

Guidelines for Online Education for Ghana's Next Normal

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Abstract

In light of the abrupt disruptions resulting from the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated many lives, social and economic activities, transportation, employment opportunities, family relationships, and education in general, this article explores the guidelines to address online education in Ghana. The education sector encountered numerous difficulties during the epidemic, such as poor internet connection, sporadic network outages during remote learning, and departmental overcrowding for Zoom time slots. This public higher education institution managed to finish the 2019–2020 academic year reasonably well in spite of these difficulties. Among other things, it is very crucial to investigate some of the activities that went on during and after the pandemic and how the Ghanaian government supported them to reduce the pain in the educational sector, including the general public. The next paragraph will observe the conditions in the educational sector during and after the pandemic.

Keywords : Online Education, Ghana, Next Normal

1. The state of the educational sector during the pandemic

In actuality, the epidemic caused significant disruptions in the education system. The daily operations of the major players in the educational field, such as parents, teachers, students, school administrators, philanthropists, businesswomen in the field of education, government officials, local government, and parents and teachers' associations (PTA), to name a few, were also disturbed. The teaching of classes was suspended. Before receiving their daily paycheck, drivers who had been taking students to their destinations also lost their jobs. Parents who had worked at different schools to



support their family lost their employment and fell into extreme poverty. Nearly every typical on-site activity that had the potential to be profitable was disappointing. All forms of classroom renditions were stopped. The situation, therefore, called for the government intervention to avert the unbearable situation.

Ghana's government's intervention to education in the pandemic

STEP 1. Official Closure of all schools:

According to Ghana web, “the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic facing the world forced over 124 countries to close schools as at 22nd March 2020 with an estimated 1.25 billion learners from pre-primary to tertiary education being affected (2020, p.2). Ghana reported the first two COVID-19 infections on March 12, 2020. The President of the Republic of Ghana declared on March 15, 2020, that a number of steps would be taken to stop the virus from spreading within Ghana. The government's measures, which included tighter cleanliness regulations and social isolation, were intended to slow the virus's spread. The President issued an executive order to close schools as of March 16, 2020. When the first school closure orders were issued, senior high school (SHS 3) and junior high school (JHS 3) final-year students were permitted to stay in class to finish their coursework, as long as social distancing and improved hygiene practices were followed. Following the West African Examinations Council's (WAEC) subsequent announcement on. March 23, 2020.

STEP 2. Introduction of online education

Group A: The Universities and College Students

Ghana's first university in the country, The University of Ghana, Legon, The Cape Coast University, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, and all other private universities and colleges were provided with online education equipment and various centers to access flexible online tuition. The Ghanaian government saw the need for a ‘radical change.’ Change is “the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the everchanging needs of external and internal customers. Again, the government provided free medical centers for university students and the public. For example, “Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR), a leading biomedical research facility, which began initial testing of COVID-19 samples, is part of the University of Ghana. Second, the university has a well-equipped medical center of comparable status to any international health facility that serves as an avenue for treating critically ill COVID-19 patients” (Tsevie, 2021, p. 151).

Group B: Senior High, Junior High, and Primary Schools

In the near future, all SHS students will have access to the content on the iBox and iCampus thanks to a partnership between the GES and the Center for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS). Approximately 1.2 million SHS students have registered on the iCampus system to enable self-directed and online study. GES is collaborating with the Ghana Library Authority to offer an online learning resource to all upper primary, junior high, and senior high school students. Additionally, GES is working with Scholastic to provide online content for kindergarten and lower primary children. Furthermore, the GES aims to start building a strong integrated learning management system right now so that it can assist the students for online schooling (Ghana web, 2020).

Group C: Students with Disabilities and Kindergarten pupils

Ghana government provided all the necessary online tools and materials such as brail machines for the blind, audio-visual and sound enhancement gadgets for students with hearing disabilities, desk top computers, laptops, tablets, projectors and digital smart televisions for various centers to motivate children to study online. Caregivers may struggle to support their children's learning due to low educational attainment, disabilities, or distance schooling experiences. The MoE/GES aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, including the poorest and most marginalized children this was announced by Ministry of Education (2021).

