12 education is a provincial responsibility in Manitoba and throughout the rest of Canada (Pollock & Hauseman 2016). Manitoba's publicly-funded school system includes 37 school districts that serve 210,524 students (Manitoba Education 2019). Most of Manitoba's 37 school divisions are located in predominantly rural population centres. While Canada ranked sixth in the 2018 PISA results, there is a high degree of variability in student performance between Canada's 10 provinces and three territories (CMEC 2019). For example, the 2018 PISA results point to Manitoba being one of the lowest achieving school systems in the country (CMEC 2019). Without strong and effective school leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to exacerbate systemic inequities within Canada's provincial school systems and at the individual school-level throughout Manitoba.

Manitoba's System-Wide Response to the Pandemic

Manitoba's public school system response to the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in two stages. The first stage which involved closing schools, suspending in-person instruction and shifting to teacher-led online instruction began March 13, 2020 and lasted approximately 10 weeks. The second stage of the pandemic response began on June 1, 2020. Stage two focused on a partial reopening of schools and resumption of in-person learning prior to the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. Key milestones and decisions associated with this two-pronged public school system response to the pandemic are discussed in detail below.

Stage One: Suspension of in-person learning and shift to online instruction. On March 13th, 2020, the provincial government announced that all publicly-funded schools would be closing for three weeks on March 23rd (I. Froese & C. Gowriluk, No school for Manitoba K-12 students for 3 weeks starting March 23, *CBC News*, March 13, 2020). The initial three-week period of school closures involved a shift to providing teacher-led online instruction. By March 31st, the province decided that large-scale provincial assessments would be cancelled for the remainder of 2019-2020, and that schools would be closed indefinitely (Manitoba Education 2020). Despite the suspension of face-to-face classes and a move towards teacher-led online instruction, the provincial government took various steps to support student learning, including a commitment to provide each student with a report card at the end of the academic year. The final 2019-20 report card will inform students of whether they will be required to participate in recovery learning in 2020-21 and outline details regarding specific academic needs and outcomes (People for Education 2020).

Instructional goals were narrowed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year. Teachers shifted focus to providing students with formative assessment opportunities and the provincial government outlined revised student learning expectations. Student expectations for the teacher-led online learning component ranged from five hours of instruction for students in grades K-4, to a minimum of three hours per course for secondary school students in grades 9-12 (People for Education 2020). Teachers were encouraged to prioritise different areas of instruction based on their grade level, such as literacy and numeracy for grades K-8, or maintaining a focus on achieving course specific outcomes for Grades 9-12 (People for Education 2020). The provincial government also developed an online portal titled, 'My Learning at Home' to support distance learning provided by teachers while schools are closed during the pandemic (Manitoba Education 2020). The portal includes several academic and non-academic resources and developmentally appropriate activities for K-12 students.

Stage Two: Partial reopening. In Manitoba, the transition towards a partial reopening of schools and an attempt to provide face-to-face instruction began on June 1, 2020. However, schools and the nature of public schooling looked very different during the partial reopening. For example, social distancing measures that call for individuals to be at least two metres apart were enforced during the partial reopening, leading to condensed classes and an emphasis on small group classes and one-on-one instruction (W. Reimer & M. Blunt, Back to school in June: Manitoba students, staff head back to class for small group sessions, *Global News*, June 1, 2020). Classroom configurations were altered to adhere to social distancing measures and principals were required to ensure students were screened prior to entry.

Work Intensification: How the Pandemic Has Changed School Leaders' Work

The suspension of face-to-face classes and the move to teacher-led online instruction, followed by the subsequent shift to partially re-open schools by June 1, 2020 altered the work that principals and other Manitoba school leaders are expected to perform on a daily basis. Manitoba's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in principals experiencing work intensification as they have witnessed an expansion of current roles and responsibilities and are engaging in new job demands. The impact of work intensification has been particularly evident in the following four aspects of school leaders' work: a heightened sense of accountability and responsibility to support staff and students; learning new policies and job demands under tight timelines; a need to engage in transparent and consistent communication with all members of the school community; and modelling and promoting meaningful collaboration.

Heightened Sense of Responsibility and Accountability to Support Staff and Students

Manitoba's principals and other school leaders feel a heightened sense of responsibility for supporting staff and students and increased accountability for ensuring students' achievement of academic and non-academic outcomes, at a distance. During the first stage of the province's response to the pandemic, principals and vice-principals were tasked with supporting teachers as they shifted towards leading remote learning plans which included online learning and supplemental tasks that could be facilitated at home. Staff supports provided by school leaders involved ensuring that teachers are healthy, and possess a level of confidence engaging in new and different kinds of work. For example, principals need to ensure that teachers can effectively use technology to communicate with students and other members of the school community.

This heightened sense of responsibility and accountability was particularly evident in how principals aimed to support students during the pandemic. First, there was a push to maintain the health and wellbeing of students by providing nutritional and emotional support to families in the school community who were struggling. Some principals organised the delivery of mental health and wellbeing gift baskets to students experiencing difficulty not being able to socialise or see their friends during the shift to remote learning. School leaders also prioritised establishing routines with staff and students (e.g. conducting synchronous learning activities or checking in with students at the same time each day) so there was some sense of normalcy during stage one of Manitoba's response to the pandemic. Despite the pandemic providing a good opportunity to help and support families in the school community, there was concern as schools experienced difficulty contacting all of them. This heightened sense of responsibility to support staff and students intensified during the scramble to prepare schools to welcome students back to the classroom in early June 2020.

Learning New Policies and Job Demands Under Tight Timelines

The COVID-19 response involved the introduction of several new policies and procedures that required principals and school leaders to engage in new job demands. For example, Canadian school leaders were tasked with supporting teachers in the shift to online instruction, some of whom had little experience with this themselves. Managing the partial reopening of schools under social distancing and other public health guidelines provided an additional, unfamiliar challenge. In addition to learning new policies and job demands, the response to the pandemic also asked Manitoba's school leaders to complete work under extremely tight timelines. Schools, in an effort to be expedient with addressing needs, were often asked to quickly compile information for the district office surrounding the number of families in the school community needing food and emotional supports, or lacking devices to access online learning. These efforts were absolutely necessary to support the students and the school community. However, gathering information of this nature intensified school leaders' work as it involved increased phone calls, emails and home visits to inquire about

supports needed throughout the school community. Further, implementing new policies and procedures led to an extension of the workday. During stage one of the pandemic response, principals were tasked with ensuring that staff were completing their required tasks and activities while working remotely. In this way, the pandemic has elongated the work day for principals with additional responsibilities for accountability and finding ways to ensure effective, timely communications with staff.

Transparent and Consistent Communication With All Members of the School Community

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected event, and many of the new policies and procedures implemented to respond to the pandemic were being developed, ‘on the fly’. Communication with the school community has always been an important aspect of principals’ work. The shifting policy context and uncertainty that characterised stage one of Manitoba’s public school system’s response to the pandemic further highlighted the need for transparent and consistent communication with all members of the school community. Holding regular staff meetings responsive to new government announcements, along with weekly emails to the school community are two effective practices school leaders engaged in to maintain a high level of transparency. School leaders were also often placed in a situation where they did not have the answers. When they did have the answers, those could be subject to change based on the evolving advice of public health officials.

Modelling and Promoting Meaningful Collaboration

Despite many challenges, the shift to remote learning and subsequent partial reopening of schools presented principals with many opportunities to reflect upon their instructional leadership practices and develop innovative ways to collaborate remotely. For example, the way many schools have embraced a team approach has been astounding as staff that are well versed in the technology are sharing their knowledge by mentoring others. School support teams have also had the time to collaborate on the new and improved ways to address individual student needs in a meaningful way.

Lessons Learned

We conclude by highlighting lessons learned and leadership ideas to assist school leaders tasked with navigating their school community through similar crises in the future. These include valuing everyone’s contributions as well as establishing professional boundaries and modelling work-life balance. We also offer some thoughts on the nature of effective professional learning and describe the importance of leaders being flexible when faced with shifting and uncertain local policy contexts. Spreading positivity to buoy the spirits of staff and students is another lesson learned that may be useful for school leaders dealing with similar crises or tragedies in their school community.

Value Everyone's Contributions

Recognising the diverse proficiencies of individual staff members is essential during a crisis. This can be done by embracing strength-based approaches when distributing leadership or delegating tasks to capitalise on the skills and expertise of various staff members. It is important that school leaders listen to all voices in the school community so they have greater insight into the strengths and skills various individuals in the school community bring to the table.

