

The Effect of COVID-19 on Nigeria Tertiary Institutions: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Education as one of the major bane of national development was grossly affected by the virus. Education is so important that it is listed as goal number four (4) of the seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to transform the world. As part of governmental policies to check the spread of the virus and reduce the mortality rate, schools all over the world were shut down, at such some schools have to operate through online platform. Hence, this study focus on challenges Tertiary Institutions encounter amid the pandemic and prospects of overcoming the challenges were discussed. This paper adopted secondary data; the data was collected through newspapers, publications and journals.

Keywords: COVID-19 • Pandemic • Tertiary institution • Challenges • Prospects • Students

Introduction

COVID-19 is a novel infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus which first case was first identified in Wuhan China and brought the world to a lockdown. The first case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was first recorded on 27th February 2020 in Lagos. As part of the government policies to check the spread of COVID-19 Virus in Nigeria, schools, airports, recreational centres, market, religion centres, shopping malls, stadiums, banks and other multinational companies were shut down. As a result of the lock down, some schools have to resort to the use of platforms such as Social Media (Telegram, Whatsapp, Zoom, and Google Classroom ETC) and Electronic Media (TV and Radio) to ensure that student keeps learning.

Even when some universities adopted the system of online classes, student complained of not understanding some of the platform that they were asked to use, platform such as Zoom, Google Classroom among others because they didn't have proper and adequate training on using it. Also, some student also complain of not having the financial strength of using the platform as some of the student don't have smart phone or laptop and even those that have are unable to afford internet data because their parent or sponsor source of income have been affected as a result of the lockdown and it is expensive for an average Nigerian to afford. While some of this student struggle with electricity problems which make them unavailable during lecture.

The lockdown as a result of COVID-19 have disrupt the tertiary institution calendar as most schools were not able to conduct exam amid the pandemic, this have brought about disruption in school calendar and this will have effect on the school planning and activities both short term and long term. Also, it will affect the revenue of most institutions because they have to pay staffs and the students who are their major source of income have been at home and unable to complete a semester or session. In most cases, it is when student resume they pay tuition fee and other fee which serves as a major source of revenue to mostly states and private institutions. Post COVID-19 lockdown will be demanding in term of finances for most tertiary institutions so as to pay staff salaries, build infrastructure or facilities that will improve the standard of education and also prepare them in case there is future occurrence or similar scenario to the pandemic and also engage in researches and other necessary activities in other to improve the standard of education. With the shortfall in revenue, how will Tertiary Institution cope?

There are fears that many young people will fall through the cracks, drop out of sight from school systems and become long term victims of the pandemic. According to Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) chaired by Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, projected that unemployment in Nigeria may rise to 39.4 million or 33.6% in December, this is likely to affect students in private institution because their parent or sponsor might lose their job as predicted by the committee which will make some of the student dropout from school. The ESC further predicted a monthly loss of 185 billion naira for the Country; the short fall in revenue will not give room for infrastructural development and

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effective and efficient human development needed for the development of Tertiary Institution. This definitely will not allow infrastructures such as ICT platforms, electricity, teacher-tutor training amongst others needed to allow e-learning grow in Nigeria to be available [1].

The allocation for education in the 2020 National Budget is 671.07 billion naira which is 6.7% of the national budget also fall short of the 15 -20% that was recommended by the UNESCO for developing countries. What shall we say about the reality that at a time the world is redoubling their investments on research and education, should Nigeria remain stagnated to its out-of fashioned 6.7% allocation? [2]. Is the Federal Government's action in accordance or resemblance of a government that believes in the saying that the future of the nation depends on the young people as their generation provides the next leaders? It is pertinent to note that, An investment in education is an investment in national development, with the amount allocated for education is it enough to bring about the desired development in this current situation where the goodies of education is been threatened by the COVID-19 virus?.

As at August 15, 2020, tertiary institutions in Norway, Germany, Denmark, Japan ETC have reopen their tertiary institution because they were able to ensure proper planning, infrastructure and adequate funding were put in place, as at August 20, 2020, compared to most Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria that couldn't resume earlier due to lack of proper planning, improved infrastructure and adequate funding.

