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A Socio-Philosophical Assessment Of Distance Learning In Educational Institutions During The Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic In Nigeria

Friday Keri-Frank; J. A. Onyido & N. E. Kalu

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
University Of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
One development which the global crisis that swept across the education industry in 2019 can be remembered for is the ability of the crisis to introduce innovations in the education industry as measures for the continuous provision of education to humanity, part of the innovation was a sudden transition to distance learning. Using the philosophical methodology, this study makes a socio-philosophical assessment of distance learning where the paper focuses on the prospects and challenges of distance learning. Outside that, the paper instructively makes case that as crises are the foundations for positive changes and innovations in the affairs of man and his institutions, the education industry should sustain innovative progress so far made during the period and should never return to practices in education prior to the introduction of distance learning. The paper recommends that education in the new regime should focus on prioritizing the production of the various technological accessories used in distance learning as well as prioritize the teaching of humane concepts such as social justice as a mechanism for translating the dividends of governance to the people.
Keywords: Distance learning, Pandemic, Socio-philosophical assessment, coronavirus.

INTRODUCTION

Education is looked upon for the human capital development and human capacity building of states and on the strength of this education is evolutionary, transitionary, radical and revolutionary so as to capture the dominant spirit and developmental aspirations of the state that is interested in providing it. Because education targets achieving the developmental aspirations of the state that provides it, education is seriously a hotbed upon which policy decisions are made for the development of man and his society and such policy decisions for the development of man and his society crisscross the political, economic, social, religious, cultural, health, agricultural, artistic, scientific and technological dimensions. It has been recognized and acknowledged that any innovations for improving the quality of lives of man must be routed through education for it to be successful and success here is multidimensional; those who are to initiate the ideas through which values can be added to the quality of life of the people must be educated and a high level of awareness for the acceptance of the innovations must be done through education.

Man's reliance on education for his general transformation has made education and its provision a social and humanistic pursuit or provision where the seal of policy summersault is robustly and generally visible on it on a daily basis. In fact, most policies in education appear in split seconds and in this order most policies in education also become obsolete before they are implemented. One thing of interest in all these is that education the world is a subject matter in which both laymen and experts are interested in, a development that shows that education and policy will continue to have a pride of place in the social transformation of the world. The receptive embrace of education during the

outbreak of the global coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic in 2019 is a description and direction per excellence on the utility of education in solving and resolving the problems of man across the globe and one unique shift and development during this period is the adoption and transition to distance learning as an innovation to ensure that members of the global community still have access to learning and education.

The mention of distance learning stimulates a lot of attention in contemporary development of knowledge, acquisition of knowledge and the different ways in which people can learn or can have access to social connections. Distance learning gained phenomenal and large-scale attention during the rampaging and ravaging spree of global coronavirus (covid-19) particularly in developing and under-developed countries of the world and part of why it gained such phenomenal and large-scale attention hinges on its usefulness and ability to be relied upon for the continuation of assessing information, communication, learning and education during emergencies. One feature that distance learning is associated with is that its use and success is dependent on technology, availability of power and technological accessories and as an educational innovation that is one hundred percent dependent on technology, power and technological accessories, distance learning is associated with providing people unlimited access to information, learning and education at the convenience of the teacher and the learner and according to Moore, Jayme and Black (2021:11) "Can also permit multimodal instruction, enabling digital texts to be rewound and reexamined a multitude of time". In the same way as distance learning has advantages, it also has a plethora of limitations, shortcomings or disadvantages that tend to dwarf its embrace and celebration as an innovation in the education industry. The much-celebrated claim that distance learning increases access to education is adequately critiqued and correspondingly placed under serious scrutiny by Vegas and Winthrop (2020:5) when they write that:

> …according to the US Census Bureau, during the Covid-19 school closures, 1 in 10 of the poorest children in the world's target economy had little or no access to technology for learning. And UNICEF estimates that 463 million children at least one-third of the world total had no chance of remote learning via radio, television on online content.