Establish Professional Boundaries and Model Wellness

Working remotely through email and other online platforms gives the impression that principals and other school leaders are accessible and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Staring at a computer screen for more than eight hours each day to participate in remote meetings is not a healthy way for school leaders to approach their work. It can be difficult to recognise that sometimes it is best to slow down. To avoid burning out and succumbing to the negative mental and physical effects of work intensification, principals need to establish professional boundaries and model wellness. Discussing wellness during meetings and sharing various strategies and approaches for maintaining positive work-life balance can help staff and students understand that it is okay to prioritise self-care, such as making the time and energy to engage in regular physical activity. In addition to promoting positive personal outcomes, establishing professional boundaries and modelling wellness also lead to more focused work.

The Nature of Effective Professional Learning

Learning is often required to achieve goals and move forward in times of crises. The pace at which principals and teachers have learned to use new technology reinforces notions that effective professional learning can be directly embedded into usual instructional practices and is responsive to the contexts and conditions in which educators work (Leonard 2015).

Be Flexible

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and exacerbated many tensions people face on a daily basis. School leaders are encouraged to be realistic in their expectations of themselves and everyone else in the school community. It is important to maintain flexibility around expectations of families due to challenges they may be experiencing around employment, child care and motivating their child(ren) to participate in remote learning. It is important that principals demonstrate consideration toward staff and students, many of whom are using various means of remote technology for the first time. There has been a steep learning curve with respect to navigating online learning platforms and communicating through unfamiliar barriers.

Spread Positivity

Finally, it is important that principals and other school leaders stay positive while navigating crises, tragedies and other unprecedented events that influence their work and impact the school community. There are many ways that school leaders can assist with sustaining staff well-being by intentionally providing opportunities for collegiality and maintaining a sense of humour. For example, during stage one of the pandemic response, some principals implemented digital spirit weeks for staff to bring a sense of levity to an otherwise difficult situation. Encouraging the sharing of positive news and celebrating staff going above and beyond the call of duty to support students is another effective strategy for instilling confidence and optimism amongst staff. Finally, in lieu of a graduation ceremony, principals put time and energy into making uplifting videos for graduates and placing signs in front of their homes so they could be recognised by the community.

Conclusion

Even though Manitoba schools have partially reopened, the uncertainty that characterised stage one of the pandemic response is still evident as principals and other school leaders are left to wonder what public schooling in the province will look like in the future. One-on-one learning opportunities, small group instruction and other social distancing measures have been effective stop-gap solutions during stage two, but are not sustainable in the long term. However, school communities can rest assured that principals and other leaders have learned important lessons about the importance of collaboration, communication and wellness while working during the pandemic and will be ready to offer their expertise and support when/if faced with another crisis.

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School Principals and Students With Special Education Needs in a Pandemic: Emerging Insights From Ontario, Canada

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Abstract: *School principals are ultimately responsible for ensuring the delivery of programmes and services that students with special education needs (SEN) require. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the traditional delivery of these supports and principals are struggling with how to adequately support students with SEN. In this paper, I provide an overview of the ways in which principals in Ontario, Canada are attempting to direct services to students with SEN while working remotely. I consider some emerging insights into their experiences and what might be learned from a period of emergency remote learning. The conclusion provides an opportunity to consider lessons learned in other contexts and the particular need to ensure that students with SEN are central to long-term planning efforts.*

Keywords: Special education needs, school leadership, inclusion, work intensification

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic led to all schools being closed in Ontario, Canada in mid-March, 2020. The Ontario Ministry of Education instructed school boards to develop plans in the ensuing weeks for 'learn at home' through an emergency remote learning approach (Ontario unveils details of learn-at-home program, students out of school until at least May 4. *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, March 31, 2020). Emergency remote learning was a recognition that instruction and learning would not simply be transitioning into an online format but that a wide variety of strategies would need to be considered and incorporated to meet immediate student learning needs from a distance (B. Farhadi, Educating Ontario students during COVID-19. *Broadbent Institute*, April 9, 2020). Principals in the province – and the organisations that support them such as the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO), and l'Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) – clearly were confronted with a massive task. As a university researcher specialising in inclusion and school leadership, of particular

interest to me in this context was the question: How could principals support the educational programmes of those who are often the most vulnerable in schools, students with special education needs (SEN)?

By early April, as teachers began preparing to deliver educational programmes for students, one of the first steps that principals took was to encourage teachers to contact parents and guardians of students through phone calls. Principals often joined in these efforts. These phone calls provided an early opportunity to discuss specific needs that families were confronting. In some cases, these phone calls also provided a chance to document the technological needs that students' households required in order to engage in emergency remote learning. One of the most significant concerns that principals and school system leaders had was equitable access to educational programming as a result of the reliance on technology for programme delivery (C. Alphonso, Educators worry gap may grow for disadvantaged students stuck at home. *The Globe and Mail*, April 20, 2020).

As I interacted with principals across the province, I began hearing more examples of specific ways in which principals were leading the instructional programme for students with SEN. Principals frequently met with teachers and support staff to problem-solve and develop plans of action for supporting specific students. They sometimes drove to the homes of these students to provide devices that could access the Internet, assistive technologies such as alternative keyboards, and manipulatives that could be used in learning activities. Clearly, principals were leading the way in how to initiate and support educational programming.

After the immediate response in the early days of emergency remote learning, principals began to identify many challenges they and their staff were facing with supporting students with SEN. One principal summarised the challenges as, 'How to meet their [students with SEN] unique needs without some of the environment, schedule, transitions, equipment, and relationships that support daily learning.' The challenges were not static; they seemed to change daily. One of the more recent challenges, related to access to technology, has been the use of video-conferencing technology to support working one-on-one with students with SEN (K. Rushowy, Ontario teachers told to 'embrace' live video conferencing as school shutdown continues. *The Toronto Star*, May 8, 2020). Concerns about equity of access and privacy have prevented most efforts to engage in this type of support (ETFO 2020). Yet, in remote learning environments students with SEN often require video-conferencing to enable individualised supports. This is one of the emerging challenges of supporting students with SEN in the midst of the pandemic: How do we provide the supports students require while also adhering to legal, societal, and professional expectations such as ensuring privacy?

Lessons Learned in Supporting Students With Special Education Needs

I hold four national research grants (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) which focus on examining inclusive practices of principals (Sider 2019a; Sider, Maich

& Morvan 2017). Our research team has been particularly interested in examining a conceptual idea of how critical incidents inform the practices of principals in supporting inclusion for students with SEN (Yamamoto, Gardiner & Tenuto 2014). The pandemic is a critical incident on a massive scale. Since the end of April, 2020 I have been working with the Ontario Principals' Council – the largest principals' organisation in the province representing more than 5,000 principals – to better understand the experiences of principals as they navigate how to support all students in the midst of emergency remote learning. We are surveying and interviewing principals across the province to better understand their experiences in the pandemic. So what can we learn from their experiences? Here I share three emerging lessons: beliefs about inclusion, work intensification, and leadership nimbleness.

What Do We Really Believe About Inclusion?

The current situation is laying bare people's beliefs about inclusion. Principals are sharing many examples where they have made significant effort to support a child with a SEN. They have shared stories of teachers and support staff going out of their way to provide valuable engagement with students with SEN. The examples being shared illustrate that the vast majority of teachers believe deeply in inclusion. However, principals are also sharing examples of comments from a small minority of teachers who are reluctant to support students with SEN in this time. This comment is illustrative of this, 'The student never worked for me during the regular class. Why should I help them now?' These types of statements, which reflect a reluctant or resistant attitude, demonstrate the 'unfiltered' perceptions of some teachers with regard to inclusion. It is easier to indicate a belief in inclusion when traditional structures and specialised supports are in place; when the responsibility for supporting students with SEN is more explicitly and directly the responsibility of a teacher, as it is in the time of an emergency, deep-seated beliefs are laid bare (Johnson 2020)

The Work Intensification of Principals is Escalating

The work intensification of principals is well documented (e.g. Pollock 2016) and the pandemic has escalated the pressures of the position. Principals are incredibly hard-working, creative leaders who are working with their staff to adapt to the current situation and to provide the best supports possible for students with SEN. For example, principals have shared how they have worked with their teachers to find short-term solutions to support students who are medically fragile or with significant behavioural needs. In data collected from a questionnaire I developed with OPC during April and May, principals identified the following ways that they are supporting their staff in these types of efforts: Resource teachers and educational assistants are meeting daily with students by phone, loaning technology devices and providing instruction remotely on how to effectively use them, and distributing resource kits including puzzles, visual cards, and math manipulatives. Of more than 50 Ontario principals who completed the questionnaire, the vast majority indicated that the most

significant strategy they and their staff are using is daily or weekly phone contact with students and their families. This speaks to the importance of ongoing contact and relationships as primary, foundational aspects of care. This increased contact also leads to increased challenges in balancing work and personal responsibilities.