Hence, this research work will be looking at the effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Institution in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Gupta and Goplani in their study title impact of COVID-19 on educational institutions in India, the study was based on the number of preventive measures taken by the Government of India including the closure of all Educational institutions followed by one day nationwide Janta-curfew to combat virus and 21 days lockdown to curb the corona virus [3]. The study focus on the following: Precautions to be taken in light of Novel Corona virus (COVID-19). Awareness regarding Corona virus disease, digital learning initiatives, exam postponement, Making the Quarantine Productive, Safety and Care of hotel residents and Preventive measures to achieve "social distancing"-permission to teaching and nonteaching staff to work from home. The study was carried on just the first 2 weeks lockdown, which the impact of the virus on educational system have not been deeply felt and the study majorly focus on the impact of COVID-19 on the early stages of the virus which has to do with government policies put in place to curb the spread of the virus.

The Guidance Note on Education Systems' Response to COVID-19 released by World Bank to help client countries mitigate adverse impacts of COVID-19 pandemic through an education-specific response. The guidance note identified the impact of COVID-19 on education in two ways, namely; direct impact and indirect impact. It direct impact was felt by one billion students all over the world which is likely to reverse the gains of learning results. The world bank also posit that an even higher cost comes from the disengagement of students with learning challenges (academic, socio-economic, students with special/diverse educational needs or

persons with disabilities) who may not effectively cope with remote learning strategies or cannot access the information. Where school feeding is the norm, closed schools might preclude students getting school meals unless alternative arrangements are in place. In secondary schools, longer school closures could result in an increased risk of dropout for youth, particularly from lower income groups. School closings also impact labour supply; as they increase the burden on parents, who need to stay home or find new arrangements if children have to stay at home (even worse if playground and children centres are closed).

Apart from its indirect impact, the pandemic impacts include the possible use of school facilities as make-shift hospitals, as in some low-infrastructure rural areas the school may be the only public building available. That may cause lengthier disruption of education services making the building unavailable for education purposes. The World Bank also went further by giving ways through which countries can mitigate the effect of the virus on education. The World Bank said countries must show high level preparedness while keeping schools open by enforcing and supporting preventive measures in schools. Promoting and enhancing distance learning or e-learning in other to mitigate the loss of learning as well as using the all the available educational resources to ensure that education is been restored by to normalcy amid the pandemic.

Ogunade Niyi Jacob, said the COVID-19 affected school curriculum, as well as the schools calendar, he further by saying that the virus also affected the investment on education And he recommends that the Minister of education should direct all Schools Administrators to come up with strategies to cover up the one month teaching and learning gap created as result of the COVID-19 schools closed down [4]. Obiakor and Adeniran in one of their study, titled COVID-19: impending situation threatens to deepen Nigeria's education crisis, said the impact of the virus on education cannot be overemphasized but can be mitigated by providing distance learning through low cost technology, empowering and supporting parents, tapping into global resources, increase in education financing and reaching the most vulnerable [5].

Conceptual Framework

This Article is based on review of latest literature presented in journals, books related on COVID-19 , Internet sources and country data obtained from various ministries and their websites to collect qualitative and quantitative information. Based on data collected, a comprehensive literature review is carried out on the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary Institutions in Nigeria.

Brief history of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a novel virus caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei China in December 2019. According to Worldometer, As at 15 June 2021, 117,089,650 million cases was reported in over 215 countries and territories, 3,829,091 deaths was recorded and 161,296,978 million people recovered [6] (Figures 1 and 2).

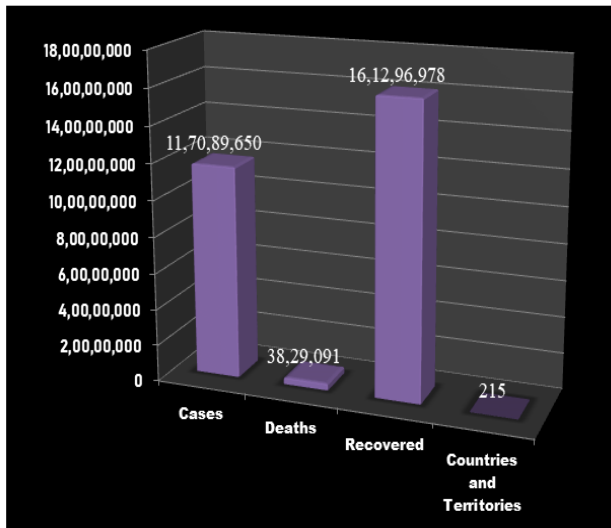


Figure 1. A graph showing the COVID-19 cases all over the world as at 15 June, 2021.