In the same way as the above scholars knocked down distance learning, Nwaokugha and Keri-Frank (2023) remark that the well-known positive influence of the classroom environments and peer effects or positive peer group influence from fellow learners in motivating learners to learn or change positively does not exist in distance learning situation. All these notwithstanding, it is important to note that the outbreak of coronavirus (covid-19) is the springboard and precursor that triggered the transition to distance learning particularly in most developing and under-developed countries of the world and during this period, many socio-philosophical issues emerged, some of which aligned with the position that "crises drive innovation" in the sense that such crises moments avail people opportunities to excel through thinking creatively and critically and correspondingly learn to generate new ideas that help individuals and societies to break through new frontiers of knowledge that help to add value to human existence while others see such periods as moments when people's fundamental human and natural rights are fragrantly abused and when misgovernance and authoritarianism become norms in the society.

In the same way as socio-philosophical issues exist at a general level, socio-philosophical issues equally exist at the level of distance learning during the ravaging and rampaging spree of coronavirus (covid-19). What is of interest and a cause for concern however, is that despite how clear such socio-philosophical issues are especially when some of them have features upon which they can be described as mix bag (Nwaokugha, 2020) not much has been done to sensitize the masses or to create awareness on the need for an urgent socio-philosophical assessment of distance learning during the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic particularly in Nigeria. This paper systematically targets filling this gap.

The methodology for the study is basically philosophical, and philosophical research according to Angadi (2019:37) is a qualitative type of research where scholars who are receptively disposed to using it indulge in "the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period in a naturalistic setting to gain insights not possible using other types of research". Another

feature of philosophical or qualitative research especially in the field of education is highlighted by Ishtiaq and Naz (2024:10) when they write that:

> Qualitative research is often exploratory aiming to cover new insights, perspectives and understanding within educational settings. Qualitative research in education involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, case studies and document analysis. The aim is to generate in-depth insights, explore meanings and understanding the underlying processes that shape educational phenomena.

A detailed description of philosophical or qualitative research methodology is presented by Nwaokugha and Danladi (2016) when they write that a methodology in a research or study is philosophical when a researcher or a scholar uses speculation, analysis and prescription. Speculation as a philosophical methodology for carrying out research according to Aminigo (1999) and Agulanna (2011) invokes a meaning that revolves around attempts to find logical coherence in an entire realm of thought. The above is close to the position maintained by Oduor (2010) when he writes that to speculate is "to wonder, conjecture, guess or to hypothesize". What this mean according to Nwaokugha (2021:160) is that "the correctness, rightness, reasonableness and acceptability of a proposition or an argument largely depends on the orderly sequence in which one idea logically links up to the other". Language and logic play important roles in speculation.

Analysis as a philosophical research methodology focuses on critically examining terms, words, concepts and propositions with the intention of making explicit the various layers of meanings that may be associated with such terms, words, concepts, and propositions. Where analysis is properly done, it calls attention to the context in which a particular meaning of a term, word, concept and proposition can apply and it also helps in the amicable resolution of conflicts, contradiction, absurdities, disagreements as well as brings about peace, unity and stability. The above is what Nwaokugha (2021:102) emphasizes when he writes that analysis is "key to clarifying and decoding inconsistencies and ambiguities that are ever-present in man's daily social, political, religious, scientific, economic, technological and environmental activities". Language and logic are key in any meaningful analysis.

Prescription as a philosophical research methodology is a conscious attempt by a researcher or scholar to establish standards for making prescriptive value judgment. Oduor (2010:97) says it all when he writes that "to prescribe is to recommend or set down as a rule or a guide" and Nwaokugha (2021:102) adds that prescription;

> Is achieved in research in the form of a researcher making autonomous value statements on how an issue that has been the focus or subject matter of a philosophical discussion can be resolved so that all the wrongs noticed in the course of the discussion can be harmoniously addressed. In a way, suggestions and recommendations in research and other forms of writing fall within the frame of reference of prescription.