STEP 3. Installation of Modern ICT Equipment

The government of Ghana, in collaboration with the Ghana Education Service, provided ultramodern online schooling facilities such as high internet speed, solar energy to power electricity for the villages, free computers for all schools, and free ICT training for teachers.

STEP 4. Provision of Free Hot Meals, Water and Light

The government of Ghana provided free hot meals, water, and electricity for the communities in Accra, Kunasi, and all capital cities to assist parents to stay home and assist their children to study online. This program assisted many poor parents who lost their jobs and could not cater for their children's education, leaving alone their basic needs.

2. Post Pandemic and Adaptation of Online Education in Ghana

The new normal education is still being developed, it is evident that distant work and online learning have become more popular since the epidemic. Colleges and universities across the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia have shortly and considerably changed higher education by switching to online courses, allowing students to work from home, canceling events and travel, closing school facilities and campus activities during the active pandemic period. The new normal education after the pandemic have still allowed online learning from far and remote locations to assess education without much struggles (Quilter-Pinner & Ambros, 2020). To adapt the new normal of education, many institutions are embracing new technologies and teaching methods to provide a more flexible and personalized learning experience, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

3. Teachers Develop More Skills in Technology and Artificial Intelligence

After the pandemic, technology equipment and artificial intelligence, online learning such as Google Meet, zoom meetings, live webinars with Q&A charts, digital educational content like courses, podcasts, blogs, or eBooks developed by SMEs and technical teams, WhatsApp platforms, Line platforms, TED talks, social media forums, and others have become part of education. This new online learning has forced many students and lecturers who had never adopted the use of computers, iPads, tablets, smart TVs, or any kind of online learning to upgrade their knowledge to the new situation, even after the pandemic. However, one big problem is that teaching in the less privileged areas lacks many facilities. After the pandemic, the Ghanaian government has fully adapted online education as one of the best ways to make education more flexible and reachable for all people. irrespective of your location. Exams, questionnaire administration, lectures, and orientation exercises that had a major impact on the education of library users during the pandemic are things of the past. Students preferred CBT and online techniques but encountered difficulties with strict schedules and internet access (Adetayo, 2023). Currently, there is a requirement that computers, the internet, and other high-tech devices be used for online learning. According to Mukul and Büyükožkan (2023), the pandemic brought about a digital transformation in the educational sector worldwide, from which Ghana too has benefited.

4. Families and Students are ready for the New Online Education

Several families across the globe have adapted to this new normal of education by sponsoring their children with all the required technology tools and materials, such as smartphones, iPads,

laptop computers, home-based libraries, home-based special tutors, online learning schooling, e-books, and digital 3D electronic boards, just to mention a few. However, there is a disadvantage for parents who are financially weak and unable to afford such technological and educational facilities. To resolve this problem, some families have cordially teamed up with community philanthropies for assistance, especially those from Christian religious groups and others.

5. New Policy to Welcome Universities to Allow Online Students

A. Better learning results, B. increased accountability, and C. equity at all levels of the education system are the ‘three core goals of the education reforms (Ghana Education Service, 2018). Again, “ICT in Education Reforms

B. Seeks to develop early desire and competences in children to use ICT, equip pre-tertiary learners with ICT skills, infuse ICTs into education management, and transform teacher development and tertiary education through technology-based training.” (Ghana Education Service, 2018).

C. “Secondary Education Reform (4 Pillars)

D. With the Free SHS Program, MOE seeks to absorb all fees paid at the senior high school level, and additionally to expand physical infrastructure, improve quality, and promote skill development and equity” During and after the pandemic, the government’s policies towards the new normal of education differ from one another. For example, in my country, Ghana, there were a lot of restrictions that affected the closure of all schools, educational centers, and facilities for about six months in 2020. After the pandemic, the government has adapted to this new normal of education by allowing the collaboration of both onsite and online learning in universities, colleges, and secondary schools when necessary. On-site and online facilities are ready to promote the success of education.

6. Conclusion

This work has outlined the guidelines for online education in Ghana and how prepared the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana government, and other stakeholders have embraced the new education system irrespective of any problems they may encounter as the new online education, focusing on the integration of technology and artificial intelligence among educators and students.

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