Principals themselves are trying to navigate the complex nature of life in a pandemic. Many have shared examples of their own struggles such as providing school leadership while working from home and supporting their own children and family. Many have expressed concern about the lack of work responsibility boundaries during this time, as one stated, 'I have completely failed at [boundaries between work and home] ... I am super accessible to staff and families.' This accessibility and support for students and families is remarkable. I am witnessing this in dozens of situations involving principals across the province. However, it does raise concerns for the mental health of principals who before the pandemic were already expressing concerns about the amount of work responsibilities they care for (Wang, Pollock & Hauseman 2018).

Nimbleness in Leadership

I have increasingly heard from principals and school system leaders that principals are having to focus more on school management rather than instructional leadership (C. Finn, Why school principals need more authority. *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2012). Aspects of management, such as establishing and ensuring organisational procedures, can be difficult to maintain and can become bureaucratic burdens in times of crisis. Principals are struggling with how to adapt to legislative and procedural expectations to ensure that the needs of all children are being met. They are also struggling with the amount of information that they are dealing with from school systems and government ministries. Yet through this, principals continue to provide nimble and nuanced leadership to schools. They have shared examples of how they are working with teachers and support staff to develop support materials for students. They are making multiple phone calls to students to walk them step-by-step through learning activities. Many are supporting families who are often overwhelmed with the needs of their child as well as the other stresses that have come with the pandemic. Principals are sharing examples of how they might spend an hour on the phone with a family and then transition to another family to support them before moving to yet another student need. Principals are identifying and responding to dilemmas and challenges on a daily basis. This reflects the types of nimble leadership skills that might not show up in organisational charts, policy memoranda, or even leadership competency and standard frameworks. As Gurr and Drysdale (2020) state, 'Good leaders are able to make sense of ambiguous situations' (p. 27). Nimbleness in leadership – being able to recognise and effectively respond to multiple urgent situations without significant input from others – is unfolding as a critical aspect of leadership in emergency situations.

Moving Forward: Considerations From Other Contexts

Emergency situations are not unique to the current pandemic. As I work with principals in Ontario, I have also been examining what we can learn from those principals who have worked in emergencies before the pandemic. Over the past 15 years, I have been engaged with research on inclusion and school leadership in contexts such as Egypt, Ghana and Haiti. Working in these contexts has clearly demonstrated to me that principals in difficult situations often rise to the challenges of their contexts (Sider 2019b; Sider & Jean-Marie 2014). Further, the leadership framework provided by Gurr and Drysdale (2020) provides excellent conceptual considerations in this area. So what can we learn from others who have experienced emergency remote learning?

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is a global network of organisations who work to provide quality education in emergencies and post-crisis recovery efforts. A recent webinar they hosted provided lessons of how schools have responded to other crises in the past including war in Kosovo, the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, and the recovery from the tsunami in Thailand and Sri Lanka (INEE 2020). Although the focus of the INEE has not been specifically on what principals do to support learning in these emergency settings, the examples the INEE has provided have reminded me that, although we think this is the first time the world has dealt with a massive emergency, it is in fact not. Others have dealt with emergencies that have severely disrupted education, sometimes for years. Perhaps this is a time when regions in the global North can look to those in the global South for case examples and lessons in effective practices to move from the initial period of emergency learning to longer-term planning.

One lesson we can learn is that those with SEN are often the first ones marginalised in an emergency and often the last ones re-integrated into schools (Stough, Ducey & Kang 2017). Avoiding this is critical not only for the students with SEN and their families but for society more broadly. As the person ultimately responsible for the educational programme of all students in a school – including those with special education needs – principals must consider the needs of students with disabilities first and then plan for other students. This basic premise of Universal Design for Learning – what is necessary for some is beneficial for all – will serve to ensure that all students are effectively supported in the time of emergency remote learning and beyond.

As we look to move from the immediate phase of engaging with emergency remote learning to increasingly online learning and some school-based supports, it is important to engage with research around these experiences. Key research questions going forward include:

1. What is the changing nature of principals' work in the pandemic and the ensuing phases of learning specifically for students with special education needs?
2. What lessons are being learned from this pandemic that will support school leadership and inclusion for future emergencies?

3. How might principals, researchers, and policy makers work together across provincial/regional and national lines for a collaborative, cohesive approach to inclusion in times of crisis?

These questions can serve as a framework for future work in this area. Principals are dealing with lots of uncertainty on how to help the students who are the most vulnerable and with the most significant learning challenges in a remote learning environment. There are no easy answers to these challenges but a research agenda that considers these questions will be vital to better understanding our current pandemic response and that which might inform our response in the future.

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Educational Responses to the Pandemic in India

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has become an historic threat in India like the entire world. The state governments across the country have temporarily shut down schools and colleges. This occurred at a crucial time for the education system, because university entrance exams, other competitive examinations, board examinations and nursery school admissions were held during this period. School and university closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also engender far-reaching economic and societal consequences. This paper considers educational responses to the pandemic by focusing on status, effect, educational responses, strategies and need to prepare the students for the post-pandemic situation.*

Keywords: School closure, university closure, online learning, virtual classes, Indian education, pandemic

Introduction

On June 28, 2020 the total coronavirus cases in India were 548,318 with 321,722 recovered and 16,487 deaths (MHA 29.6.2020, Covid-19 live, business-standard.com 30.6.2020). This has brought unprecedented challenges in India and education closures have revealed deep gaps in the overall approach to education. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has announced three successive lockdowns: March 25, April 15 and May 1 (MHA Order (22.5.20) Announcement of lockdown in India, *The Hindu*, published in Mumbai). The guidelines issued by the Indian MHA to the lockdowns have prohibited the operation of educational, training, research and coaching institutes. However, the MHA and the state governments have encouraged education through online provision (Nell Lewis, Corona virus lockdown could give online education a lasting boost in India, CNN Business, 25.5.20, 0910 GMT). Various state governments had taken similar steps even prior to the issuance of the MHA guidelines. Within the education sector the major board exams have been postponed, many boards have cancelled and promoted some of the classes, major entrance examinations along with government jobs examinations have been postponed. All schools and colleges have been shut down during the nationwide lockdown.

On the 12th May 2020 the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an overall economic package worth Rs. 20 lakh crore (10 per cent of the 2020 GDP) (*The New Indian Express*, May 13, 2020) and said that the COVID-19 crisis was an opportunity to achieve economic self-reliance. He stressed the importance of promoting 'local products' which he called 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' or 'Self Reliant India Mission' (Misra, U., PM Modi Self-Reliant India Mission Economic Package, retrieved from *The Indian Express*, May 14, 2020). The PM said that whilst the coronavirus will be a part of Indian lives for a long time, the nation can't remain confined by it. Nevertheless, the lockdown further extended to May 31, although there was some resumption of economic activity (Sitharaman, Nirmala (13 May, 2020) 'To spur growth': PM Modi's Atamanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, *Hindustan Times*, May 13, 2020, Published at New Delhi).

After the end of lockdown 4.0 on May 31, the central government left it to the states and union territories to decide on future restrictions in their jurisdictions. In lockdown 5.0 the centre decided that the educational institutes across the country will stay closed till July 31, and so schools and colleges may have to rely on online lessons (Vaishnavi Corona virus Pandemic To Bring New Educational Revolution In India, *Indian Express*, June 1, 2020).

In a memorandum (Government of India Office, 29/4/2020), the Union Home Ministry of India has asked all its officials to download the 'Aarogya Setu' app (a mobile application to help in breaking the chain of transmission of COVID-19). The government said that the officials who are categorised as high risk or moderate based on recent contact with infected persons should not come to the office. Such persons should self-isolate for 14 days until the status comes to low risk. Before starting for the office, they must review their status on 'Arogya Setu' and commute only when the app shows 'safe' or 'low risk' (Order 29.4.20). The order has been sent to all departments, ministries, cabinet secretariat and the prime minister's office. Central Board of School Education (CBSE) and different universities recommended the Arogya Setu app to all school principals and heads of the higher education institutions and Health Ministry protocol for immunity busting (NDTV 4/4/2020). APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University makes it compulsory to download the 'Arogya Setu' app for all students to take end of semester exams starting in July (recommendations of AKTU Examination Committee meeting 23.6.20).

Broad Education Responses

The Indian HRD Ministry directed schools and colleges to advise students to follow protocols developed by the Ayush Ministry to boost immunity and light diyas and candles on April 5 as advised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These protocols are being suggested to students as they are set to boost their immunity, which is immensely essential to fight off the novel coronavirus. As addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi (16.4.20), students may light a candle, diya or torch on their mobile for 9 minutes on April 5 at 9 pm to realise power

of light and to highlight the broad objective of which we are all fighting together. However, no one should assemble in colonies or anywhere outside their houses.

The structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies, was the first to be affected by these closures. Only a handful of private schools could adopt online teaching methods. Their low-income private and government school counterparts, on the other hand, have completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions. The students, in addition to the missed opportunities for learning, no longer have access to healthy meals during this time and are subject to economic and social stress. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future. A large number of Indian students – second only to China – enrol in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic (e.g. China, UK and USA) or with severe travel restrictions (e.g. Australia). Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.

With schools being locked down due to COVID-19, educators across the country were moved to virtual classes on Microsoft Teams to ensure 'Learning Never Stops'. Microsoft Teams not only enabled teachers and students to connect over video-enabled remote classrooms, but also provided a host of interactive and collaborative tools on a single platform (MHA 21, 5, 2020 Directive to Chief Secretary and Administrators regarding proper implementation of Guidelines). Given the digital divide, new shifts in education approaches have not only narrowed down equality gaps but also introduced new solutions for education and innovation.

Many schools, colleges and universities throughout the country are conducting online learning sessions with the help of virtual teachers and virtual platforms available (Gupta, V. Coronavirus Pandemic To Bring New Educational Revolution In India, *EDTECH*, March 19, 2020). The students from disadvantaged families or living in remote areas may not have access to smart phones, laptops to attend online classes or WhatsApp, digital divide, iCloud or indeed the internet even in the best of times.

Three Examples of School Education Responses

Following are the responses of two education institutions of New Delhi and a service provider:

British School, New Delhi

The British School (www.britishschool.com), New Delhi is a 75 year old educational institution. The school moved to Microsoft Teams even before the COVID-19 lockdown to enable its teachers and students to interact and collaborate in remote learning scenarios. The British School Director says platforms like Team allow a sensible teacher to be able to reach out to their classroom remotely and continue to interact.

The Ardee School, New Friends Colony, New Delhi

The head of the Ardee school, New Friends colony, New Delhi said that their mission has been to ensure that learning will never be interrupted, so in the beginning of the school session 2019 they got an Office 365 subscription for the entire school. It provided many tools for teaching and learning. When the Delhi government directed schools to close secondary classes as the city grappled with the unprecedented level of air pollution, the Ardee school moved its classes to Microsoft Teams to ensure that its students do not fall behind. The early experience enabled the school to swiftly deploy teams for the entire school in the current COVID-19 situation (contactusdelhi@heardeeschool.com.)

Live Online Tutoring by Vedantu

For supporting and cooperating with the state and national government authorities to put all necessary measures in place to ensure the continued well-being to all, 'Vedantu' provides online tutoring and offering support to students, parents and schools in New Delhi, Bengaluru, Kerala and Hyderabad by providing free access to its complete learning platform. In a statement issued, Vamsi Krishna CEO and co-founder of Vedantu said, 'At Vedantu, we believe online learning is a safe option in these risky and uncertain times. The students can study from the safety of their homes and avoid travel to public places. We are closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 and are here to assist students and schools with all their learning needs' (Vamsi Krishna, COVID-19 impact: Vedantu to provide free access to live classes, study material, test and assignments, Business Line, March 13, 2020).

Strategies to Overcome the Effect of COVID-19 on the Education Sector in India

Needless to say, the pandemic has transformed the centuries-old chalk-talk teaching model to one driven by technology. This disruption in the delivery of education is pushing policy makers to figure out how to drive engagement at scale while ensuring inclusive e-learning solutions and tackling the digital divide. The following multi-pronged strategies are necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term:

Ensure continuity of learning. Immediate measures are essential to ensure continuity of learning in different types of schools and universities. Open-source digital learning solutions and Learning Management Software should be adopted, so teachers can conduct teaching online. The DIKSHA platform with reach across all states in India can be further strengthened to ensure accessibility of learning to the students (DIKSHA E-Learning Portal for Teachers, Students and Parents, retrieved from <https://versionweekly.com>, May, 21, 2020). An e-learning portal and digital infrastructure for knowledge sharing platform was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in association with the National Council for Teacher (NCTE). It reaches across all states in India to ensure accessibility of learning to the students (e.governance source, May 21, 2020).

Inclusive Learning Solutions

Inclusive learning solutions were especially developed for the most vulnerable and marginalised learners. This strategy cultivates learning environments that are equitable and nurturing to every student with access to flexible learning choices. With a rapid increase of mobile internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85 per cent of households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalisation of education even in the remotest parts of the country (Richa, 12/6/2020, COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and strategies for education sector in India, Government of India, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Press release). This can change the schooling system to giving students and teachers multiple options to choose from. Many inspirational districts have initiated innovative, mobile-based learning models for effective delivery of education, which can be adopted by others.

Prepare the Higher Education Sector for Demand and Supply Trends

Strategies are required to prepare the higher education sector for the evolving demand and supply trends – particularly those related to the global mobility of students, faculty and improving the quality of higher studies in India. Further, immediate measures are required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs and research projects.

The Current Delivery and Pedagogical Methods

It is also important to consider the current delivery and pedagogical methods in schools and higher education institutes by seamlessly integrating classroom learning with e-learning modes to build a unified learning system. The major challenge in EdTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions (ET Government, Guidelines of Lock down 5.0, *Indian Express Daily News Paper*, 16/4/2020). Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmarks for online learning on offer by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms. Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.

Use of Indian Traditional Knowledge

Indian Traditional Knowledge is well known across the globe for its scientific innovations, values, and benefits to develop sustainable technologies and medicines. The courses on Indian traditional knowledge systems in the fields of yoga, Indian medicines, architecture, hydraulics, ethno-botany, metallurgy and agriculture should be integrated with a present-day mainstream university education to serve the larger cause of humanity (NITI Aayog, see niti.gov.in).

Need to Prepare the Students for a Pandemic Situation

The students, in addition to the missed opportunities for learning, no longer have access to healthy meals during this time and are subject to economic and social stress. The COVID-19 crisis will change the global outlook of Indian people, therefore, it is important to rethink about the type of education needs for better preparation of our young learners, for what the future might hold. These include:

1. Educating citizens in an inter-connected world.
2. Redefining the role of educators imparts knowledge, wisdom and technical skills. The role of educators will need to move towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society.
3. Teaching life skills needed for the future – creativity, communications and collaboration, emotional intelligence and effective teamwork.
4. Unlocking technology to deliver education with greater flexibility.

The lockdown has accelerated adoption of digital technology, a computer data management method, online education, professional learning skills, knowledge and internet connectivity of online systems.

In this time of crisis, a well-rounded and effective educational practice is needed for the capacity-building of young minds. It will develop skills that will drive their employability, productivity, health, and well-being in the decades to come, and ensure the overall progress of India.

Conclusion

To sum up, in COVID-19 the burden of running educational institutions, meeting costs, paying teachers, paying rents, upkeep of infrastructure and keeping the students engaged in learning from homes has now shifted to a significant degree on to educational institutions. The states may need to approach this with equal consideration for all stakeholders, as the situation progresses. Since restrictions on educational institutions will be one of the last ones to be lifted, governments will also have to take a holistic view with regard to scheduling academic year 2020-21 and admissions to college and entrance examinations thereafter, while ensuring that students from the lesser privileged sections of society, who do not have access to online, are not unfairly prejudiced.

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Managing Education in a Peculiar Environment: A Case Study of Nigeria's Response to COVID-19

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Abstract: *The global paradigm shift in the education systems of the world towards an increasing reliance on technology-based solutions in the wake of the unprecedented school closures worldwide portends challenges which are contextual to different regions. With or without the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian society is a peculiar environment owing to the systemic dysfunction observed in every sector of the nation. The pandemic has further exposed this dysfunction with the education system being one of the worst hit sectors. This paper highlights the adverse effects of this pandemic on the Nigerian education system. Also, this paper evaluates the response of the government and private school owners in addressing these challenges in terms of equity of access to learning, teacher-student relationship, suitability of pedagogy, sustainability of the strategies deployed, as well as the implications of this paradigm shift in a low-resourced environment like Nigeria.*

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, Nigerian education, education disruption

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has proven to be an enormous challenge for the global education community, especially at a time like this when most education systems were unprepared for the world of digital learning which, arguably, is the lifeline of education at the moment. Pandemics disrupt education with the closure of schools, and COVID-19 is the most pervasive of recent examples. According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), these nationwide closures have affected about 1,215,484,510 learners worldwide (UNESCO 2020). The responses of different nations across the world have highlighted the importance of moving learning experiences beyond the traditional school building and hours, thereby bringing about more real-world application of content and increasing frequency of authentic experiences for students (Petrie et al. 2020).