Scholars in such areas of study as axiology (ethics, political philosophy, social philosophy and aesthetics) must prescribe so as to be relevant to themselves and their society and what accounts for this is the prevalence of change in the affairs of man and the society, which such scholars must correspondingly respond to. The philosophical methodology is epistemologically and axiologically appropriate for this study as the study is committed to developing critical insights in the members of the society that can enable them to creatively and critically assess socio-philosophical issues about distance learning during the ravaging spree of coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic and the study is generally important as it has potentials to raise new sign post and generate new epistemological theorizing for assessing socio-philosophical issues associated with distance learning during the global coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic in Nigeria.

The theoretical framework upon which this study hinges on is social constructivism. According to Nwaokugha and Agbarakwe (2024:252)

> Social constructivism invokes a meaning that revolves around the fact that human beings are the principal actors and agents that produce, generate meaning, build and construct knowledge, developments that suggest that no knowledge is ready made or manufactured anywhere, rather that knowledge grows and develops out of human

consciousness through interactions, dialogues, manipulations and communication that systematically and logically derived from the day to day experiences of persons with others and institutions in the society.

Social constructivism as a theory of knowledge construction has some laid down procedures for arriving at such knowledge. According to Nwaokugha and Abiakwu (2024), such procedures include the learners' active engagement and commitment in breaking new frontiers of knowledge, learners' ability to show commitment in solving problems and curiosity to responding to the demand of change, ability of learners to show enthusiastic zeal to collaborate with others and learners' ability to appeal to or embrace creative and critical thinking skills in their drive and desire to construct knowledge.

Studies or researches that follow the paradigms as outlined above especially the philosophical research methodology maintain a unique tradition namely a detailed focus or discussion on the key concepts that are the focus of the study and to this we now turn.

Coronavirus (Covid-19)

A global health challenge that wreaked havoc across all the other spheres of human activities – economic, social, political, religious, educational, environmental etc emerged in Wuhan, a city that has over eleven million people in the People's Republic of China in 2019. The global health challenge is identified as coronavirus and has been coded covid-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as declared a global pandemic by the same world health regulatory agency. Part of the justification why the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic was the magnitude of havoc and massive suffering and general instability that the outbreak of the virus caused and inflicted on humans across the global community.

In descriptive terms, Fung and Liu (2019:530) write that coronavirus are a group of enveloped viruses with non-segmented single-stranded and positive sense RNA genomes which are spherical or pleomorphic in shape, with a diameter of 80-120mm. In their own remark about coronavirus (covid-19) Mahaimin, Habibi, Riaby, Algantani, Chaerunisaa, Wijaya, Milanda, Yusop & Albelbisi (2023) write that covid-19 is an infectious illness characterized by the SARS-COV-2 virus. The above observation points in the direction that coronavirus (covid-19) is a communicable disease that has the potential and capacity to distort, transfigure very negatively and disarticulate the entire health systems of its victims. The speed with which it spreads and the speed it kills is one feature that singles it out as a special terrible communicable disease. What attests to its dreadedness and unfortunate terrible nature as a communicable disease is the number of people it kills within a short period of time. How contagious and terribly deadly coronavirus (covid-19) is can be established in the remarks by Nwaokugha (2020:170) in these words – Coronavirus is

Easily passed from one person to another and the commonest symptoms of coronavirus (covid-19) are coughing, sneezing and difficulty in breathing. Little tiny droplets from the system of an affected person during coughing and sneezing are fastest ways of transmitting the disease from one person to another. The mode of transmission of coronavirus (covid-19) is so simple that a carrier of the virus can spread it to other people before the symptom develops in him or her.