According to NCDC, as at 15 June 2021, there were 167,078 confirmed cases and 2117 reported deaths cases. COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th of January 2020 and was declared pandemic on 11th of March 2020. The virus can be spread or contracted through droplets from talking, sneezing and coughing; those standing close to the carrier of the virus may inhale them and also become infected.

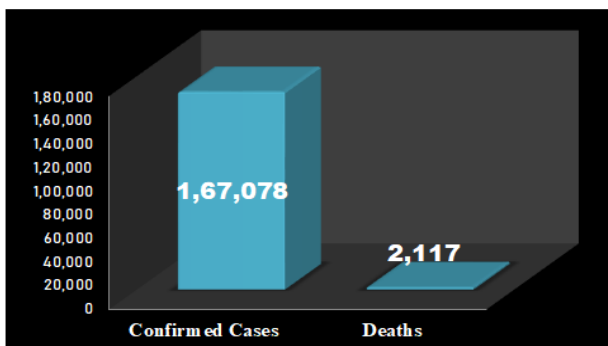


Figure 2. A graph showing the COVID-19 cases in Nigeria.

The symptoms of the virus are fever, cough, and fatigue, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell and sometimes a carrier of the virus might be asymptomatic. The prevention of the virus are hand washing, quarantine, face covering, covering of mouth when coughing or yawning, using of hand sanitizers and social distancing. Other names of COVID-19 are Coronavirus, Severe Pneumonia with Novel Pathogens, Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia, COVID, Corona and 2019-nCoV Acute Respiratory Disease.

Impact of COVID-19 on tertiary institution in Nigeria

COVID-19 affected virtually all the sectors in the world from the oil and gas sector to manufacturing sector to entertainment sector among other sectors. The education sector was not an exception; this resulted to shutting down of schools in about 215 countries and territories all over the world with 91.4% of the total number of enrolled

learners in these countries momentarily mandatory out of school (UNESCO, 2020). Highlighted responses, inequalities, online delivery, pipeline effect, among others as some of the impact COVID-19 had on education in Sub Sahara Africa [7].

One of the impacts of COVID-19 on education was the switch from face-to-face classes to online classes. According to UNESCO, 9.8 million African students are experiencing disruption in their studies due to the closure of higher education institutions. In order to reduce the effect of disruption in classes, Tertiary Institution started making use of online medium such as Google class, zoom among others, to deliver lectures, assessment test and also submit their assignments.

Tertiary Institutions have shown high level of response as a result of the COVID-19, Institutions have been engaging in online classes, doing exams online and also trying to improve their facilities in response to COVID-19. Al Hikma University in Kwara, Nigeria, did it exam online during the lockdown and Public University like Kwara State University responded by engaging in Community Service to cushion the effect of COVID-19 on its host community and its environment at large.

Challenges posed by COVID 19 on tertiary institution in Nigeria

There has been wide range of inequalities among students when it comes to getting access to education during the pandemic due to the fact that most classes switch from physical class to online class. Most of the public institutions are mostly attended by mixed class (the poor and rich), some of the students couldn't afford gadget and internet data so as to have access to online class. Even when student have access to gadget and the internet data, there is no guarantee of adequate power supply that will sustain some of the student to attend the online classes. This caused lot of disparity as some student could attend class while some couldn't attend it.

It is misleading to consider that online learning can be effective by just posting a lecturer's notes online or having a video recording of the lecture. So far, this is what is generally happening at hand [7]. In most cases posting notes and materials online for students is not enough as student sometimes need practical to have foresight knowledge about a particular subject matter. Students in engineering and medical fields are always more into practical than reading; the new system of taking online classes is likely to affect the quality of education in these fields.