The Nigerian education system has been plagued by systemic dysfunction which is traceable to gross underfunding and bureaucratic bottlenecks that frustrate the efforts of technocrats when appointed into offices that have direct influence on the running of the education sector. It is for this reason that the Nigerian society is a rather peculiar one. Managing education, which is very challenging in Nigeria, has become worse during this pandemic. Before the

pandemic, the distance learning sector in Nigeria has had its own challenges as learning was usually not done online but required the presence of students for tutorial sessions which took place in environments that were not conducive to learning (Atanda & Itobore 2014). At best, what is applicable in Nigeria during the school closure has been emergency home schooling.

Effects of School Closure on the Nigerian Education System

The closure of schools nationwide has had some adverse effects on the education system in general. Its effect on the stakeholders of the system, especially the parents and students, are discussed below.

Increase in Number of Out-of-School Children

Education is the first casualty in the peculiar situation where learning is disrupted. With the spread of the pandemic, schools were first closed before other public places in Nigeria. Children are considered to be the most vulnerable group in society, and school closure is thought to be a measure to curtail the spread of the disease. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that more than 10 million children are out of school in Nigeria, even though primary education is officially free and compulsory (UNICEF 2019). School closure nationwide has increased this figure.

Psychological Effect on Children Being Out of School

Education creates a mini-community in society. Education, during a crisis situation, can allay the fears among children as generalised shock and panic are evident in times like these; when schools are closed there is no mechanism to support children in a crisis. Through schooling, children are gainfully occupied and their right to education is protected. A large proportion of the victims in peculiar environments, as occasioned by pandemics, are school-aged children, and the major need of these children is education because schools provide them opportunities to meet their friends. There is also the effect of social isolation considering the fact that schools are hubs of human interaction and social activity. School closure hinders social contact and interaction which are crucial to balanced learning and development.

The Repurposing of Schools

On the 24th of March, 2020, the House of Representatives directed the Federal Ministry of Education to make available hostels in the Federal Government Colleges to be used as emergency care centres and isolation units. It was reported that 127 Nigerians who are indigenes of Osun State returned to the country sometime in April. These returnees, among whom a large number tested positive for the disease, were quarantined in two schools in Ejigbo, a town in the state. Also, in Lagos State, educational facilities were used as Emergency Neighbourhood Food Markets to provide residents in different neighbourhoods with access to food supplies during the lockdown. Some of these facilities were also converted to

temporary health facilities and shelter. Ideally, the government is expected to identify alternative locations for such purposes. The repurposing of schools ought to be a last resort, and even when this is the case, some measures ought to be taken. For instance, there ought to be proper communication with parents, students, teachers and the school authorities clearly stating the duration of such repurposing and the conditions for the safe return of these educational facilities like concrete plans to repair damaged school property and the disinfection/fumigation of the school premises and all therein. This is to give the school authority ample time to remove or relocate school furniture, equipment and other delicate assets. Such measures would have allayed the fears of parents and students as regards infection. Sadly, this did not happen, thereby increasing the risk of a delayed return to school. Although decision making during crisis has to be speedy, it is equally important to listen to those who will most be impacted by these decisions, and this makes it essential to be in constant communication with all stakeholders (Ahmed 2020).

No Preparation for Parents and Families for Distance Learning

The abrupt closure of schools brought about a demand for greater involvement of parents in the education of their children, especially taking up the responsibility of home schooling. This, for many parents, is a daunting task even for the educated ones because effective teaching requires the possession of adequate pedagogical skills. The introduction of online and distance learning by some schools also threw up another challenge for parents and families as the equity of access to the devices required for such learning and being technology savvy vary across families nationwide.

The Response of the Government and Private School Owners

The Federal Ministry of Education (2020) documented its plan to ensure continued learning for students all over the country based on three scenarios. The first scenario, where schools are closed for one month, is taken as the normal duration of holidays, although children will be kept busy with both homework and other learning materials. The second scenario, where schools are closed for one to three months, will entail the deployment of more sustainable strategies to support learning through online and audio-visual methods. The third scenario, where schools are closed for over three months, will entail the development of television, radio or self-learning instructional materials in line with the national curriculum, and the initiation of a structured approach to encourage digitisation of curricula.

Furthermore, the government unfolded its plan to commence school broadcast classes in May after finalising the modalities for getting operational licences and the purchase of transmitters by the Ministry of Education, the Nigerian Television Authority, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and the National Broadcasting Commission in April. The plan was for the broadcast to be uniform across the country and run from morning to night, covering all subjects with a series of subjects in a day for different classes. Also, it was stated

that a different network would be created on the FRCN so as to avoid breaking into the established listening schedules. Three months later, and these plans are yet to be put into effect.

Private school owners at all levels of education in Nigeria were swifter and more practical in their response to school closure. Private pre-tertiary school owners saw the first month of the lockdown as a holiday and began online lessons afterwards to mark the beginning of the third term. Some other schools resorted to offline strategies where parents were asked to come to school and get the workbooks and textbooks of their wards on Mondays, with weekly tasks and assignments to be submitted on Fridays. Some private tertiary institutions have since commenced online learning.

Evaluation of These Responses

The government's plan to introduce and sustain online learning shows the typical Nigerian situation where the policies of the government are bogus and often divorced from societal realities. Effective online learning in a country characterised by unstable and epileptic power supply, expensive internet data rates and a high level of ICT illiteracy is impractical. Also, many rural areas in Nigeria lack basic amenities, and that includes strong internet connectivity. Inadvertently, the strategies deployed thus far constitute a threat to excellence and equity which are regarded as cornerstones of education. These shall be further evaluated below.

Equity of Access to Learning

There are three broad categories of children in terms of internet access for online learning: those who have good internet facility and access as well as many learning opportunities; those with good internet facility and access but having no, or very limited, learning opportunities; and, those without learning opportunities and internet facility and access. Variations in the levels of access to technology worsen inequality. The lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity is an obstacle to continued learning, particularly for students who come from disadvantaged families.

Many homes do not have televisions. Some students do not have a reading desk or personal computer at home for online learning. Some students cannot afford data for internet connection. The situation is worse for students in rural areas. Poor power supply and the attendant financial cost of opting for an alternative power supply over a duration spanning some months might be prohibitive for many homes. There are also some homes with multiple children, limited devices and limited bandwidth. These portray unequal access to digital learning portals. School closure has also caused a lack of access to learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

Some private-owned schools have switched to online learning, while some have done nothing about it. Virtually all government-owned schools are presently not running online classes.

Thus, the majority of students are being denied access to school-based learning. The poor funding for education has made it difficult to prepare for a time like this. Documents from the Budget Office of the Federation (2020) revealed that the budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria for 2020 was 6.7 per cent of the national budget, and this allocation was less than 7.4 per cent for the three previous years despite the UNESCO recommendation that governments should spend between 15 and 20 per cent of their national budgets on education (UNESCO 2015).

Teacher-Student Relationship

This has weakened because time is a crucial factor in building relationships. The opportunities for students to interact with each other and with their teacher(s) are blurred when they have to learn via radio and television. In the case of private schools, teachers have had to devise strategies to reduce the time for classes so as to maximise internet data consumption even as they confront power supply issues. It has been reported that some school authorities mandated teachers to use their own resources for online teaching with a promise to reimburse them later.

Suitability of Pedagogy

The beauty of online/distance education is that it is learner-driven but this is not the case in Nigeria. Teachers have had to make a transition to online teaching without strategies to help them acquire the skills and mental preparedness for this kind of teaching, thus, most of them have carried out online teaching as though they were in the traditional space-bound classroom. It is essential for teachers to have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices into instruction and also develop creative initiatives like play-based collaborative learning (Petrie et al. 2020). The situation is also not different for students as they struggle to make adjustments to learn in a virtual classroom. The question also arises as to the suitability of online education for kindergarten/nursery school pupils in Nigeria.

Sustainability of Strategies Deployed

Effective home schooling demands more parental involvement. The involvement of parents/guardians in this emergency home schooling is predicated upon their availability and competence (in terms of possessing the right pedagogical skill to teach children). The possession of basic internet knowledge to set-up or troubleshoot technical issues relating to online learning is also essential. Parents are overwhelmed with the plethora of resources being shared without steps on how to use them (Petrie et al. 2020). Parental involvement has been stretched with the need to take up supervisory responsibilities. There are instances where children have been found to use their devices to play games or chat with friends instead of attending classes. This further compounds the challenge of parents as regards balancing work and home schooling. Switching to online mode requires infrastructure to be in place, not an overnight action. Some schools began online learning but stopped abruptly

due to financial and structural challenges. Even in some government-owned schools currently having online classes, it has been reported that the funding for the modalities put in place has largely come from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Implications of These Responses

When a crisis lingers, the situation changes from peculiarity to familiarity, and at this point, mid-term plans are expected to be initiated, but in Nigeria the government, which is the regulator of the education system, is still 'studying' the situation. Some implications of the strategies deployed are discussed below.