Inherent in societies and victims who are infested or carriers of the virus is the intensification of uncertainty and fear of the unknown and there are reasons why this is so. Carriers of the virus easily manifest what Rajkumar (2020) calls acute psychological and physiological stress due to the prevalence of fear of the unknown (Nwaokugha, 2020). The reason for the intensification of fear in people and the society is deep rooted in the fact that people who have other health challenges in their systems easily become prey or victims. Rajkumar (2020) calls attention to this when he writes that victims of coronavirus (covid-19) are most likely to suffer hypertension, respiratory system disease, organ failure, and cardiovascular metabolic disease that angularly or in combination result to the damage of the heart. Other common illnesses that are triggered by coronavirus (covid-19) include psychiatric disorder, such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety disorder and grief related symptoms in adolescents and adults. Again, it has been established according to Katic, Ferraro, Ambra and Iavarone (2021) that coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic results in increased psychiatric disorder and grief related symptoms in adolescents. Part of what accounts for all the above especially fear in societies where coronavirus (covid-19) exists and among the carriers of the virus is the

discovery of new variants of covid-19, "the long covid syndrome" and the stress disorder seems to prevent an end to the pandemic. It is also correct to say that measures taken by states and institutions to mitigate or control the spread of the virus create and instigate physical and emotional fears in the people. Such measures as social distancing, social isolation, confinement curfew and quarantine phenomenally raised incidence of fear to astronomical levels and fears that are not controlled only help to increase the detrimental consequences of the virus.

From the on-set, we have said that the outbreak of the global coronavirus, though a health challenge, impacted very negatively on all spheres of human existence and one area, notably, the education industry stands out when the negative implications of the global coronavirus (covid-19) is mentioned. Education is a social service and a social activity where movement of people, interactions with one another and a safe and conducive environment are features that support and promote its provision and practice. However, when critically examined against the backdrop of new normal particularly where there are restrictions in movement, social isolations, confinement, quarantine, social distancing and unsafe environments, one can be left with no other option than to strongly conclude that the education industry is one of the institutions where the blows of coronavirus (covid-19) is most felt. It is a thing of common knowledge that developments which are unreceptive to education or which are not good bedfellows or co-travelers with education such as fear, worry, anxiety, frustration, irritation, hopelessness, helplessness insecurity (Nwaokugha & Keri-Frank, 2023: 80) became norms of the society in the rampaging and ravaging spree of coronavirus (covid-19).

These unfortunate developments to humanity and education did not escape the attention of scholars and institutions. In reaction to the situation especially as it concerns education, Huber and Helm (2020:237) write that the crisis caused by covid-19 has far-reaching effects in the field of education. Highlighting developments on this, Nwaokugha and Keri-Frank (2023) report that world bodies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, WORLD BANK have highlighted the crisis brought upon the education industry by the outbreak of covid-19 when they admit that "the global disruption to education caused by covid-19 pandemic constitutes the worst education crisis on record". This crisis is one that led to the closure of educational institutions from the primary to the tertiary levels, a development that caused a staggering 1.5 billion (Vegas and Winthrop, 2020:4) and 1.6 billion (UNESCO, UNICEF and the WORLD BANK, (2021:5) learners across the world not to have access to any formal education. The development as presented above and the fundamental necessity and need for education particularly at this point in time necessitated a drive and a transition, from the face-to-face mode of education to a distance learning mode.

Distance Learning

Education in its enigmatic nature responds to the needs of individuals, groups, institutions and the state and base on this, education is a subject matter upon which politics is played and at the same time a subject matter that admits policy summersaults especially when the directions and objectives of the policy summersault are to guide humanity in directions that can help solve and resolve humanity's ever-present challenges. One time in human history when the importance of education was globally acknowledged as a practice and process for providing succor and relief to man and his institution was the period of the transition from face-to-face mode of learning to distance learning mode during the outbreak of the global coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic in 2019.

Distance learning according to Simonson (2019), Nwaokugha and Wogonwu (2023), Nwaokugha & Keri-Frank (2023) has other names it can commonly interchange with and such common names are e-learning, virtual learning, remote learning or web-based learning. There are other scholars who also refer to distance learning as distance education and to be expected, different scholars have different definitions of distance learning. According to Fry (2001), distance learning refers to online instruction systems to create educational material, provide teaching and manage programmes. Webster and Hackley (1997) define distance learning as involving implementation of information, computing and communication technology application in more than one location. According to Simonson and Schlosser (2009), modern distance education is defined as institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors. Hedge & Hayward (2004) define e-learning as an innovative approach for delivery electronically mediated, well-designed learner centred and interactive learning

environment to any one, any place, any time by utilizing the internet and digital technologies in concern with instructional design principles.