Most of the Sub Sahara African Countries fall short of the 15-20% allocation for education that was recommended by the UNESCO for developing countries. If COVID-19 should persist, there are likely chance that education might not get adequate attention because the government will want to invest in the health sector which is more demanding during the pandemic and other sectors that is of importance, and this is likely to affect the funding and opportunities of Tertiary Institution in Nigeria and in turn affect the development of the country at large. More so, Private Institutions are likely to be affected due to the economic implication COVID 19 will have on the student and their sponsors because most of the private institutions relied mostly on tuition paid by their students and this will likely lead to dropping out of students due to their financial incapability.

Closure of schools during the lockdown, is likely to have effect on the quality of intake of student as some of the student will have been

relaxed and will have missed one or two courses from the curriculum. Having said that, some of the private university might fold up or downsize as a result of the economic implication of the virus, this is likely to have effect on public institutions too, if public institutions don't admit large intake of student as a result of the incapability of private institution this will lead to high literacy rate and if public institutions admit a large number of student, this is likely to stretch the finances of the government as they will have to spend more in other to accommodate the large numbers of students.

According to Economic Sustainability Committee (ESC) chaired by Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, projected that unemployment in Nigeria may rise to 39.4 million or 33.6% due to the Virus. Most Private Organisations are retrenching their staffs as this will have huge implication on the graduates who before now are finding it difficult to get a job. It is also pertinent to note that most of the research been carried out in Sub Sahara region are most time funded by organisations or governments in Europe, USA and China; this countries are worst hit by the virus, which they are most likely to focus more on their respective country for now. This is likely to affect the funding that Nigerians researcher received from these countries in form of grants, supports and scholarships. This in turn will likely affect researcher from embarking on research to better the country and the world at large.

The lockdown as a result of COVID-19 have disrupt the Tertiary Institution calendar as most schools were not able to conduct exam amid the pandemic, this have brought about disruption in school calendar and this will have effect on the school planning and activities. Also, it will affect the revenue of most institutions because they have to pay staffs and the students who are their major source of income have been at home and unable to complete a semester or session. In most cases, it is when student resume they pay tuition fee and other fee which serves as a major source of revenue to mostly states and private institutions. This will hugely have a negative effect on most of the private institutions [8-18].

Discussion and Conclusion

COVID-19 caught the whole world unaware that some countries have to adjust their National Budget in other to make provision for the pandemic. On July 13, 2020, the presidential task force on COVID-19 gave guidelines for the resumption of schools, the guidelines include fumigation and disinfection of schools, and social distancing of 2 metre and a situation where the 2 metre rule cannot be applied, alternative learning models for safe distancing should be used. On 2nd march, 2021, Nigeria received nearly four (4) million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine (WHO, 2021) which is a step towards fighting the spread of the virus. Lots of sentiments have been attached to the vaccine and this has been scaring lot of people from taking the vaccine.

The effect of COVID-19 on education cannot be discussed in its entirety. The virus gave education sector a shake and gave more reasons on why the education sector in Nigeria should embrace the use of technology in delivering classes. Although some of the Tertiary Institution find it difficult to move from the traditional face to face class to the online class due to lack of proper funding, inadequate facilities, lack of untrained personnel among other factors. Even when the tertiary institution have the facilities in place for online classes,

students still complain of not been able to access it due to epileptic power supply, cost of mobile data, increase in cost of electronic gadget among other factors.

Recommendations

1. Lecturers and students should be trained on the best practice on how to use the online platform for the benefit of classes, assessments and exams.
2. Government should provide adequate funding to Tertiary Institutions in other to cushion the effect of the pandemic on their revenue.
3. Scholarship and grants should be made available to students that are affected financially as a result of the virus so they can continue with their education.
4. Tertiary Institutions should educate their students and staff on the need to take the COVID-19 vaccine so as to reduce the spread of the virus.
5. Due to the increasing loss of job as a result of the pandemic, tertiary institution should encourage entrepreneurship education, so that students can be self-reliance after their graduation.

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