Disruption of the Academic Calendar

The duration of the academic year is already affected, and this will severely impact students, as the planned syllabus will have to be covered over a shorter period of time. The third term in pre-tertiary schools may be shortened to meet with the September resumption timeline, or the first term resumption may be pushed forward. Considering the fact that a larger proportion of school children have not been able to participate in online learning in this period, the chances are high that for the disadvantaged not to be denied access to education, learning will continue from where schools stopped at the point of closure. This means that there may be a repetition of school work done during the lockdown. School leaving certificate examinations for Nigerian students are on hold, and this will further delay the plans of these students to proceed to tertiary institutions.

The Redesigning of Assessment Standards

The issue of assessment is tied to the quality of the teaching-learning process. Quality refers to fitness of purpose or conformity to generally accepted standards as defined by quality assurance bodies and appropriate academic and professional communities (Akinwumi 2010). An assessment of the entire home schooling process during this pandemic must begin by admitting that whatever strategies we have been able to come up with at the moment must be improved upon. The assessment of the students cannot be done as it had traditionally been done. Though it must remain rigorous, it must take cognisance of the learning needs of students from disadvantaged, rural and low-income backgrounds.

The Need for Proper Planning

The key to planning is that it must be a participative, collective activity involving all interest groups, that is, those whose interests are to be protected. Contingency planning is suitable for a peculiar environment, and it has to be tailored to the conditions of the environment; it is not a one-size-fits all model. Although they are tentative, quality of education should not be compromised. An effective plan will cover issues like the age and attention span of learners, learning goals, what is to be learnt synchronously and asynchronously, the balance between

digital and non-digital activities, the continued need for social integration, and the evolving role of the teacher.

Conclusion

The role of education in providing the human capital for national growth and development underscores the need for a resilient and responsive education system which is capable of providing inclusive education. Sadly, the Nigerian education system lacks the resilience necessary to address this need. This pandemic has created a unique mix of threats and opportunities to enhance access and improve the quality of education through the deployment of digital learning. Change often occurs during moments of crisis, and a moment like this reveals that there is a strong likelihood that things will not return to the way they used to be. Thus, it is time for the key actors in Nigerian government to re-evaluate the lessons learnt and make the right moves for a seamless reintegration of learners at all levels of education with the re-opening of schools in the post-pandemic period.

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Management Practices in Lagos State Private Secondary Schools Amidst COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract: *The appearance of COVID-19 in Nigeria with the attendant state of unpreparedness has been devastating to every sector of the economy and education has not been an exception. All educational systems were disrupted by the pandemic as all schools were ordered closed by the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria. This paper explores different efforts put in place by various managers of private secondary schools in Lagos State to continue the provision of access to the students and the implicit costs to both the schools and parents. The management of finance, human resources and facilities during the pandemic period and the implications of the novel idea of digital learning in Nigeria and its associated challenges are examined. It is recommended that the government should provide a bailout to private school owners in the form of grants-in-aid, and that schools should adopt blended learning.*

Keywords: Management practices, private secondary schools, COVID-19 lockdown, Nigeria

Introduction

Whilst the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives the state responsibilities for education, it also allows for some deregulation. By implication, private individuals, organisations, religious bodies, and other voluntary agencies are allowed to establish and operate educational institutions. Such educational institutions are called private schools. Although these schools are owned by private individuals or bodies, they are under the regulation of the government as provided for in the national policy on education or the state policy on education as the case may be. In Nigeria, private schools exist side-by-side with the public schools. The Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) (2011) reported that the education in Lagos State was being dominated by private ownership with a large number of students enrolled into different types of private schools. As at November, 2019, there were 18,573 private primary and secondary schools in Nigeria enrolling about 60 per cent of all students (Ogundare 2019).

In an effort to curb the virus, the federal government and the Lagos State government gave a stay at home order with effect from Monday, March 23, 2020 which led to the closure of all schools, private or public, across the state. In a short time, COVID-19 has disrupted the landscape of learning in Nigeria by limiting students' access to learning across the country.

This paper explores the management practices in private secondary schools in Lagos State amidst the COVID-19 lockdown with a view to suggesting measures on how to enhance the effective management in the post COVID-19 era.

Pre-COVID-19 Private Secondary Schools' Model in Nigeria

In Nigeria, secondary education is the formal education that is provided after the completion of the primary level of education; the system became operational in the 1981/82 session. It is in two three-year stages, junior secondary followed by senior secondary education. The aim of secondary education in Nigeria is to prepare individuals for useful living within society and for higher education. For the attainment of these objectives, the Nigerian government has recognised education as a very costly social service that needs to be sufficiently funded by every level of government as well as the private sector, communities, individuals and other organisations for the effective implementation of educational policies and programmes (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004). Therefore, effective and efficient management and administration of this level of education is imperative. Private schools have partial autonomy in staff recruitment, students' admissions, and funding but are adequately regulated by the appropriate agency of the government in the areas of curriculum, teacher quality, physical resources, and other related areas. At the end of the first three-years of the secondary education designated as Basic 7-9, students are required to sit for the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) which leads to the award of Basic Education Certificate (BEC). Success at this grade is required to continue on to the senior secondary level. The senior secondary school is also a three-year programme at the end of which students are expected to take the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) which are conducted by the West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council (NECO) respectively. The WASSCE and SSCE are equivalent to the British Ordinary Level of the General Certificate of Education, and are the basic educational attainment required for admission into tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria.

A primary and secondary school session in Nigeria is made up of three terms and each term is for a minimum period of 13 weeks. Typically, the first term runs from September to December, second term from January to April, while the third term runs between May and July. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has placed education on the concurrent legislative list, hence, the management of education in the country is the responsibility of the three tiers of government. Therefore, the provision of secondary school education is within the purview of both the federal and state governments. However, individuals and interested private organisations are not restricted from being involved in the

provision of secondary education. The involvement of government in the provision of secondary school education is considered basically as public goods. A number of private sector participants are profit-driven while others are run on a not-for-profit basis.

Governments' Reactions and Actions

In Lagos State the closure of all private and public educational institutions, however, took effect on the 23rd of March, 2020 as directed by the state government. The Lagos State Ministry of Education made frantic efforts at restructuring the teaching learning process through the introduction of online/digital education in its public schools as a way of addressing the educational needs of students while at home due to the lockdown. This was done through radio and television programmes. In order to solve problems of lack of radio and television sets, the Lagos State Ministry of Education distributed 10,000 radio sets to students across the state. However, it was emphatically stated that the third term would not begin. Private schools were also encouraged to go ahead with the use of remote teaching.

It should be noted that in taking decisions on how to go about the online classes, the government consulted with the different associations of private school owners such as National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS) and Association for Formidable Educational Development (AFED), among others in the state. In addition, the government promised to give palliatives to proprietors and teachers of private schools in the form of loan facilities, though, as at the time of putting up this paper, the portal where application for the loan could be accessed was yet to be opened.

However, some private school owners and teachers have benefited from the federal government COVID-19 Targeted credit facility with 5 per cent interest. The school owners were categorised under the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME), while teachers benefited under the households whose means of livelihood have been adversely affected by COVID-19 lockdown. The objective of the credit facility was to cushion the effect of the lockdown on businesses in the country.

Private Secondary Schools' Reactions and Actions

It should be noted that at the time of school closure, secondary schools in the country were near the end of the second term of the 2019/2020 academic session. While some had started the examinations for the term, others were about to start. Prior to the pandemic break out, the system in operation in most private schools in Nigeria was that the final year students (JSS 3 and SSS 3) were required to have paid all school fees for the three terms in the session not later than the end of the second term. This suggests that the majority of the finalists must have paid their school fees before the government's directive that all sectors of the economy including education should close their activities.

The other classes, JSS 1 – 2 and SS 1 – 2 had their examinations period accelerated and concluded in some schools before the closure of the economy. Parents of these sets of students were encouraged to pay the third term school fees; with inducement ranging from five to 10

per cent as discounts despite the closure of all schools. The government clearly insisted that third-term was on hold and no form of interaction between the schools and their students would be considered as satisfying the requirement of completion of the third-term. So, if schools provided learning activities, it was above the requirements of the government.