According to Agadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008), distance education is a system of education characterized by physical separation between the teacher and the learner in which instruction is delivered through a variety of media including print and other ICTs to learners who may either have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have been denied the face-to-face formal education due to socio-economic, career, family and other circumstances. In his own approach to the subject matter, Jegede (2003) defines distance education as education provided by a mode other than the conventional face to face method whose goals are similar to and justifiable and practical as those of on-campus full time face to face education.

According to Turnbull, Chugh and Luck (2021), there are two basic types of distance learning; synchronous and asynchronous distance learning. The term synchronous learning according to Buselic (2012) is a mode of delivery where all participants are present at the same time. This method of providing distance learning is like the traditional teaching and learning situation despite being an educational provision that is provided remotely. What is implicated here is that there is an agreed time when all the learners link up online for instruction and there is a formal timetable to guide activities concerning which course or subject or teacher is to teach at a particular time. According to Muhaimin et al (2023), live webinars and virtual classes are examples of synchronous distance learning.

On the other hand, the asynchronous distance learning mode according to Buselic (2012) is a mode of delivery where participants access course materials on their own schedule and this is more flexible as learners are not expected to gather together at the same time for the purposes of receiving educational instruction from a teacher or instructor. According to Muhaimin et al (2023) video recordings and emails are good examples of asynchronous distance learning. Asynchronous distance learning model allows for greater flexibility in term of timing. This is because it does not require real time engagement as materials are provided on line. It is important we point out that one good thing about distance learning especially as it concerns methods of its delivery is that both the synchronous and asynchronous methods can be used or combined effectively in delivering instructions to learners.

No matter the perspective from which scholars define distance learning or the name they give to it, there are common denominators that identify an educational provision or a teaching learning situation as distance learning. According to Nwaokugha and Wogonwo (2023:8) there must be digital technologies, information and communication technology, internet, power, computers and their accessories, network and technologically skilled personnel, relevant infrastructural facilities and the processes of teaching and learning are not affected by distance between the teacher and the learner or the different locations between the teacher and the learner. In other words, the teacher and the learner must be separated or be far apart but technology and its accessories serve as their source of connection.

The popularity of distance learning as an emergency innovation particularly in developing and under-developed countries of the world owes its currency to the outbreak of the global coronavirus (covid-19) and has become a subject matter where many studies have been carried out and where many scholars show a lot of interests. In all of these interests, there has been a constant variable and that constant variable is that such studies from different scholars across different regions of the world expose inherent prospects (advantages) and disturbing challenges (disadvantages) about distance learning. For instance, in a study carried out by Katic et al (2021) in Slovenia and Italy, it was found out that many students struggled in Slovenia to follow distance learning classes and part of what gave rise to the difficulty was the fact that "About 20% of students share a computer with other family members and correspondingly struggle to follow distance learning timetable. In Italy, the same study admitted that educational institutions were forced to adopt distance learning as an innovation to ensure that education was available during the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic, but this however created learning difficulties for about 45% of the youths principally due to inaccessibility to devices and accessories such as computers, tablets and lack of internet facilities that aid and promote distance learning. Distance learning is equally associated with prospects, principal among which is that it aids pedagogical development and improvement of the learner, contributes to the continuous professional development of the learner as well as helps to link individuals and institutions to one another. In fact, some details of the prospects and challenges of distance learning shall be provided below.

Prospects of Distance Learning

Distance learning is associated with many prospects as it is supportive of meaningful and independent academic pursuit through its capacity and ability to expose learners to innovative ways of exploring and accessing information on digital libraries, and website or the internet. Such unlimited access to information helps to enrich the quality of research and other academic activities of the learners. Through supporting independent academic pursuits and activities, distance learning promotes access to education and equality of educational opportunity as those learners who are shy to learn in the conventional situations find distance learning space as a destination of choice for their educational self-actualization. Distance learning develops learners' technological cognitive acumen through making learner acquire skills on how to develop technology and maintain technological accessories. Distance learning particularly asynchronous mode makes room for learners to engage in learning activities at their pace, speed, study topics of their choice in details without hindrance or limitation to the point of independently revisiting any subject matter whose understanding posed a challenge at the first time of study.

Distance learning is flexible as learners are free to combine learning with any other opportunities that meet their empowerment and self-sustenance needs. Distance learning provides learners a receptive space to connect and make friends with other people. In fact, distance learning opens a floodgate of opportunities for different extra-curricular activities that help to widen the vision of learners. Distance learning has the trigger to boost the finances of individual as well as boost the economy of the state through the involvement of the private sector in the establishment of companies or corporations that specialize in the production of EdTech soft and hardware or learning infrastructure. The point that distance learning boosts the finances of individuals and that of the state is highlighted by Nwaokuha and Wogonwu (2023:12) when they write that (online teaching and learning) is also a big money-spinning business.

Distance teaching supports research at multiple levels namely repositioning and sensitizing stakeholders in teacher education towards revolutionary and transformative breakthroughs where products or trainees in teacher education institutions can acquire new skills that can make them relevant in the face of emergencies and change as exposed during the outbreak of the global coronavirus (covid-19). Intensification of research efforts in area of distance learning is a necessity in the life of every teacher who wants to remain relevant in the knowledge industry in the twenty first century. This stand is taken because distance learning will still remain relevant and even more relevant in the post covid-19 era. To this end. Distance learning can facilitate the emergence of professionally trained teachers who can be efficient, effective and professional in delivering and managing face to face and distance learning models. Resolving and tackling problems in teaching and learning through researches in distance learning can make the teaching profession emerge better and stronger. Distance learning has inherent potentials to engineer a revolution where humans can forge a common front for the promotion of the spirit of mutual cooperation and collaboration for resolving and tackling problems that confront humanity. Distance learning is supportive of the professional and administrative development and growth of the teacher and other stakeholders in the education industry. What is implicated here is that distance learning avails teachers and administrators in the education industry opportunities to try out new strategies that can be tilted towards their respective intellectual capacity building that can enable them serve the society better. Distance learning can be cost effective especially in states that find it difficult to recruit teachers as in states where distance learning is the norm, one teacher can teach all learners and cost is also reduced for the teacher and the learners as they do not pay to transport themselves to school or to their various study centres.

Challenges of Distance Learning

Irrespective of the numerous prospects which individuals and states stand to gain in distance learning regime, there are terrible and phenomenal challenges that are associated with it. Contrary to the claim that distance learning increases access and promotes equality of educational opportunity, distance learning is not inclusive, meaning that it is selective and correspondingly does not accommodate every learner and every discipline, rather what become norm in a regime where distance learning is the trend is the transformation of education from a social service or a social good to an elitist good

where only a few who can pay or afford the necessary technological gadgets can afford it. Because of the technological devices and accessories involved in distance learning, it causes learners many distractions that epically affect their sense of concentration and commitment to their studies. The high cost of technological accessories, computers, laptops, tablets etc coupled with the high level of poverty in the various developing and underdeveloped countries cause parent not to afford the necessary study materials for their sons, daughter and wards.

It can be said and said very strongly that learning in a regime where distance learning is the norm is heavily dependent on the availability of the necessary technological gadget, which in most cases are not always available due to poverty. The non-availability of such technological devices and accessories, whether simple or complex for the learner means that opportunities for learning by the learners are compromise. What this means is that distance learning promotes unequal or inequality of access to education.