At the onset of the lockdown, private school owners through their various professional associations embarked on enlightenment programmes for the students, parents and communities about the pandemic through their various online platforms. In the course of closure of schools, the private schools introduced e-learning to aid the teaching and learning process. It should be noted that the commencement of online classes and modes of operation varied from one school to another. Initially, some of the school owners were sceptical about the workability of the online teaching, especially the cost implications.

There was also pressure from some parents who wanted the educational needs of their children to be met amidst the lockdown. While some schools charged fees for the online classes, others provided this *pro bono*. This, and the level of teachers' involvement also depended on the type of platform used, which include the Google Classroom, Google Form, WhatsApp, customised learning platforms, etc. It needs to be stressed that the digital classes focus on revisional exercises basically to keep the students busy while at home as approval was not given for commencement of third term of the 2019/2020 academic session.

Issues in Implementing the Online Classes

In the course of implementing the online classes in private schools, the following issues emerged:

Financial Constraints

The financial implications of running e-learning became an unintended cost to the system. Even the public-school students that benefited from the free radio sets distributed by the government still contended with the cost of batteries. Students in private schools faced harder problems. These include but are not limited to the cost of IT devices, cost of data for internet, and cost of fuel for electricity generating sets (as electricity supply is erratic). The attempt by the private schools' managers to pass the cost burden of generating electricity to the parents pushed up the cost of access to remote learning beyond the reach of parents who were not earning income during the lockdown period. There is no doubt that the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the teaching/learning process is highly capital intensive. This became more apparent when teachers and students were physically separated. There is no gainsaying the fact that most private schools in Lagos State belong to the category of low-income schools. Corroborating this, SEED (2020) affirmed that in Lagos State, the low-cost private schools cater for over 60 per cent of students and provide education to students of the lower spectrum in the social class. Typically, the survival of many of these schools could be said to be from 'hand to mouth' due to their dependence on the meagre school fees received from 'poor' parents in most cases on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Epileptic Electricity Supply

Generally, electricity supply in Nigeria and Lagos in particular is very erratic. This menace inhibits the achievement of the intended objectives of the online classes. Since most of the classes are live teachings and scheduled for particular times of the day, students in areas without the supply of electricity at the scheduled time would definitely miss their lessons. Many times, there are interruptions in the supply of electricity at the teachers' end where the lessons emanate. Apart from this, many students, especially from rural parts of Lagos, could not take advantage of the digital classes due to the unavailability of municipal services in such rural communities. This has therefore, denied them equal access to the opportunity. There is no doubt that a large number of students fall in this category. Hussain (2020) envisaged that the drastic escalation of coronavirus would not only have negative impact on students' learning but would also aggravate the already existing inequalities in education in the country.

Deficiency in Information and Technological Skills

The inadequacy of competent personnel to manage the e-learning interactive session became apparent as most teachers had knowledge gap in the application of ICT to deliver content to their students. Consequently, the contents of training materials are too often inadequate and monotonous. The e-learning process also incorporated the parents as 'teacher assistant' as they are expected to provide guides to their children and wards. A number of the parents confessed their inability to support their children in the learning process.

Due to closure of all sectors of the economy which disrupted the revenue generation processes, a large number of private secondary schools' managers opted to discontinue the payment of salaries to their teachers, while some opted for payment of half salaries for the period that the schools were closed. This without doubt has untoward implications on the morale of teachers, as many of them found it difficult to meet their regular financial obligations. In fact, there were situations where both the husband and wife worked in a private school, and so one can imagine how difficult it was for such a couple.

Conclusion and Implications for Private Secondary School Management

There is no doubt that the experience of COVID-19 has further exposed the inadequacies of the Nigerian educational system. Therefore, the following measures are suggested towards meeting the challenges in the post-COVID-19 era:

- Since private school owners complement the efforts of the government in educational provision, and due to the fact that most private school owners depend on the school fees paid by the students for sustenance, which is not forthcoming for now, the government should provide a bailout to private school owners in the form of grants-in-aid. This would go a long way to reduce the financial burden orchestrated by the lockdown. With

this, outstanding salaries of teachers could be paid, and they would be able to continue in their business.

- There is the need to revisit the learning methodology adopted in Nigerian secondary schools. Therefore, the use of blended learning is recommended. Blended learning is a student-centred strategy which creates and integrates learning experiences in such a way that the learner interacts with other students, with the teacher, and with the contents by way of a combination of virtual and face-to-face approaches. When this is done, it would facilitate the provision of appropriate infrastructure that would support the learning mode.
- In view of the persistence in the erratic supply of electricity in the country, there is the need for the use of solar-powered educational materials in schools.
- There is the need for the government to partner with telecommunication providers to provide subsidised mobile data packages to schools and students for teaching and learning purposes.
- Managers of private schools need training on cash flow management, as this would go a long way to improve their knowledge on effective ways of accessing credit facilities from financial institutions. This inadequate knowledge of cash flow management actually affected the capability of some of them in attracting the Central Bank's COVID-19 loan.
- Capacity building programmes on digital literacy for teachers is inevitable, as this would help them in meeting the increased needs of students and be able to fit in to both digital and traditional teaching/learning environments.

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Going Hard and Early: Tertiary Teaching Under Lockdown in New Zealand

Sylvia Robertson

Abstract: *This paper shares the experience of adapting a large first year education studies paper to an online learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In New Zealand, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on 28 February 2020. Within 26 days, with little time to prepare for the shift from face-to-face to online learning, we went into full lockdown. To quote Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, 'We're going hard and we're going early.' In this paper, the strategies employed to coordinate a team of tutors and approximately 260 students across two campuses are identified. Both the highs and lows of teaching and learning during a pandemic are explored with reference to leadership and higher education literature that resonated during this process, and referencing the all-important perceptions of the students. Leadership insights are provided together with thoughts about what the future of university teaching might be as we seek to leverage the gains we have made.*

Keywords: Tertiary education, online teaching, COVID-19, educational leadership

Introduction

Here in New Zealand, as we emerge from lockdown, we are overcome by a sense of 'what just happened?' This is exacerbated by feelings of survivor guilt as images from other countries are beamed onto our ever-present devices. Back on campus, the students are returning, and we are planning classes as usual. But there is no certainty. Rather like the Christchurch earthquakes in 2010/11, there is no knowing when we might experience the next aftershock or worse. But as Poulton and Tibble (2020) point out in a government report, we are well placed to be hopeful. They refer to the resilience of New Zealanders saying, 'people are far stronger, adaptable, and dignified in the face of adversity than they give themselves credit for' (Poulton & Tibble 2020: 3). Anecdotally, there is evidence of this among our students. So, what did just happen? What follows are my perceptions as a university lecturer, as I coordinated and taught a large first year paper in Education Studies for the first time.

Going Early: Quick Decisions

I gave my last face-to-face class late Friday afternoon on 20 March. By Monday, it was announced that all university papers were moving online, and by midnight Wednesday 25 March, we were in full lockdown. The university suspended classes for that week to give us time to make the adjustment, and to allow many students to scramble home. There was no time to panic, the response had to be swift and effective. Three things helped here. Firstly, more than 30 years teaching and leading in primary schools meant that I knew events happen that require a quick response. When your school burns down, when a child dies unexpectedly, or when a campsite is devastated by a storm, there is no time to stand around. Action is needed and leadership is key. Secondly, I had been teaching a distance postgraduate paper, so I had some idea of what online teaching involved. Thirdly, as a wise principal once told me, you must keep 'your eyes above the parapet' (Robertson 2017: 782). To this end, for some weeks, I had been following what was happening to colleagues in Australia, the UK and the US. I made a big decision and unlike many others around me, I made the paper (a Semester One first year course) fully asynchronous. This meant the students could study when they could and where they could.

An asynchronous approach was in contrast to my first thought of keeping everything as 'normal' as possible. Prior to lockdown, course delivery consisted of lectures and workshops taught weekly on campus in the traditional way. I knew I could livestream my lectures, but I could not see how my tutors might run two-hour 'hands on' workshops online. I also knew that many of my students had gone home. In some cases, this meant overseas, while others had moved back to remote rural parts of New Zealand often with poor internet connections. As time went by, I discovered others who were working double shifts in supermarkets, pharmacies and care homes doing lowly paid but essential work. Others were home schooling siblings while their parents worked, or they were helping on the family farm harvesting crops in the absence of migrant seasonal workers. These were the students who were grateful for asynchronous teaching. But many others commented that they liked being able to structure their learning to suit themselves, and how when everything around them seemed to be changing, this enabled them to get into a routine that provided some certainty and lessened anxiety.