The centrality of technology in distance learning technically removes education from professionals in the field of education and places it into the hands of corporations that now run the education industry along those paradigms that are dictated by business and market forces. The implication of this according to Nwaokugha & Keri-Frank (2023:90) is that "Happenings in education may soon be determined and dictated by powerful syndicates and conglomerates with inclinations to run the education industry as business and profit oriented outfits rather than outfit and institution for social service". The above is further highlighted by Moore, et al (2021:12) when they write that "Most online learning (distance learning) allow corporations and platforms to dictate pedagogy". It is important to point out that the dominance of the education industry by conglomerates in the business world is a pointer that those dominant practices in the business world, which though are immoral such as capitalism, hegemony, domination, profit mindedness and drive towards privatization will find their ways into the education industry. Surely, the infiltration into the education industry by corporation who run the education industry like companies have potentials to erode the professional territory and professional autonomy of the teacher. Assessment of educational provision under the regime of distance learning as observed or seen by Nwaokugha & Keri-Frank (2023:91) tend to suggest that "quality in educational provision has been compromised and correspondingly expectations in terms of levels of productivity and performance may not measure up to what used to be the case prior to the outbreak of Covid-19".

Most learners in developing and under-developed countries of the world do not have environment that are conducive for distance learning or that can stimulate the curiosity of the learners to learn and this affects distance learning very terribly. In the same way, the influence of fellow learners especially in their ability to motivate fellow learners to learn, a development that is necessary in effective teaching and learning as most learners learn more from the actions and responds of their fellow learners, but unfortunately, this does not happen in the case of distance learning. In fact, the known fact that learners can stimulate their fellow learners to learn or learn from them do not exist in distance learning because every individual learner is in his or her comfort zone or in the dilapidated home of his or her parents. The power of the environment in promoting teaching and learning which does not exist in distance learning is highlighted by Nwaokugha & Keri-Frank (2023:91) when they write that:

> It is equally true that classroom activities and interactions between teachers and learners and learners and learners have potentials to stimulate positive developments in the form of self-esteem, sense of identity, self-confidence and personality development of the learner. In fact, eye contact between a teacher and his or her learners performs wonders in teaching and learning situations and this all-important resource is completely missing in online (distance) teaching and learning.

The above deficits that are associated with distance learning may have prompted Saykili (2018:2) to say that distance learning practices have been criticized to be of lesser quality and effect compared to campus-based education.

Socio-philosophical issues in Distance Learning

The foregoing has laid foundations upon which discussions on the socio-philosophical issues in distance learning can be adequately and robustly highlighted. In fact, anyone who critically looks at the presentations from the on-set can quickly acknowledge the fact that distance learning truly has

popped up pedagogical directions as well as axiological insights which when adequately explored can lead to greater exploration and repositioning of the education industry for the common good of humanity. It is correct and remains a valid claim that distance learning popped up new developments in the education industry which according to Ali and Khalid (2021) have "impacted on the social lives of people across the globe" and such have potentials to trigger what Nwaokugha & Onyido (2022:6) call a breakdown from the past and laying foundations for sustainable new beginnings.

Without sounding repetitive, educational provision under distance learning regime is defective in not encouraging dialogic and dialectical relationships, creativity and criticality and a sense of enquiry in learners rather it is rich in what Moore et al (2021) call "edutainment", which practically narrows the curriculum, reduces education to the consumption of content, negate the importance of relationship in teaching and learning, flatten the artistry and professionalism of pedagogy, stifle necessary criticality and reproduce inequity. A sociological revelation that emerges from the above is that the much-expected transformation of the individual and his society which is a key responsibility of education can be a far dream where distance learning remains the main mode of educating the masses.

However, the unfolding development is one that has made change or innovation an inevitable phenomenon in the education industry notably because the reality of events presently is one in which returning to educational practices the way they were prior to the transition to distance learning will be entirely unthinkable. Sustainable quality change that can be meaningful can be that which prioritizes the incorporation of new pedagogical strategies, taking into consideration the relational nature of teaching and learning. This means whatever innovation must revolve around human beings with a unique emphasis on face to face method of teaching and learning because following Vieira & Barbosa (2023:29) "Face to face teaching will never disappear", suggesting that a sustainable direction for the much expected change and innovation in education as revealed by the transition to distance learning occasioned by the outbreak of the coronavirus (covid-19) is one where there must be great emphasis on what Vieira & Barbosa (2023:29) call "A great frontier of pedagogical innovation and investment in teaching" that can bring out the humanistic and relational potentials about education for the common goal of humanity. Again, one may add that the direction of the change must be one that highlights the importance of education in the political, moral, economic prosperity and stability of states in particular and humanity in general (Nwaokugha & Onyido, 2022:6).