Due to the possibility of glitches with my rural broadband connection, I uploaded the lecture and content to Blackboard (our university learning management system) on the Friday before the week it was due to run. I discovered many students were viewing the lecture on Sunday or Monday thus getting ahead for the week. I found my classroom began to 'flip' (Bishop & Verleger 2013). The students used the online activities as an opportunity to engage critically with what they had already learned rather than to learn new content. I provided a weekly overview with a list of activities and a suggested order to tackle them. In this way, by keeping instructions simple and clear, I was attempting to remove all extraneous processing that might distract my learners (Mayer 2010). To support essential processing, I recorded the

lectures in three bite-sized chunks using Zoom and shared the screen with my lecture PowerPoint. To further this processing, I personalised my lectures with comments about our current situation and where possible, I drew parallels between the content and our pandemic experience.

Face-to-face workshops were replaced by online activities, readings, and a discussion board each week where students could post and chat to each other. Tutors provided a weekly optional drop-in Zoom meeting to chat and ask questions. As lecturer of a large paper, reading the discussion boards and connecting with students through these forums enabled me to really get an idea of what they were thinking and understanding. Several students reflected that the online discussion boards were a great way to engage and further implement their understanding of the course material. One of my nine classes was on a campus in another city. Online teaching enabled these students to engage with the local students and for me to get to know them a little better. By the end of each week, it was evident that many students were engaging in a deeper way with the materials. This drove me to focus on my practice and in particular, my questioning technique. Questions are somehow thrown into sharp relief in the online world, especially on the discussion board where I tried to model for the students how to engage with each other in more thoughtful ways (Southworth 2009). In short, we found that ‘flipping’ the classroom perhaps created more opportunities for critical thinking and evaluation of the theorists we were studying than in our regular face-to-face workshops.

Going Hard: Building Relationships and Solving Problems

For those experienced in distance learning, this probably sounds very simple but there were enormous difficulties. Keeping in touch with 265 first-year, first-semester students and maintaining motivation were key issues. Many students were intensely disappointed that their first-year experience was not what they had planned. Some complained of it being difficult to get out of bed, let alone boot-up a computer in isolation. My team of eight tutors and teachers worked hard on pastoral care and building quality relationships to enhance learning. We had countless checklists. We followed up with emails, phone calls and Zoom meetings when students were not appearing on the discussion boards. There were frequent issues with technology. We became customer service officers and an information technology help desk all rolled into one. I made myself available 12-13 hours a day responding to emails quickly. This was greatly appreciated but not something I would encourage in ‘normal’ times. Despite these efforts, some students fell by the wayside. However, surprisingly few took advantage of the University’s extended period for paper withdrawal. The majority, on completion of the paper, reported an increased sense of self-efficacy. Several students commented that they had learned skills that would be useful for the rest of their time at university. They also noted they were more resilient than they thought. They were very proud that they had stayed ‘on track’ and handed everything in. Although initially, some found it

hard to post as they felt shy about sharing their ideas in an online forum, once they started, most quickly gained confidence. It was not uncommon to have more than 100 posts for a class of 30 students each week (inspired no doubt by some marks being awarded for online participation). Overall, students reported increased independence, development of new study skills, and a general improvement in their academic writing style (borne out in our assessment results).

As paper coordinator, I had to work out what to do about assessment. Our assignments were mostly set up to be marked within Blackboard, but I was unsure what would happen with the end of semester exam. Again, I looked to colleagues overseas to see what was happening. I felt the students needed some certainty early on so I decided to abandon the exam and create two internal assessments instead (one of which was credit for online participation). In the second week of lockdown, in the midst of creating and recording lectures, I found myself preparing the paperwork for a paper variation and by 18 April the students knew what to expect for the rest of semester (ending in June).

Going Hard: Dealing with Disparity and Disappointment

As a university, we had a model of clarity and compassion to follow in our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern and Director-General of Public Health, Ashley Bloomfield. We were given simple messages and directives with language and images that were easy for everyone from the youngest child to understand: Four levels of restriction, staying within our 'bubbles', and ways to protect those bubbles from penetration. We were referred to as 'a team of five million'. This was not rocket science but worth thinking about in terms of educational leadership. The pandemic accentuated the need for clear vision and direct action in a crisis, and a focus on keeping things simple. Knowing when to hit the accelerator and when to put a foot on the brake as McCarthy, O'Connell and Hall (2005) found in their case study of a company in the midst of a tragic crisis. Even within this short space of time, sometimes the pace of change needed to be fast, while at other times a more cautious approach was needed. As a government, mistakes were made, there was some confusion, and doubtless there will be many system reviews and inquiries. However, we must not underestimate the courage it took to take such direct action within a neoliberal context. This response required a more welfare liberal approach and it highlighted a number of issues in our society.

I became more acutely aware, through engaging with my first-year students, of the social inequity that exists within New Zealand. This was evident in the disparity between students who had an affordable, safe place to live with an environment conducive to learning, and those who did not. Disparity between those students with late model computers, the correct software, endless data caps and good internet connections, and those without these things. Disparity between those students with parents who were supportive, confident university graduates, and those first-generation university students lacking this support, and often too shy or embarrassed to ask for help. Lastly, the disparity between those students who had to

work during the crisis, and those who did not. This disparity is not a new problem. It begins in our schools (Gordon 2016), and its lingering presence in the tertiary setting was highlighted during the pandemic.

Going hard and going early was exhausting. I remember commenting to friends that I had not had time to worry about being in lockdown, I was too busy working. Being able to stay at home and work without distractions, such as the weekly commute, was a bonus. The amount of upskilling was enormous. New to tertiary teaching and already in a place of unfamiliarity, I could identify with my first-year students who felt thrown in the deep end. Initially, as lecturers, we were bombarded with lots of helpful information about how to teach online, but I simply did not have time to absorb this or to begin to teach diverse skills to students, some of whom had never logged onto Blackboard before. Looking back, I just needed some simple strategies and someone I could approach for a quick answer to a basic question. I learned that technology is not a tool to help us do what we want to do. Instead, we have to know the programmes inside out and backwards and then think about how we can adapt our ideas to make use of what is on offer. This I found supremely disappointing. During this crisis, there was little time to learn complex delivery modes such as Blackboard. Now, more than ever, we need simple systems.

Another disappointment for me was that my research was put on hold. Like those first-year students frustrated by a first-year experience that was not to be, I was unable to attend conferences where I had abstracts accepted, and I had little time for writing or research. I still plan to complete my current project, funded by a university research grant, within the planned timeframe, but my fieldwork with school leaders has been deferred as we all fought to move our schools and papers online. However, as researchers, we now have an opportunity to explore in-depth the impact of this pandemic on our teaching institutions and to start to tackle some of the persistent problems such as social inequity with heightened urgency.

Implications for Tertiary Teaching

So, what are the implications of this experience for tertiary learning and teaching? What can we take away from this? Personally, I am reluctant to give up my new learning. We need to think about what we can do to help students move forward and build on the new skills and understandings about themselves they have acquired. Going hard and going early was rewarding for many. The feedback from our students reveals a strong sense of resilience, independence, pride in their accomplishments 'against the odds', and recognition of the development of a community of learning despite the social distance. This was a student community that craved social connection and found support in knowing they 'struggled together'. There is potential here to foster a community of transformative leaders, young people able to think clearly, full of empathy and compassion, who have both witnessed the sorrow and frustration of others while discovering strength, adaptability and dignity within

themselves. These are the skills needed to prepare our young people for an uncertain future. These are the skills to build on within our university programmes. Now more than ever, our students are ready because as learners they are bringing fresh personal experience to their learning. As educators, we must build on this experience. Schneider and Preckel (2017) in their systematic review of variables associated with achievement in higher education, found that blended learning had a greater effect size than purely classroom-based or online learning approaches. The time is right to reflect on the way we teach and learn so we can best build on the experience we have just faced. What positive new learnings can we take away from this? I value personal connection. I would rather walk across campus and talk to someone face-to-face than send yet another email. Yet, I felt strangely more connected through the online experience of thinking, writing about, and discussing learning with my tutors and students. Perhaps it was the slightly slower pace that fostered this.

When I began teaching in the 1980s, I used a chalkboard and an eraser. Everything was handwritten and important issues were discussed face-to-face. If someone had told me I would be teaching students from my lounge room using a computer and having meetings via Zoom, I would have thought the idea pure science fiction, somewhat akin to the short story by Forster (1909), *The Machine Stops*. But I did it and I learned from it. And I share the same sense of achievement as one of my students who shared pride in the way everything was handled during 'these hard times', but also great anticipation at the thought of seeing everyone back on campus.

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