On the other hand, distance learning can be credited with opening floodgates of axiological and philosophical views whose incorporation into education has potentials to enrich education, teaching and learning as well as the general well-being of the members of the society. In its drive for inclusive change and innovation, transition to distance learning equally laid foundations for the beginning of the implementation of social justice policies that in the past were elusive and unattainable. The epical and phenomenal disparities, technological divide and inequalities in access to social goods in states came to limelight and a new thinking where it cannot be well with the richest man or society on earth except the conditions of the poorest of the poor is address began to receive urgent attention. For the first time, most states and societies initiated moves towards granting their citizens "access to basic services and needs" (Marenga & Amupanda, 2021:206) by consciously and systematically implementing policies they rejected over the years. These are triggers towards making social justice and other concepts that are laden with improving human conditions norms in the society or state and part of their relevance in the new dispensation is that they should be incorporated into the school curriculum so much that they become focal flashpoints in the new direction for change in education. In fact, for the first time, rulers globally across states acknowledged the need for equal enjoyment of all rights and freedom and a move towards the evolution of policies for the common good, common welfare and common well-being of all.

What this reveals is that social justice measures as put up by states across the globe which at first sight seems impossible and unachievable are achievable, only what is needed is the political will to do so. This is where the study expands its pedagogical and epistemological insights through making case for the incorporation of political concepts and ideals in the new change mantra in education. The change mantra can come to fruition through education teaching learners how to become social justice advocates and what social justice stands for in the common affairs of the state and humanity.

CONCLUSION

One saying that has remained ever constant and whose currency is still valid till tomorrow is that which acknowledges that change is inevitable in the affairs of man and recent developments in the education industry precisely teaching and learning occasioned by the outbreak of the global coronavirus (covid-19) that caused the global community to transition to distance learning attests to the truth of the ever presence of change in the affairs of man. Distance learning is an educational provision where the teacher and the learner do not engage in a physical face to face conventional way of teaching and learning but are connected from their various distant locations or destinations through the use of technology. This technology-based innovation in the education industry is a response to a historic global emergency which the education industry passed through starting from 2020. To be expected from an unplanned transition especially one that involves technology are the possibilities of challenges or crises as well as the possibilities of prospects.

No doubt, there is the recognition that crises drive innovation in human affairs and this is the direction any humane and fair assessment of distance learning during this period of global crises and emergency should focus attention, for purposes of growth and sustainable development of man and the education industry. During this period, the education industry globally introduced and was agog with phenomenal, healthy and progressive innovations which any state or anyone in his right rational senses must pray for their sustenance and incorporation in educational practice in the post covid-19 era. In other words, it will be unthinkable or it can become the most foolish act of any individual or state to return to practices in education prior to the transition to distance learning or not work towards consolidating the advances made in the field of education, teaching and learning during the global coronavirus (covid-19) crises period in education.

Education fundamentally is a forward-looking social provision and institution and a new direction has been found which must not slip out of the hand of man. Part of the new direction for sustainable improvement in the new dispensation should be innovation in curriculum and pedagogy and such innovation should incorporate the acquisition of knowledge of the production and maintenance of technology and its digital accessories as well as the intensification of knowledge of creative and critical thinking. It is also possible the new direction for education should make knowledge of emergency and emergency management focal flashpoints. Also, the new direction should incorporate teaching for social justice especially how to raise generation of social justice advocates who can sensitize humanity on the centrality of social justice in bringing about the dividends of governance to the people. Lastly, the new direction in education should teach learners how to create innovation out of every crisis situation or more technically turning challenges into opportunities. This is how man's conscious and rational abilities can be explored and exploited in responding to issues in the societies.

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